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AN EVALUATION OF THE THREE PRINCIPAL SUNDAY SCHOOL
LESSON SERIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL
COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Religious Education

by

Annie Ruth Callis
May 1950
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A new and vital interest in the Sunday School Curriculum has grown out of recognition of the fact that the early Sunday school catechism, offered to its pupils as the core of instruction, was inadequate. It gave little thought to questioning its effectiveness as a balanced ration of spiritual food. As the educational consciousness of the church developed, the curriculum problem became more acute.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study (1) to trace the development of the curriculum as it is to-day; (2) to report under appropriate chapter divisions the facts of each of the three principal Sunday School Lesson Series; and (3) to present a summary chapter of findings and conclusions.

Importance of the problem. No other problem confronting the church to-day more concerns thoughtful leaders than that of the curricula for its schools. This problem has recently taken on new significance from a realization of the very literal truth contained in von Humboldt's dictum that what you would have in the life of a people you must first put into its schools.

Although the importance of the curriculum has always been recognized it is only at long intervals that material changes have been made in it. More serious and intelligent study is being given to the subject
to-day than ever before. Though promising and commendable, these efforts cannot really be successful unless they are based on the answer to the fundamental question, what is the desired end of Christian education?1

It is true that the most significant advances yet made in the development of the curriculum of Christian Education are going on right now. These advances are being made on four broad fronts: improvement in material based on changes is outlines made in the early forties; cooperative production of materials heretofore produced independently by some denominations; and experiments going on in local churches and communities.2

The curriculum problem is vital because it is that with which the process of Christian education is primarily concerned. The curriculum of Christian education must be able to make the man of God "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work". Only a supernatural text book - the Word of God - can achieve this end.3

II. Definitions of Terms Used

The scope and character of any enterprise is controlled in the main by the meanings ascribed to certain basic terms and the relationships that are assumed to exist between the various elements involved

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in the enterprise. Inasmuch as there are widely varying concepts it is necessary to define the terms used to lessen any misunderstandings as the work progresses.

**International Lesson Committee.** Prior to 1914 the Lesson Committee had been created by the International Sunday School Association. The body was reorganized to consist of three sections; the international section of eight members appointed by the Association, the Sunday School Council section of eight members appointed by the Council, and a section consisting of one member from each of the denominations having a curriculum committee of its own. In 1916 another step of reorganization of the Executive Committee was taken so as to include fifty per cent as representatives of the Association and fifty per cent as representatives of the denominations.\(^4\)

A new lesson committee is chosen every six years at the alternate sessions of the International Sunday School Association, though members are, of course eligible for re-election. The members of the committee are selected with great care and with reference to the denominational and territorial representation.\(^5\)

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International Uniform Lessons. The Uniform Lesson is that type of lesson in which the same text is studied by all ages, children and adults on a given Sunday. The Uniform Lessons admit no basic materials except Biblical. They are planned to cover the Bible in cycles of from five to eight years. The first committee was instructed simply to select a list of lessons for a seven years' course, which was to include as far as possible a study of the whole Bible, alternating between the Old and New Testament. It was required to select only one lesson for the entire school. 6

Subsequent to the reorganization of the Lesson Committee in 1914 an attempt was made to introduce the principle of grading into the Uniform Lessons by the adaptation of the Uniform Lessons to different age ranges above the primary level. This was published under the title, "Improved Uniform Lessons."

They consist of lessons arranged by quarters -- concerning portion of the Bible restudied in cycles of varying duration. They offer both chronological and topical studies. The whole school studied the same lessons in all grades or classes. The same Scripture text is assigned to all pupils in the school, however separate lesson titles are given for each general age group which suggests graded application. 7

In 1920 a Commission of Seven was appointed to undertake a thorough investigation of the lesson situation, with Luther A. Weigle

6 Loc. cit.

as chairman. One of the recommendations submitted by this committee was that the Improved Uniform Lessons be discontinued and that the outlines thenceforth be issued as straight Uniform Lessons, without adaptations. So strong, however, was the demand for the Improved Uniform Lessons that under the pressure of several private publishing concerns the Lesson Committee later modified its action and restored the adaptations above the primary age. To-day, however, the Improved Uniform Lessons have superseded Uniform Lessons. The Committee on the Uniform Series develops outlines for so called "uniform lessons", formerly known as "Improved Uniform Lessons" and now entitled "International Sunday School Lessons." 8

International Graded Lessons. The Graded Series consists of seventeen units, graded to the year from the age of four to the age of twenty inclusive. The materials comprise two sets for each year, one for pupils and one for teachers. They are issued as paper bound "Parts" to the year. Sets of pictures are provided to accompany the earlier years' lessons. The complete series comprises thirty-four blocks of materials, seventeen for pupils, and seventeen for teachers, in addition to pictures.

The Graded Lessons or Closely Graded Lessons provide a different lesson for each week of a child's life. (There are no Graded Lessons available for adults.) If they are used as planned every pupil must be

8 Bower and Hayward, op. cit. p. 69
in a class of boys or girls of the same age or grade as himself. Every class studies a different lesson. As the pupils advance each year they get the entire course. 9

International Group Graded Lessons. The Group Graded Lessons are as their name indicates a graded series. The distinction in the matter of grading between them and the Graded Lessons lies wholly in the closeness and skill with which the grading is done. While the Graded Lessons provide for steps upward in materials by single years, the Group Graded Series advances by three year steps. This series requires for each age group three interchangeable units of materials, one for each year. This plan enables the smaller school to place in the same class children three years apart in ages while at the same time giving them materials which, even if rather coarsely graded, are in some degree adapted to their use. 10

By this plan instead of each age group in the Primary Department studying a separate lesson, all the ages in that department study the same lesson. The plan is the same whether they are all in one class, because the school is small, or are in separate age classes and are using the system only for simplicity. 11

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9 Murch, op. cit. p. 44


11 Murch, op. cit. p. 45
Curriculum. In Latin the word "curriculum" means race course, or the race itself; the great round where horse or man shows his mettle. Applied to religious education the term might therefore mean a round, or series of deeds or acts through which youth is put that brings out its mettle.

Upon this basis the curriculum consists of all the organized educative influences brought to bear upon the child through the agency of the school.

In this study the meaning of the word curriculum is limited to the types of lesson materials taught.\(^1\)

Grading. Grading is the orderly arranging of the systematic and progressive study of the Bible; the members of the classes and departments being classified as may be consistent with age and advancement, and following as nearly as possible, usually, the grades laid down by the graded schools, the lessons and methods of teaching being adapted to the pupils of the several departments.\(^2\)

III. STATEMENT OF METHOD OF PROCEDURE

In the succeeding chapters is presented a report of the study of each of the Three Principal Sunday School Lesson Series of the International Council of Religious Education and a summary chapter giving

\(^1\) E. E. Fasme and P. R. Stevick, *Principles of Religious Education* (New York; The Macmillan Company, 1926), p. 43

\(^2\) George W. Mead, *Modern Methods In Sunday School Work* (New York; Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1907), p. 25
the advantages and disadvantages of each type, conclusions, and comparisons.

The purpose of this study was to examine the content of the three types of Lesson Series giving enough connecting history to enable one to understand the various expansions, criticisms and modifications involved in the development of the curriculum.

These materials include publications of the International Council of Religious Education, denominational publications and various sources in the field of Christian Education.
CHAPTER IX

INTERNATIONAL UNIFORM SERIES

People are inclined to take their Sunday-school lessons for
granted, with little thought of how they have been provided. The
present day Sunday-school curriculum is the result of much study and
effort.

Catechism Period. From 1790 to 1815 the curriculum of the
American Sunday-School, with few exceptions, was the catechism. The
catechism had a double purpose; it was intended to ground children in
the essentials of Christian doctrine, and to impart Biblical knowledge.
The reason that catechisms were so widely used was that there was no
other course of Bible study in print. Many catechisms however, were in
existence and these were utilized as teaching material. They lent them-
selves easily to divisions, sections, and lessons for the purpose of
instruction. When teachers desired to engage in systematic religious
instruction, they turned to the catechism.

Memory Period. Following 1815 the catechism suffered a serious
decline. The Bible made a stronger bid for popularity and moved nearer
to the center of the curriculum. The use of lesson material from the
Bible for memory work rapidly crowded out the catechism from its long
established place.

Babel Period. The period from 1840 to 1872 in the history of
the American Sunday School curriculum is generally referred to as the
Babel period. The memorizing of promiscuous verses gave way to the study of a verse a day, a plan which had long been practiced by the Moravians, and which for a brief period became popular. This period was one of great confusion as each denomination and prominent Sunday-school publishing house issued a scheme of lessons of its own, which put emphasis upon its creed, or planned to suit its constituency. Sunday Schools began to secure their materials from a variety of sources. Competition of denominational boards, interdenominational unions, and private publishers led to confusion, but it was a chaos out of which some semblance of order eventually came.

**The Genesis of the International Lesson.** One hundred years was spent in laying the foundation of the International Lesson System. Like all great movements, the system is the work of many master spirits. Its roots run back to Robert Raikes and the wretched intellectual and spiritual conditions of England during the Eighteenth Century. Raikes turned from a hopeless endeavor to convert criminals in English jails and to teaching them the rudiments of spelling, reading, and church catechism. His teaching furnishes the germ of the International Sunday-school history and progress.

Transplanted to America, the Raikes' idea soon secured toleration, friendship, and finally, the adoption of the churches. The Raikes' Sunday-school in America became the inspiration and stimulus

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to religious education.

The conception and adoption of the International Lesson has followed successive steps:

1. The use and spread of the Raikes' mission school in England in which the children of the poor, under hired teachers, were the subjects of instruction.
2. The transference of the Raikes Sunday-school idea, in method and motive to America, and its early adoption by the churches.
3. The coming of the era of "memorization" which held sway for the first twenty-five years of the Nineteenth Century.
4. Out of the reaction from the exclusive method of memorization came the first hint of our International System in what was called at the time the "limited lesson" or "selected lesson scheme". Dr. James Gall of Edinburgh is its reputed author. It began in America in 1825. In 1826 the New York Sunday-School Union approved the scheme and urged its adoption. It secured a place in many schools, chiefly in New York, Albany, Boston, and Philadelphia. In 1826 Rev. Albert Judson began the issue of a monthly series of questions on these Scripture selections for the use of the teachers. In 1827 Judson published a question book based upon the "Selected Lessons". The scheme comprehended a course of scriptural selections extending through five years, of forty lessons each year and including the principle facts and truths of the Bible. The American Sunday-School Union was quick to note its marks of progress, and gave it a hearty endorsement. Its chief claim to popular favor, as declared at the time, was that it "required every class to receive instruction in the same lesson at the same time."2

5. In 1827 the American Sunday-School Union began the publication of its annual series of "Union Question Books", containing from one hundred twenty-five to one hundred fifty pages, and sold at six and one half cents a volume. Some of these books gave an entire year to a single book of the Bible, others presented the chronological study of the life of Christ; the full series aiming to comprehend the entire Bible in portions. In 1869 an "Explanatory Question Book" was added to the series giving answers to the questions of the other books. Within fourteen years from the issuance of the first "Question Book" nearly two million were sold

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and their wide use was a factor in preparing the Sunday-school movement for the yet far-away national and international uniform lessons.

6. A signal step was next taken by Organa Judd, Publisher of the American Agriculturist, who supplemented prior schemes of lesson study to be studied for two consecutive Sundays. The titles of the first quarter's lessons will illustrate the scheme: "The Babe of Bethlehem", "The Boy in The Temple", "The Man at the Jordan", "The Tempted One," "The Transfigured Christ," and "The Grief at Gethsemane."  

In 1867 Edward Eggleston carried out Vincent's second year plan of lessons by publishing the lessons for that year upon the "Teachings of Jesus". He expressed himself as being in favor of the use of one lesson for the entire school with such adaptations by the teachers as to make it serviceable for all ages and capacities. He believed that a uniform lesson was necessary for an effective school, since such a plan would make possible the holding of general exercises, give unity to the hymns and prayers and bring about a oneness of purpose on the part of those studying the same Bible passage.

The lessons issued by Dr. Vincent were centered primarily in material rather than in the pupil. The chief object was that of imparting information about the Bible rather than using the material to illustrate how Christian virtues may be established and vices shunned.

The lessons issued by Vincent and Eggleston, the most important forerunners of the International Lessons, were better suited to adults than to children. The lessons issued by these men were influential in the development of the new curriculum. The impetus for the Uniform System came from the lessons by these men for as a result of their lessons

3. Ibid., p. 38
B. F. Jacobs conceived the idea of uniformity for all the Sunday-schools of America.

**B. F. Jacobs dream of a Uniform Lesson.** A keen expansionist and propagandist, Benjamin F. Jacobs dreamed of extending the idea of Vincent's and Eggleston's lessons over the nation so that all denominations throughout the world might use them.

Jacobs projected three very definite objectives for Sunday-school lessons. They were: first, one lesson for all ages; second, one lesson for all schools throughout the world; and third, expositions of the lessons in all religious and secular papers that might be induced to publish them. He also advocated that there be just one lesson for all children regardless of age or experience. A crystallization of this feeling began to take form in the National Convention of the Sunday School Association in 1869.

**Period of adoption.** The next step in the direction of the new system was taken by the convention of 1869, which appointed a committee to formulate plans for further action. This committee, in turn, requested the National Executive Committee to call the lesson publishers into conference. Twenty-nine publishers and writers representing the various denominations met in August, 1871, for consideration of a proposed uniform system of lessons.

The publishers appointed a committee to make a selection of lessons for the year 1872 as a trial project. The committee decided that the lessons should be selected from the Bible as a whole and
accepted a scheme which included a study of the entire Scriptures. Of the trial lessons chosen for 1872 two quarters were selected from Eggleston's National Series, one quarter from Vincent's lessons, and one quarter to be compiled by the committee itself. The course of study as outlined by the committee contained twelve lessons selected from the Acts of the Apostles, Hebrews, and Revelation called "Jesus After His Ascension," and a review; twelve lessons on Elisha, Israel, Judah, and a review; twelve lessons from the Epistles, and a review; and twelve lessons on Daniel and his times, and a review. This distribution shows that one half of the time was devoted to each Testament.

The National Convention met in Indianapolis in 1872. Its chief subject was the adoption or the rejection of a uniform system of lessons.

A resolution was presented by B. F. Jacobs:

Resolved, that the Convention appoint a committee, to consist of five clergymen and five laymen, to select a course of Bible lessons for a series of years, not exceeding seven, which shall, as far as they may decide possible, embrace a general study of the whole Bible alternating between the Old and New Testaments semi annually or quarterly as they shall deem best; and to publish a list of such lessons as fully as possible, and at least for the two years next ensuing, as early as the first of August, 1872; and that this convention recommended their adoption by the Sunday Schools of the whole country; and that this committee have power to fill any vacancies that may occur in their number by reason of the inability of any member to serve.

The resolution was adopted by an overwhelming vote. The Uniform Lesson Series was launched. 4

Period of Extension. The Committee appointed in 1872 included representatives from Canada, Great Britain, and India. Thus the Convention changed its name to the International Convention and the lesson committee created by that body became known as the International Lesson Committee, which body with changes in personnel, has continued to select lessons up to the present time.

The first lesson committee set to work along the specific lines laid down by the International Convention for its guidance. They followed specific instructions as (1) alternation each year between the Old and New Testaments; (2) beginning with Genesis to select from the Old Testament in chronological order; (3) to spend a part of each year in studying the life and ministry of Christ, beginning with Matthew and passing in order through the Gospels; and (4) to follow with lessons on the Apostles, the planning of the church, and the doctrines of the New Testament as contained in the Epistles.

The first lesson committee thus began its work under specific directions to select from the Bible by parts and in chronological order. The province of the committee was to select the Uniform Lesson text. The publishing houses which have adopted the Uniform Scripture lessons have proceeded to supplement them as they deemed advisable with helps, analyses, questions, and explanations. The Lesson Committee from the very first confined itself to the task of selecting the lesson titles and the Scripture text, but as time went on, the functions of the committee were broadened so as to include the selection of the Golden Text, memory verses, devotional readings, and additional Scripture
Content and character of the Lesson Cycles. The first cycle, 1873 - 1879. For the year 1873 the Lesson Committee selected only the title and the Scripture text. The system of lesson arrangement for 1874 is superior to that of 1873 in that there is not the break in the study of the Old Testament as in the previous year. The Lesson Committee in 1874, for the first time, selected a Golden Text. The year 1876 marks a backward step in one respect and an improvement in another. The improvement lies in the fact that the Scripture selections were longer. The backward step was made when the committee decided to alternate between the Old and New Testaments on a quarterly basis. However, the committee changed its plan for the succeeding year. The outstanding characteristic of the lesson for 1877 consisted of the biographical emphasis in both the Old and New Testament studies. The lessons were planned to revolve around personalities.

The year 1879 was devoted to an eclectic study of both Testaments. The first half of the year was spent in a study of the poetical and prophetical portions scattered throughout the Old Testament and the last half was given over to an eclectic study of the Epistles and Revelation.

Of course the first Lesson Committee received criticisms before their work was even completed. Four main objections were raised to

5 Ibid., p. 235
the lessons: (1) they were said to be scrappy and fragmentary; (2) there was no room for the denominations to stress their special doctrines; (3) not enough provisions were made for lessons on civic reform and missions; and (4) the lessons were not arranged so as to take account of the festival occasions of the church year.

The Second Cycle, 1880–1886, was built on the same general plan as the first, but it appears to be less fragmentary and more consecutive. In the lessons for 1881 the twelfth lesson in each quarter was reserved for review and the thirteenth for a lesson to be selected by the individual Sunday school. The year 1882 was the first time in the lesson scheme that an entire year had been given to any book of the Bible. The year 1885 reverted to the quarter basis. The two characteristics of this Cycle were (1) the semi-annual alternation between the Old and New Testaments and (2) the reserving of the thirteenth Sunday of each quarter for a lesson to be determined by the school, during the first four years of the Cycle.

The Third Cycle, 1887–1893, lessons were biographical and narrative. The lessons from the Old Testament begin with the creation of the world as described in the first chapter of Genesis and end with the giving of the Ten Commandments. The studies in Matthew go through the Gospel chronologically and consider the life and ministry of Jesus. The third Lesson Committee provided two years of consecutive study in the Cycle, one in Matthew and one in Luke. This was a step forward. The Committee further provided for three optional lessons for the last
Sunday of each quarter, a review, a temperance lesson and a missionary lesson. This third Cycle marks the third time in which the Bible had been covered in cycles of seven years each.

The Fourth Cycle, 1894–1900, covered a period of six years instead of seven. In this cycle eighteen months are devoted to the life and ministry of Jesus as recorded in Matthew, Luke and John. The Cycle closes with a year's study of the life and teachings of Jesus. The Old Testament lessons present an historical, biographical, and chronological history of the Hebrews prior to the monarchy, the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and their disintegration, the return of the Judaean exiles, and some choice ethical and moral lessons from the Old Testament.

About 1890 there arose sharp criticisms of the Uniform Lessons on the ground that they were fragmentary and could not be adapted to the youngest children. This criticism was responsible for more consecutive studies upon the most vital points in both Testaments.

The Fifth Cycle, 1901–1906, appears to have presented an excellent grouping of lessons from the chronological standpoint.

The Sixth Cycle, 1907–1912, was unique in the length of time given to the several portions of the Bible.

1907 January–December. Stories of the Patriarchs and Judges.
1911 January–December. Kings and Prophets of Judah and Israel.
The Seventh Cycle, 1913-1917, gave a greater length of time to the particular portion of the Bible chosen for lesson study.

The Eighth Cycle, 1918-1925, incorporated several changes and was issued under a new title, Improved Uniform Lessons. It is the only eight year cycle. The eight year plan was adopted by the Committee so that it might present several short topical courses; for example, "Some Great Teachings of the Bible," and Studies in the Lives of Peter and John. The short topical courses were planned in addition to the usual chronological study of the whole Bible. The committee felt it necessary to present a more frequent survey of the entire Bible with varying methods of approach than the six-year Cycle would allow.

In the first six years of the Cycle, the gospel story was studied three times, together with a rather detailed study of the historical events of the Old Testament. In addition to these, there were the four topical courses and the course on biblical biography. The last two years of the Cycle contained a comprehensive review of the Old Testament history and a more detailed review of the life of Jesus followed by a study of the spread of Christianity as portrayed by the Acts and by the Epistles.

The Improved Lesson was uniform for all ages above the beginners but the Committee suggested separate titles for each age group. For example: the second quarter for the year 1919 began with "God our Heavenly Father":

Primary topic: The Heavenly Father's Care of His Children
Junior topic: God our Creator and Keeper
Intermediate topic: What do we owe to our Father in Heaven?
Senior and Adult topic: God the Father Almighty.

The basic lesson texts contained more Scripture verses than those of former Cycles, thus providing a broader Biblical foundation.

In the Improved Uniform Lessons more lessons were chosen from the Old Testament. This is to be accounted for by the fact that in many cases more verses were assigned to lessons from the Old Testament.6

Plan of Uniform Lesson Series. The Uniform Lessons (since 1918 called Improved Uniform) admit no basic materials except Biblical. They are planned to cover the Bible in cycles of from five to eight years. The Improved Uniform Lessons, dating from 1918 are a modification of the Uniform Lessons, and calculated better to meet the demands of younger children. This is to be accomplished by using a different lesson title and presenting a more elementary treatment with a shorter Bible passage in the lessons for earlier grades. Since this plan was put into effect the general lessons have presented longer Biblical sections, thereby covering the Bible more rapidly.7

The Committee on the Uniform Series does much of its work in sub-committees and in smaller groups of the sub-committees. It is necessary for the committee to do its work in advance. It is only

after the outlines have been given rigorous review by the International Council bodies, and then released to the member denominations and others, that the work of writing the lesson actually begins.

Then the steps of printing and distribution have to be taken into account and thus a long time necessarily elapses between the meeting at which it is decided a certain topic or Scripture passage is to be used for a particular day, and the Sunday on which that material is actually taught. For example, the Committee met in the fall of 1948 in Toronto, Canada. They completed their work on outlines which will not be used until 1952. Furthermore, they began work on outlines which will not be actually taught until 1953. This seems a long time but it is no longer than is actually required.

In the very beginning of the present curriculum, the Uniform Lessons were a series of lessons designed to cover the entire Bible in a seven year cycle. Later modifications of this system ought not to obscure the importance of that early step. By this action, American Christians were making one of their early advances in interdenominational cooperation in Christian education. From that advance other significant steps have been taken, and much of our present cooperative work in Christian education has been made possible because of these early ventures.

In many countries and in every community in the United States and Canada church schools regularly use lesson materials based on outlines produced cooperatively through the International Council of Religious

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8 Knoff, loc. cit. p. 19
Education. The growing usefulness of these outlines comes as a result of more than seventy-five years of experience in cooperative lesson planning.

An interesting comparison has been worked out by Crawford showing the choice of Biblical materials in the Uniform Lessons during forty-six years.

### TABLE I

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<td>Luke</td>
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9 Betts, op. cit. pp. 356-357
Chapter III

International Graded Series

Graded Lesson Series in the religious curriculum were not entirely the product of the twentieth century, for very early attempts, though usually crude, were made to grade religious materials to the needs of the pupils.

There were many factors responsible for the introduction of the Graded curricula, the most important being dissatisfaction with the Uniform Lessons. Others have been changed conceptions in religion and changed points of view in the field of education and psychology.

Origin of the series. The International Graded Lessons are based upon Scripture material selected by the International Lesson Committee. The Graded Lesson Conference, meeting in 1906, decided to revise the Beginner's Course of study, which was already in use, and to select lesson material for the pre-adolescent years. When the units (nine in all) were completed by the Graded Conference they were submitted to the Editorial Association for any suggestions. In turn the lesson outlines were presented to the International Lesson Committee for their consideration.

The chairman of the Executive Committee of the International Association called the representative Sunday-school workers of America to meet in conference in Boston, January 4, 1908. The Editorial Association, the Graded Lesson Conference, the International Executive Committee, and the International Lesson Committee were represented in this conference.
This body felt that the demand for graded lessons should be met by the International Sunday School Association and that the Lesson Committee should issue the outlines. The convictions of this conference were incorporated in the report of the Lesson Committee to the International Convention held in Louisville, Kentucky in June, 1908.

The International Convention adopted the report and authorized the Lesson Committee to prepare and submit to the denominations the outlines of a completely graded series. The present form which it assumes as used by the various denominations is the result of the editorial work of those individual denominations.

General characteristics of the graded lessons. The Graded Series has an inclusive aim: to meet the spiritual needs of the pupils in each stage of his development, an aim for each Cycle or age group such as Primary, Junior, etc., an aim for each unit, and an aim for each lesson.

The series is graded by years, the material being arranged in cycles. At first the material is presented in story form, topically arranged. Then, in the ages when the power to memorize and to reason is deepening and habits are being formed, the mind is stored with the great facts of Bible history in the form of narratives chronologically arranged. Then, when life is taking on new meaning and youth is discovering himself and achieving his freedom in the days of adolescence, Bible history is approached for the third time, from the standpoint of biography and life studies. Later still, in the days when the foundation of manhood and womanhood are being laid, when reason is developing and the individual
is seeking life's rational basis, the fundamental principles of Christian living are studied from the standpoint of Christian and social ethics. Finally, in the days of the nurturing of powers, when the adjustments of life are being made and the individual is finding his place in the great world of work, the Bible is approached from the standpoint of the development of the literature. The pupil has caught a vision of the whole sweep of history and he is helped to adjust himself to the world which stretches back into the past and forward into the unmeasured future.

One needs only to study carefully the general outline of courses to discover that the material is both Biblical and extra-biblical. Dr. Leonidas W. Crawford, in his unpublished Doctor's thesis, Northwestern University, found through statistical study of the series that, according to his classification, the content is 52.7 per cent Biblical, 31.1 per cent quasi-biblical, and 16.2 per cent extra-biblical, the latter material being drawn from nature, literature, history, and biography.

The material is centered around definite objectives, with an aim for the entire series for each department, and for each lesson. The general purpose of the Graded Lessons is to meet the spiritual needs of the pupil in each stage of his development. For example, the aim of the Primary Department is stated thus: "To lead the child to know the Heavenly Father, and to inspire within him a desire to lived as God's child."¹ First year, to show forth God's power, love, and care, and to awaken within the child responsive love, trust and obedience. Second year, to build on the teachings of the first year (a) by showing ways to

¹ Lankard, op. cit., p. 272.
express their love, trust and obedience; (b) by showing Jesus the Saviour in His love for work and men; and (c) showing how helpers of Jesus learn to do God's will. Third year, to build on the teachings of the first and second years by telling (a) about people who chose to do God's will; (b) how Jesus by His life and words, death, and resurrection revealed the Father's love and will for us; such stories as will make a strong appeal to the child and arouse within him a desire to choose and to do that which God requires of him. The aim for lesson one in the first year of the Primary Department was stated thus: "The aim or purpose of this lesson is that of directing the thoughts of the pupil to the things that may be clearly seen in the world of nature, and of teaching him that all things have been created by the power and might of God."²

Plan of Graded Lessons. All courses consist of fifty-two lessons, no provision being made for closing the Sunday school for vacations. Up to the ninth year the lessons are organized on the topical plan, with no attention paid to chronology. For the four years from nine to twelve inclusive the courses are based on biblical chronology. From the thirteenth to the sixteenth year inclusive, biography and history supply the basis of materials, but without emphasis on chronological sequence. From seventeen to twenty the courses deal with sociological and historical materials, chronological order being observed in two of the four courses.

The series is profusely illustrated, more than seven hundred pictures being used to accompany the lessons. About eighty of these are

² Lankard, op. cit., p. 275
used for beginners and one hundred for the primary pupils. The pictures cover not only the Bible Text, but also hymns and various incidents of everyday life. While difference of opinion exists as to the adaptability of some of the pictures to the age and appreciation of the child, there can be no doubt that many of them possess a large educational value and that their use greatly increases the value of the series.  

Graded Lesson System. There are two kinds of grading: one is grading in the teaching and in the themes; the other, grading in the statement of the themes and the texts upon which the lessons are based. Where scripture texts are not used as a basis, the grading is of the older type and relates chiefly to the subjects of the lessons. At the convention in 1914, Dr. Benjamin S. Winchester, advocating that a new emphasis be placed upon the educational aspects of the Sunday-school presented a list of ten different courses of lessons which were considered by the Sunday-school Council of Evangelical Denominations. None of these courses was stated to be based upon the Bible, although some of them might include Scripture texts. Each of these courses was to be adapted to the successive stages of development of the pupils and was supposed to be denominated Graded Lessons par excellence.

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3 Betts, op. cit., p. 365

Grading of the lessons prevailed early in the history of the modern Sunday-school movement, especially in schools existing in communities where some adults had not yet learned to read. These graded lessons were vigorously attacked in those days because they were not exclusively upon the Scriptures and were frequently forced out of the schools for this reason. This was the case in the early Uniform Lessons of 1826, as also to some extent in the cycles of the Uniform Lessons of 1826, and in the cycles of the Uniform Lessons of 1872 and on. The editors and writers on those lessons further graded themes growing out of the Bible texts, and adapted them to several grades and departments in the Sunday-school. Thus the germ of recent departmental grades was in the thought of the workers and of those who prepared the lessons for Sunday-schools for more than a generation. 5

The graded lessons are practically opposed to uniformity or unity of instruction in different grades. Carried out logically, the new graded lessons have a theme adapted to each grade and each theme must be based upon a different text also adapted or graded. Some educators declared that the proposed new graded lessons were unsound on the question of the new birth, that the Scriptures were wrested from their natural meaning to provide a basis for some of the lessons; and that the Lesson Committee is through the structure of the graded lessons, interpreting the Scriptures for Sunday-schools — a work contrary to the spirit of their appointment. It was further charged that the new graded lessons

5 Loc. cit.
did not provide for, nor meet, all the elements in the problem of religious education and, therefore, must be upon unsound principles of pedagogy. 6

**British graded lessons.** The courses of Sunday-school Lessons current in Great Britain, both Graded and Uniform, are quite as many and as diverse as in America. The two sections, American and British, of the International Lesson Committee each sought to have harmonious cooperation with their colleagues, and at the same time provide courses of lessons suited to the needs of their respective constituencies in America and Great Britain.

However many differences have arisen between the two countries because of diverse conditions. The elaborate system issued in America was rejected in favor of a simpler one in Great Britain, extending to five departmental grades as against seventeen and upward in the American system. The British tend toward closer grading, the American calling a halt, if not inclined to a less number of grades. British and American graded lessons agree in starting with nature talks, or lessons, though the British regard their nature talks for the wee ones as supplementary. The two also agree that all or a large majority of lesson subjects shall be taken from the Holy Scriptures. Hence a prominent British writer (W. H. Grosner) declared that "complexity and competition must give way to simplicity and unity."

The British Graded Courses are prepared by interdenominational

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6 Rice, *op. cit.*, pp. 311-312.
counsel and co-operation, which includes most of the Nonconformists.
The Church of England, the Friends, the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales,
and the Episcopal Church of Scotland, however each maintain a system of
graded lessons of their own.

The Standard Graded Courses outlined by the British section of
the International Lesson Committee covered nine years (for pupils from
the age of nine to eighteen) in three or more grades.

Graded Courses for those below nine years of age were arranged
for Beginners and for Primaries. The Junior (nine to eleven), Inter-
mediate (twelve to fourteen); and the Senior (sixteen to eighteen) fol-
lowed the lower grades. Each grade of a school was assigned, so far as
possible the same great division of Scriptures for study. But this
principle could not be consistently applied in all grades.

The American Graded Series called for seventeen or more grades;
Beginners (four to five years of age), two grades; Primary (six to
eight), three grades; Junior (nine to twelve, four; Intermediate (thir-
teen to sixteen), four; Senior (seventeen to twenty), four; also Bible
classes of mature and older persons for which further provision is re-
quired according to the conditions and character of the communities and
classes.

In Great Britain a strong minority of workers is in favor of
Graded Lessons though fine grading is distrusted; for the majority of
Non conformists still hold to the Uniform Lessons believing that the
system can be constructed from the standpoint of child development in a
way that would meet all the evangelical needs of the average school.
Among British graded courses are those by the British International Lesson Committee, the Friends' First Day Association, and the Church of England. Each course or a system agrees on the general principles of grading, but differs in the point of view and in the details of the system.

The Friends' Course of Graded Lessons is less minute, with apparently closer study of Scripture history and themes.

The Church of England's graded courses adhere closely to the church year and have three departmental divisions — Kindergarten, Middle and Upper School — with five main grades, for those four to five years of age; six to eight years; eight to ten years; ten to thirteen years; and for those thirteen years and upward. 7

A GRADED PROGRAM

The Committee on the Graded Series is obliged to work on a similar long time span as the Committee on the Uniform Series. In March, 1949 at Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania, the Committee on the Graded Series approved for release outlines which will be finally taught during the years 1951 to 1952 and began work on outlines which will not be actually used until 1952 to 1953.

It would be interesting to open the door and see what has gone on behind the scenes before the Sunday morning on which a teacher of fifth grade boys uses his denominational teaching materials. There is the topic for the fall of 1948, "Palestine Land of the Bible People".

7 Loc. cit.
That lesson began in the Children's Subcommittee of the Cycle Graded Committee meeting in 1945. It planned outlines for three years of work as a unit, since each Sunday's work depends on the Sunday before it and contributes to the Sunday following. The entire year fits into a scheme, intimately related to the work of the year 1947-1948 and the year 1949-1950.

The children's Subcommittee considered the needs of the children in the Junior Department and re-thought the goals of Christian education as interpreted for children of this age group. Other contemporary concerns were considered and after full discussion general emphases were outlined. Then units were organized within these three general emphases, planned month by month and Sunday by Sunday.

This next step was that of preparing descriptive outlines for Sunday by Sunday use. An introductory paragraph was written, defining the scope of the unit. A statement of purpose was prepared and the more important content which might be used was suggested. It was probably at this point that the Children's Subcommittee made an individual writing assignment. That person went off by herself to a desk and made a first draft of an outline. Then it was brought back to the Children's Subcommittee and revised in accordance with its suggestions. Finally it was recommended by the Children's Subcommittee. Copies of the outline were sent to denominational staffs for review by the curriculum committees of the denominations.

The products of the committee had to go to the Commission of Educational Program of the International Council. This body has on it per-
sons representing all the many interests and concerns of Christian education. The Commission approved these outlines and sent them to the International Council (governing body) for final review and approval. The Council itself in February 1947 approved the outlines, copyrighted them, and released them to the denominations for their use.8

**DISTRIBUTION AMONG BOOKS OF THE BIBLE**

Crawford in his thesis on "Status and Evaluation of Extra-Biblical Material in the Curriculum of Religious Education in the United States" computes that 52.7 per cent of the content of the Graded Series is directly based on Bible text, 31.1 per cent is quasi-biblical and 16.2 per cent is extra-biblical. Of the extra biblical 39.8 per cent is biographical, 8.9 per cent is realistic incident, 19 per cent is from nature, 1.3 per cent is from literature, and 2.2 per cent is social and vocational.9

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8 Knoff, _loc. cit._

9 Belts, _op. cit._, p. 383
TABLE II

PLAN OF THE INTERNATIONAL GRADED LESSONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages 4, 5</th>
<th>Two years of lessons used interchangeably. Simple Bible stories arranged by Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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10 Ibid., p. 367
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<th>Ages 8</th>
<th>Ages 9</th>
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<td>Stories showing obedience to God's Will.</td>
<td>Early Old Testament Stories</td>
<td>Stories of Everyday Heroes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stories calling forth Love, Trust and Obedience</td>
<td>Jesus doing God's Will</td>
<td>Stories that Jesus told</td>
<td>Stories of the Hero of Heroes and Heroic Followers of Jesus</td>
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<td>Jesus in His Life and Work</td>
<td>Temperance Lessons</td>
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<td>The Helpers of Jesus</td>
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**Course I** | **Course II** | **Course III** | **Course IV** | **Course V**

**PRIMARY** |  |  |  |  

**JUNIOR**
CHAPTER IV

INTERNATIONAL GROUP GRADED LESSONS

The departmental lesson, or Group Graded Lesson is a compromise between the old Uniform Lessons and the closely Graded Lessons. This plan was first adopted by the Presbyterian Church in 1914, when it withdrew from the interdenominational syndicate because of the liberal views set forth by its lessons. Because these lessons have so splendidly adapted the graded principle to the small Sunday school the series has become very popular.

While the closely Graded system provides for a different lesson for each class, the departmental plan offers a single lesson for each department. The closely Graded lesson has the advantage in that it leads each pupil through a graded and progressive series of lessons. The departmental plan, on the other hand, enables the superintendent to prepare a program of worship which is closely related to the lesson. It also facilitates the correlation of the instruction program with the expressional, making possible a Youth Fellowship service wherein the discussion is an outgrowth of the Sunday school instruction. Where the Week Day Church School is possible the departmental lesson is even more advantageous.

Most graded lessons are now prepared so that they can be adopted to the departmental plan, as the latter is generally found preferable except in large Sunday-schools.

In 1920 the Graded Lesson Committee asked for a careful investig-
ation in the entire field of curriculum needs. Under the chairmanship of Luther A. Weigle a Committee of seven was appointed to survey old curricula. As a result of a questionnaire sent to six hundred twenty-seven selected persons, the Committee recommended the recognition of two basic types of Sunday school lessons; lessons graded by years and lessons graded by age groups.

They further recommended that the present system of the International Graded Lessons remain as it was, but that the committee proceed to construct departmental lessons to take the place of the Uniform lessons.¹

Origin of Group Graded Series. On December 30, 1920 the International Lesson Committee authorized the construction of a series of lessons by age groups. The declaration of policy was as follows:

1. That the International Lesson Committee continue Improved Uniform Lessons, in such cycles and with such material as its judgment may from time to time approve, but beginning with 1924, with adaptations to the Intermediate, Senior, Young People's and Adult Departments only.

2. That the committee recognize the Primary Group Lessons and the Junior Group Lessons, beginning with 1924, as substitutes, within the Improved Uniform Series for the Primary and Junior adaptations heretofore issued.

3. That the Committee recognize the Improved Uniform Lessons beginning with 1924, as an alternative course within the Group Graded Series, for all pupils above the Junior age group.

4. That the Committee thus plan to issue for schools which do not wish to use lessons graded by years the following courses:

A. Primary Group Lessons in a three year cycle

¹ Benson, op. cit. p. 147
B. Junior Group Lessons in a three year cycle
C. Improved Uniform Lessons in a six year cycle
or Intermediate Group Lessons, Senior Group Lessons, and Adult Group Lessons in three year cycles.

General Description of Group Graded Lessons. In the construction of the Group Lessons certain principles were kept in mind:

1. These lessons were to be graded. They were to be pupil-centered rather than material-centered. The aim of the series as a whole was to nurture the growing moral and religious life of the child, and to lead to a permanent commitment of that life to God through Jesus Christ, and to fitness for service in His Kingdom. The materials for these lessons were to be chosen with a view to their fitness to accomplish this aim throughout the different periods of the child's growth, rather than with a view to their logical completeness or chronological order.

2. These lessons were to be graded to the capacities and needs of three year age groups of children, rather than to the capacities and needs of single age years. Within each age-group all children were to have the same lesson; and the lessons, therefore must move in three year cycles. Within the cycle for each group, the lessons for the three years shall presuppose those of another year.

3. From age-group to age-group, these lessons were to be consecutive and cumulative; that is the lessons were to presuppose the nurture afforded by those of the preceding groups.

4. These lessons were to be predominantly Biblical; that is, they

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2 Lankard, op. cit. p. 310
were to be selected, chiefly from Biblical materials; and as a part of the moral and religious nurture which is their total purpose, they shall aim to impart a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible and to afford to the pupil the disposition and the ability to use God's Word intelligently.

The grading into groups is in keeping with the plan adopted in 1917 by the Sunday School Council of Evangelical Denominations.\(^3\)

**Plan of Group Graded Lessons.** The International Group Graded Lessons are meant to be pupil centered rather than material centered, the aim being in terms of the needs of the child rather than with the thought of covering any particular section of subject matter. The lessons are intended to be consecutive and cumulative; the lessons of each succeeding age group presuppose the training afforded by those of the preceding groups, thus creating a continuous series of steps upward throughout the curriculum. The lessons are dated and move in a three year cycle.

The Beginners use one series, the Primaries use another series, the Juniors and Intermediates use another series, the Young People and Adults use another series. According to the graded plan each lesson series is different for each level. The group grading is according to departments, not grades.\(^4\)

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3 Lankard, *op. cit.*, p. 311-312

4 Betts, *op. cit.*, p. 362
Topics of Group Graded Lessons for Juniors for 1924

First quarter: Theme I The Story of Jesus' Life

The Baby Jesus Is Saved from a Cruel King
The Boy Jesus Grows Up in Nazareth
The Boy Jesus visits Jerusalem and the Temple
Jesus is Baptized by John
Jesus Overcomes Temptation
Jesus Goes About Doing Good
Jesus Calls Twelve Men to Become His Disciples
Scribes and Pharisees oppose Jesus
Jesus is Rejected in His Own Country
Peter Confesses His Faith in Jesus
Jesus Prepares His Disciples for His Death
Jesus Sends Out Seventy Missionaries
Review

Second quarter (Theme I, continued)

Jesus Rides Triumphant into Jerusalem
Jesus Dares To Fight the Wrong
Jesus Restores Lazarus to Life
Jesus and His Disciples Eat the Last Supper
A Disciple of Jesus Proves to be a Traitor
Jesus is unjustly Condemned
Jesus is Put to Death by His Enemies
Jesus Triumphs over death
Jesus Meets and Talks with His Friends
Jesus Forgives Peter for His Denial
Jesus Leaves His work with His Disciples
Jesus Appears to Saul of Tarsus
Review

Third quarter (Theme II) Great Sayings of Jesus

A New Kind of Happiness
The Golden Rule
Trusting God
The Two Foundations
The Sower
The Good Samaritan
The Lost Sheep
The Prodigal Son
The Great Supper
The Talents
A New Kind of Greatness
The Judgement
Review
Fourth quarter: Theme III Jesus The Helper and Saviour

Jesus Tells What He Came to do
Jesus Has power over wind and waves
Jesus Cures a Captain's Servant
Jesus Feeds a Hungry Multitude
Jesus Restores Sight to a Blind Man
Jesus Cures a Man who cannot walk
Jesus Forgive Sin
Jesus Is the Friend of Sinners
Jesus Tells Nicodemus of the New Life
Jesus Helps Zacchaeus to Live a New Life
Jesus Forgives the Repentant Robber
Jesus Comes to be the Saviour of the World

A comparison of these lesson topics for the Junior Course for 1924 with the topics of the Improved Uniform Lessons indicates clearly the better adaptation of the Group Graded Series to the needs of childhood.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND COMPARISONS

I. Service of Uniform System

Regarding the Uniform System in perspective, there are undeniable services which it has rendered to the Sunday-school movement as a whole. It may be said to have brought order out of chaos and to have substituted enthusiasm for indifference. It has fastened an interest in Bible reading and study, while its interdenominational scope and character have done much toward lessening denominational differences and developing a spirit of religious tolerance and a consciousness of interdenominational fellowship. It has given rise to a type of religious literature. The fact of uniformity permitted concentration and made possible the production of a high grade of lesson periodicals at a nominal cost. Cooperation, enthusiasm, and literature are traceable in large measure to the unifying influence which the uniform system has exerted.

Contributions of the Uniform Series

The Uniform Lessons called attention to the Bible. The Series provided for a study of the Books which marked a decided advantage over the "catechetical method" of the "questionbook" age.

The Series is to be commended for the large place which it gives to the life and teachings of Jesus. Lankard's investigations show that 44.02 per cent of all the lessons in the first eight cycles were selected from the Gospels. This allowed a systematic study and a coherent under-
standing of the Gospels.

The Uniform Lessons mark an increased denominational cooperation in the Sunday school field. With the advent of the Uniform Lessons there came a feeling of sympathy and unity of purpose in respect to the different denominations.

The lesson helps called forth by the Uniform Lessons constitute a considerable literature on the Bible and from the standpoint of exposition and illustration they are commendable. The Eclectic Library for 1879 says, "there has been created a new literature bearing upon biblical exegeses, adaptation, and application." The Illustrative Notes edited by Hurlbut and Doherty, include this note in the preface:

"The adoption of the Uniform Lessons was a great step toward Christian unity and for efficiency, and thoroughness in the study of the Bible. More eyes than ever before have been turned upon the sacred page; more Bibles have been circulated, more and better expositions have been prepared and published, and even the Bible itself has been investigated as never before to throw its light upon the interpretation of Scripture."

It is fair to say, that indirectly the Uniform Lessons helped to pave the way for graded instruction. Certainly insofar as the Uniform Lessons helped the Sunday school to realize its teaching task, they made their own contribution toward the present graded system.¹

The advantages of uniformity are undoubtedly great. It secures unity in the school, enabling the teachers to co-operate in the study of the lesson, and giving the superintendent an opportunity to direct and

¹ Lankard, op. cit., pp. 250-261
stimulate the work of instruction throughout the school. It secures unity in the home, making it possible for the father or mother to assist and guide in the study of the lesson at home by the whole family from youngest to oldest and facilitates the association of family prayer with the study of the Bible in the Sunday school. It greatly facilitates the preparation and publication of helps on the part of religious papers and in the form of quarterlies and lesson papers. It enlists on the side of Bible study in the Sunday school an immense capital of brains and money. It appeals powerfully to sentiment, and secures the help of that important ally. The superintendent and teacher in every city and met in the land, the parent in every home, even the child himself, feels or may feel the stimulus and inspiration of the fact that the prayerful thought of the Christian world is turning with him to the portion of Scripture assigned for a certain Sunday’s study.  

Those who adopted the Uniform Lessons gained a more comprehensive knowledge of the Bible. Instruction was made vastly easier in this Series. Teachers meetings were possible; unity of instruction was developed by it; and, best of all, the wide use of Uniform Lessons was a great object lesson and argument for the unity of Christianity, besides widening and deepening its spirituality and power.  

Weaknesses of the Uniform Series. The defects of the Uniform

2 E. Burton, and Shailer Matthews, Principles and Ideals For The Sunday School (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1903), p. 128

3 Rice, op. cit., p. 309
Series were many. This fact was recognised by the makers of the Series who did not claim perfection.

Lankard held that the first and foremost weakness of the Uniform Series is its failure to place the child at the center. Of course, both the plan for salvation and the child should be at the center, not just the child. The lessons are material centered. The aim is to teach Biblical material. Since this is true naturally the method of treatment is largely expositional and exegetical. The Improved Uniform Lessons are based somewhat upon the child's experience but even so, require considerable adaptation of material.

The relative emphasis upon material throughout the Series was unfortunate. It was the aim of the International Convention which authorized the Uniform Lessons, to provide a thorough and comprehensive study of the Bible as a whole. The Lesson Committee, having adapted a distribution of time on a chronological basis (so much to the Old and so much to the New Testament) proceeded to distribute the lessons over the entire Bible. Since the Committee was working on the principle of a uniform lesson for all ages, it proved exceedingly difficult to select Scripture passages which yielded suitable lesson material for all ages and capacities. Henry F. Cope pointed out that in a period of thirty three years following the "inception" — as he called it — of the Uniform plan, out of the fifty chapters of Genesis only thirty one chapters are studied. Mr. Cope says further: "In the New Testament there were equally striking omissions so that students remained in ignorance of events essential to an understanding of the history involved. The system of Uniform Lessons broke down by
its utter disregard of relative values in Biblical material."

The Uniform Series has been criticized on the basis of their omissions. Luther A. Weigle, in an analysis of the lessons, points out that only one sixth of the books of prophecy and less than one eighth of the Poetic and Wisdom literature have been selected.

A recent study made by Dr. Marion O. Hawthorne of Northwestern University revealed the fact that in the two Cycles (1912-1925) 33.2% of the Old Testament was unused as basic material. The facts are that the Uniform Lessons have not provided for the thorough and comprehensive study of the Bible, which their founders had in mind for them to do.

Liberal critics, who accept the Wellhausen view of Biblical criticism maintain that the Uniform Lessons do not approach the Scripture in an historical method. A study of the Bible should utilize the well-established results of the historical and critical studies of that Book. For example, Biblical scholars insist that the book of Genesis contains prehistoric folktales, oral traditions, and primitive conceptions of science and the world order but the Uniform Lessons treat all sections of the Book without these distinctions, as though they all were to be accepted as literal fact.

Notwithstanding the wide-spread popularity of the Uniform Lessons since 1872, they have called forth sharp criticisms. The demerits as well as the merits were obvious. They were not in accord with the best theories of education. They did not give satisfactory opportunity for

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4 Lankard, op. cit., p. 268
denominational instruction. They were too fragmentary. They were
dubbed a "Kangaroo, hop, skip and jump method"; "an erratic work of
careless shears and paste-pot" and "a mere skimming of the Bible". To
this last criticism, its advocates wittily answered that "the users had
great thanksgivings over the remarkably rich cream that they had skimmed
from it!" Further they asserted that educators in the classics in univers-
ities did not read: everything in the classics, even of works such as
Homer, Virgil, Horace, and Juvenal. And finally that the advantages far
outweighed the defects.5

Results did not seem to justify the continued use of the Uniform
Lesson. The Lessons had failed to make possible a mastery of the Biblical
text for the training of teachers. The representative churches had been
forced to substitute other books on the Bible which they felt would give
the desired information.

The lessons of this system were selected on the basis of what in the
estimation of its framers should constitute the subject-matter or material
of Sunday-school instruction, and with a view to covering the whole Bible
in a given period of years. The center of interest for the system lies
in the Bible, the Church, and the Sunday-school organization itself,
rather than in the children who are to be instructed. It offered the
same lesson passage to all regardless of age or previous instruction.
Children not yet able to read and write were given prologue to the Gospel
of John, or equally difficult passages from the Old Testament because

5 Rice, loc. cit.
these had to be included somewhere in the course, and because a uniform lesson for the whole school is considered essential.

But this is contrary to every recognized principle of child psychology and religious pedagogy, which alike insist on making the self-active developing child and his changing needs the starting point and the determining factor in the choice of the material of instruction.  

Harry Thomas Stock writes that the uniform lessons have made excellent adaptations for the high school and the adult ages but at the same time are very unsatisfactory for use with children and no school should use them in the children's divisions.

**Synopsis of Uniform Course**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harmony, one year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>as Judge, One year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Jan. - June.</td>
<td>Gospel According to St. John</td>
<td>Six months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Witness of John and Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>July - Dec.</td>
<td>Saul to Solomon</td>
<td>The United Kingdom. (Saul, David, and Solomon.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Six months</td>
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<td>One year</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Gospel of The Kingdom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Looking for a moment at this series of lessons covering a period of six years from 1906 to 1911, it is evident that the entire series clearly takes no cognizance of the changing needs of the developing child life. It is based entirely upon a consideration of the subject matter or material of the course.

But more closely examined the series is wrong even on this basis. If, for example, a boy of ten years entered the Sabbath School in July, 1908, he began his study of the patriarchs and of the earlier development of the Jewish nation. According to the present scheme, he would not be called upon to study this material until seven or eight years later when he would have reached the age of seventeen or eighteen years. It is doubtful whether or not the school held this ten year old boy's continued interest for seven or eight years. Whatsort of consecutive knowledge of Old Testament history a pupil may be supposed to acquire under such a system it is easy to infer.

On the basis of usage, it is fair to conclude that the Uniform Lessons have been very popular in the Sunday School world. In spite of their wide usage, they have been subject to much criticism. In spite of opposition, however, which had been constantly gathering through the years they held a large place, in fact, a dominant place, in the Sunday-school curriculum, until about 1910.

7 Loc. cit.
The Uniform Lessons did not constitute a complete curriculum in the modern sense, but, rather a program of study. The aim of studying the entire Bible in cycles was too general to serve as a comprehensive aim for a well-planned and truly organized curriculum. The individual lessons had no specific aims definitely stated and therefore stood pretty largely to themselves. There was a consciousness of the lack of a definite and comprehensive aim binding the lessons into units or the unit into a curriculum.

But the main objection to the Uniform Lesson System lies still deeper. The principle of uniformity is wrong. Valuable as has been the system in preparing the way for something better, it no longer meets the needs of the situation. With the transfer of emphasis to the educational aim and work of the Sunday School a change from uniform to graded lessons became imperative.

Transition to Graded System

It was inevitable that a radical change in system should come. That this change came as soon as it did, and that the transition from the old to the new has been accomplished with so little friction, is one of the things made possible by the system which is now giving way to a new and better curriculum of religious instruction for the whole school.

No careful student of the subject can fail to note the very great improvement of the new system over the old and the transition has proceeded far more rapidly than even the most optimistic advocates of graded lesson courses had expected. Indeed it is to be questioned whether the
progress all along the line in Sunday-school work could have been so rapid and marked but for the strong bond of union furnished by the uniform lesson with its attendant advantages, some of which have sometimes been overlooked by the critics of the uniform system.

**Points of Strength in Graded Series**

One of the distinctive advances of graded curricula over the former ungraded lessons is in the matter of aims. The Graded Series state definite though perhaps not always attainable aims - an aim for the span of childhood and youth, specific aims for each age group, such as Primary and Junior; and an aim for individual lessons within the age group.

A thorough understanding of the Graded Series ought to leave little doubt in one's mind as to their superiority as lesson material over the Uniform Lessons which they were intended to replace.

Taken as a whole, the series offers Biblical material which is psychologically much better suited to pupils than the Biblical material of the Uniform Lessons. The lessons offered and the Bible stories illustrating each lesson depend upon the child's age. Therefore the lessons appeal to the child's interest. In the very nature of the case, a uniform lesson for all ages precluded any such adaptation as the graded lessons offer.

Four-fifths of the material of the Graded Lessons is taken direct from the Bible either in the form of passages or selections printed therefrom. The other material is based upon the Bible or selections therefrom treated in an expository manner.
The Graded Series would appear to be far more interesting to the pupil than the Uniform Series since they present material more in keeping with the needs, interests, and capacities of children. Interest is a big factor in achievement and material capable of calling it forth is a strong argument in its favor.

The Series is intended to influence daily conduct as well as to furnish information about God's activities in the past and his influence upon men and women of old.

The Series also makes some provision for the expressional life of the pupil. For example in the Primary Department, the pupil might be asked to copy the memory verse, write something he remembers about Jesus, and write an explanation of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.8

The advantage of the graded curriculum is of the greatest importance from an educational point of view. The selection of material, not on the principle of engaging the whole Christian world in the study of a given portion at the same time, but on that of giving each class or grade of scholars in each school the material best adapted to their age and stage of advancement, is the only method which can make our Sunday schools in the best sense of the term educational institutions. This method adapts the material to the capacity of the scholar, avoiding the absurdity of setting children six years old to studying the pastoral epistles or the book of Revelation. It secures the study of the different portions of the Bible in the best order, taking into account both the relation of the different parts of the Bible to one another and the varying needs, capacities, and

8 Lankard, op. cit., p. 289
critical periods in the development of pupils of different ages. It will result in giving to each pupil who completes the course a connected and related knowledge of the whole Bible and of its teaching taken as a whole, instead of the distorted and disconnected view which the system of uniformity too often gives.

**Defects of Graded System**

There has been considerable opposition to the Graded System, however, especially in conservative circles. The Graded Series as well as the Uniform Series possesses certain limitations.

Lankard claims that these lessons are not sufficiently child centered. The lessons in the series fail to meet the "threefold spiritual needs of childhood and youth - knowledge, loyalties, and conduct." Oftentimes the lesson material does not fulfill adequately the objectives of a given period. The material is often too difficult to meet the aim for the age which it is written.

Another criticism offered by many authors is that the lessons fail to meet the demands of our present-day social experiences. Other lesson materials have failed to utilize adequately the rich sources of religious experience. The literary form and content of this series, taken as a whole, are not what the church has a right to expect for the use of its childhood and youth.

The Series leaves much to be desired in the way of teaching helps. There is very little suggested information to the teachers so

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9 Burton, op. cit., p. 129.
that they may enrich their own background in the field covered.

The mechanical features could be greatly improved. Since the units are printed in periodical form and bound in paper, they are neither durable nor very attractive. Then other mechanical features are open to objection. The double columns for the elementary grades rob the page of a certain attractiveness. The length of lines, spaces, margins, size of print and the set up of paragraphs and sections are not up to the standards of a modern textbook.

The enrollment in the majority of Sunday-schools is so small that difficulty has been experienced in dividing up the pupils into separate classes. Moreover, there has been a lack of enthusiasm and unity in the school, arising from the fact that so many different lessons were being taught at the same time.

The average teacher who had been brought up under the Uniform Lessons was not familiar with much of the material in the graded lessons, which afforded more than twice as much Bible as the Uniform Lessons. In consequence difficulty was experienced in getting the teachers to adopt the new lessons. More recently, however, this difficulty has been met by the introduction of the trained teacher who has an appreciation of the better values of the graded lesson.

The modernistic forces in the church have had an appreciation of the value of the graded lesson, and in many instances have gained control of the publishing houses and thus given a modernistic tone to the Sunday school literature. This has tended to discourage many who were true to the Bible, and they have continued using the Uniform Lessons as preferable
to endangering their pupils by exposing them to this modernistic literature. 10

On the whole the content suffers from too heavy a preponderance of the Biblical. Especially is there a failure to make use of nature in the lower grades; of historical and social methods in the upper grades and of nonbiblical religious literature in all grades. There is too much of repetition of the same Biblical materials in successive grades and too little attention paid to discovering the teaching value of the Bible for various grades. The subject matter of the New Testament, and especially the teachings and life of Jesus, suffers in comparison with the emphasis placed on Old Testament materials. However, the severest criticism of all should be made on the type of treatment accorded such materials as are chosen for the various courses. The literary quality does not average of high standard; the organization and presentation of subject matter with reference to easy learning and successful teaching leaves much to be desired; helpful devices for study and instruction are but meagerly represented; little provision is made for educational activities on the part of pupils, or for carrying the lessons over into action and conduct. 11

In order to evaluate the Graded Series fairly one must keep in mind the restrictions and limitations under which its editors and writers worked bound as their constituencies were by the traditions of forty years of ungraded lessons to which a considerable portion of the church was firmly wedded. Also, in a consideration of the limitations of the

10 Benson, op. cit., p. 146
11 Meyer, op. cit., p. 94.
Graded Series it is only fair to point out two things: (1) this Series was a pioneer in the field of graded lessons; and (2) it has undergone many changes since the first Graded Lessons were published.

In spite of the severe criticisms the Graded Series has received, it is a magnificent advance over the Uniform Series with which it was to compete, when it is projected and edited on a truly evangelical basis as to aim and method.

**Synopsis.** For a preview of a Graded Series Lesson plan an investigation into "The Model Sunday School" at Columbia University is enlightening. Here the direct supervision of the school is in the hands of recognized pedagogical experts of the highest rank in liberal circles.

Conservatives of course do not accept the basic principles of this type of school. The educational principles are neither valid nor applicable in conservative circles. Although the program is not accepted theologically nor pedagogically, certain values are recognized in the system.

The subject matter of the curriculum is grouped under three heads, namely, I Religious literature; II Biblical history; III Church history.

The work in the Kindergarten falls entirely under the first of these heads and consists of the presentation of Bible and other stories, memory work in Bible passages, songs, hymns, and poems. Object lessons and manual work accompany the presentation of the stories which are selected with reference to their historical setting or Chronological order.

In Grade I consecutive stories of Jesus, his life and works are added, forming the beginning of the work in biblical history. In Grade II
the first work in church history is introduced in the form of stories about modern foreign missions. The Biblical literature work in Grades I - VI inclusive consists largely of memory work for which selected psalms and proverbs, texts and hymns furnish the material. Other Bible passages are read, the selections being made by the teacher. The Bible history work for these grades comprises in addition to selected stories, consecutive narratives from the life of Jesus and stories of the earlier prophets, patriarchs, and New Testament characters. With the stories of the patriarchs, which are introduced in Grades II and III, the study of the history of Israel begins. This study continues through Grade VI. Work in church history in these grades (II - VI) is confined to a study of modern missions by countries. In Grades VII and VIII the study in Biblical literature takes up the teachings of Jesus; the life of Jesus as a consecutive study at the same time forms the subject matter for the work in Biblical history. The teaching and life of Jesus are followed by studies in the lives and the teaching of Paul and the other apostles.

In the High school grades this study in New Testament teaching and character is continued in the religious history and Biblical literature work respectively. In the second and third grades of the High School, the study of manuscripts and versions and of Biblical masterpieces from both the Old and New Testaments is added. The Biblical history work of the High school section, in addition to the study of the life of Paul and the other apostles, continued from the preceding course, includes the history of religion within the Bible, together with its historical parallels. The church history for the High-school grades takes up in the
first year the study of the early church to the time of Saint Augustine; in the second year the subsequent church history in outline through the period of the reformation and in the third year the later history of the church, with special emphasis on the work of Whitefield and Wesley.

Provision has been made in the curriculum for graduate work, following the work of the High-school grades, and consisting largely of elective courses in which single books of the Bible are critically studied and compared with other religious master pieces. A large literary study of the whole Bible, together with work in New Testament Greek, is provided for. This work is a continuation of the work under the head of religious literature.

In this Graded Series of the Sunday School at Columbia University the principle of modern pedagogy—self-expression is recognised. The pupil is to learn by doing, that is, by expressing, in some concrete way the ideas which he has. The teacher seeks to stimulate the pupil to constructive effort.

The author of this thesis is aware that self-expression was a principle of Pestalozzi and that religious educators must be careful, lest they confuse the philosophy of progressive education with activity programs.

In this plan the ideas projected in manual work are the ideas which it is natural for the child at a given age to frame or to express. The subject matter of instruction must be suited to the age of the pupil. 12

Advantages of Group Graded Series. In the International Group Graded Series the lessons are intended to be consecutive and cumulative. The lessons of each succeeding age-group presuppose the training afforded by those of the preceding groups, thus creating a continuous series of steps upward throughout the curriculum. The lessons are dated and move in a three year cycle. One immediately sees the advantages in this system, mainly, that the needs of the child are of foremost interest. This series requires for each age group (primary, junior, and so on) three interchangeable units of materials, one for each year. This plan enables the smaller school to place in the same class children three years apart in ages while at the same time giving them materials which, even if rather coarsely graded, are adapted to their use. No Group Graded Course is issued for the Beginners, this unit being taken from the Graded Series.

A Comparative View. The following diagram affords a comparative view of the method of procedure of the three International Series.
TABLE III

(UNIFORM LESSONS)\textsuperscript{13}

| Age | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8   | 9   | 10  | 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  | 15  | 16  | 17  | 18  | 19  | 20  |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

\textsuperscript{13} Betts, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 362
**Bases of Comparison**

The child who at the age of four years had begun the Uniform Lessons would, by the completion of his seventeenth year, have covered two seven-year cycles, all lessons (with the exception of minor modifications made for elementary pupils) having been on the same level of difficulty. The one who during the same period had studied the Group Graded Lessons would have been on five different levels of adaptation, two years on the first level as a Beginner and three years on each of the remaining four. Similarly, the pupil who had been pursuing the Graded Series for the same period would have progressed over fourteen different grades or levels of difficulty, one for each year. 14

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14 Ibid., p. 360
A. BOOKS


B. PERIODICALS