

# Evaluating Bible Classes

By Horace Alexander

**E**valuation is an integral part of the instructional process in any subject area, but in Bible teaching it assumes a special significance and demands particular sensitivity. Spiritual principles permeate the entire curriculum in our schools, but parents and students often perceive the Bible class as the central thrust, the primary evangelizing vehicle of the curriculum.

The Christian teacher's role as a classroom evangelist, especially if he or she is primarily a Bible teacher, demands that he be aware of the spiritual condition of each of his students. This knowledge will assist the teacher in providing for the spiritual growth of the student. The teacher, however, needs to approach the task of evaluation with a well-formulated philosophy of education as it relates to evaluation. This philosophy will assist not only in the choice of techniques for gathering information, but also in the proper use of the information once it is tabulated.

The Bible teacher who views sanctification and restoration as ongoing processes requiring a lifetime of spiritual growth will not expect the Bible class to result in finished products. His purpose in evaluation will be to gather information that helps him provide the conditions necessary to promote healthy spiritual growth and devel-

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***Students' questions can help the teacher assess their growth and understanding.***

opment. Therefore, the Bible teacher should be predominantly process-oriented rather than product-oriented. He should exert as much effort in his preliminary assessment of the students' spiritual needs and his monitoring of growth in the formative stages as he does in the summary assessment at the conclusion of a learning experience. However, all types of evaluation should be based on carefully formulated objectives. Such objectives can help assess the degree to which each student has achieved objectives appropriate to this developmental level and commensurate with his or her potential.

Realizing that any one means of evaluation can at best provide only a sampling of student growth, the teacher would be wise to employ

many techniques and approaches in an attempt to arrive at a comprehensive assessment.

## Observation

While an obvious limitation is expressed by "Man looketh on the outward appearance but God looketh on the heart," yet we are told that "by [observing] their fruits, ye shall know them." Observation used in combination with other means of evaluation can be a valuable tool. Jesus' habit of watching the faces of His learners not only underscored His concern for the individual response, it also indicates that observation is a valid form of evaluation.

Although most teachers use this method, not all are skilled in its application and fewer still consider it an integral part of evaluation. Much of what is called observation of pupils must be described as a disorganized set of impressions obtained during periods of formal instruction. The Bible teacher needs to decide what he is looking for (based on his objectives), systematize his observations, and attempt to objectively document the data obtained. The questions a student asks in class, his response to open-ended questions, the manner in which a student listens, his involvement in class discussion, response to witnessing or other related activities, and any observable changes in life-style, all may be observable indicators of growth and development.

It is important, however, that as

a teacher searches for evidence of spiritual growth in the lives of his students he is careful to avoid the equating of broken promises, unfulfilled responsibilities, and other negative behavior (even when done in connection with church activities) as a lack of Christian commitment. A simple lack of maturity may be the cause.

### The Affective Domain

Many classified descriptions of the affective domain can provide reference points or indices of growth and development in student values, attitudes, and interests. These descriptions (called taxonomies) may be useful in enhancing observation, testing, and other means of evaluation. Perhaps the most valuable use of such taxonomies would be to (1) write objectives at varying levels, (2) plan teaching strategies that would be appropriate to those objectives, and (3) evaluate both how well the total objectives have been met as well as whether each individual part of the taxonomy has been achieved. Although it may be more difficult to write objectives in the affective domain than in the cognitive, this most important duty should not be neglected. The committed Christian teacher will become increasingly proficient as he seeks to grow professionally in this regard, if his efforts are coupled with aid from the Holy Spirit. The taxonomy most helpful in writing affective objectives may well be Krathwohl's, which lists the following progression of affective growth: receiving, responding, valuing, organizing, characterization. Other taxonomies may prove helpful and should be explored.

The Biblical taxonomy suggested in 2 Peter 1:5-7 may be suited to the needs of many students and teachers: "Make

every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (N.I.V.).\*

### Values Clarification and Stages of Moral Development

Much of the current thinking in secular circles regarding moral development and values education can be of assistance in helping the Bible teacher with evaluation tasks. One has to be careful, however, not to adopt any approach or mode of thinking that may be derived from a philosophical base inconsistent with Biblical principles.

Values clarification, for example, can be useful in helping the teacher and the student to identify the values and ideals that the latter has truly embraced as his own. However, beyond simply exploring student opinions and feelings, the Christian teacher needs to help the student to determine whether these values reflect the principles enfolded in the Bible. Values clarification does not appear to adequately address the issues of relative and absolute values, nor does it help acquaint the student with God's will for his or her life.

Lawrence Kohlberg's philosophy of the progressive nature of moral development may be helpful in ascertaining the degree of sophistication or maturity displayed in student decision-

making. Adventist teachers may have reservations about a wholesale endorsement of Kohlberg's ideas though, since they suggest an existentialist stance in questions of morality. Because God is the final authority in questions of morality, students should be helped to grow in their understanding of God's will for their lives and in accepting the eternal principles of His Word. Then they can be assured that their consciences will provide guidance consistent with God's will.

### Grading

Perhaps the most sensitive aspect of evaluating Bible teaching is testing and grading. Here, the individual teacher's educational philosophy will be of vital importance. How would the Master Teacher go about grading your students? Christ's philosophy of grading may be inferred from His parable of the lost sheep: The shepherd was not content to have only 99 sheep in the fold: The lost sheep must also be found and returned to the flock. Each of His charges must "make the grade."

We can probably assume that the lost sheep was willing to be brought to safety. What if the sheep had refused to cooperate with the efforts of the shepherd on its behalf? Should it have been allowed to fail? Some educators suggest that although the teacher should make every effort to facilitate the success of each student in Bible class, those students who do not apply themselves should be allowed to fail. Failure and success are both realities in the Christian life. Paul said to the Philippians, "I know how to be abased and I know how to abound."

Regardless of the teacher's philosophy of evaluation and grading, the reduction of a student's cognitive and affective acquisitions to

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local newspaper to see if they would like to cover the event. As a result, the Dallas *Morning News* featured a color photo and story on the front page of its metropolitan section.

The principal, James H. Hudgins, says that the photo received favorable comment, and the school plans to try the idea again soon. □

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a single letter grade is fraught with great risks. The assignment of a grade at the end of a course certainly suggests product- rather than process-oriented education. Dangers in this method include the fostering of unhealthy competition and the student's perceiving the letter grade as the teacher's assessment of his spiritual condition or commitment. Sometimes teachers inadvertently penalize students for poor attitude when in fact this attitude could be symptomatic of a lack of conversion. If teachers succumb to this misjudgment, they may actually be judging the Holy Spirit's efforts in the student's life, since conversion is His work.

Clearly, a descriptive method of indicating pupil progress, based on

objectives and reflecting the multifaceted nature of spiritual development would be preferable to the designation of a single letter grade, and would minimize the inherent risks in assigning grades. If institutional regulations, parental expectations, and other factors seem to demand a grade, then the Bible teacher needs to clearly articulate what that grade represents, or else provide supplementary information of a descriptive nature in order to give a more comprehensive picture of student growth and development.

### The Bible Class— Its Discipling Function

A study of Jesus' teaching practices as portrayed in the Scriptures clearly demonstrates that although formal education is vital, informal nurturing experiences may sometimes have a more lasting effect on the minds of students. Jesus taught by precept, yet His example certainly had an even greater impact. Much of His teaching was accomplished through socialization. As the disciples associated closely with Jesus and came under the influence of His modeling, they became changed men.

The Bible class today should demonstrate a similar discipling

function, with the teacher seeking to develop a rapport with his students. He should not hesitate because such closeness may expose imperfections in his own character. The Bible teacher should not be expected to model perfection. On the contrary, both student and teacher should model for each other the process of restoration!

Mutual modelling of restoration by student and teacher can succeed only if the Bible teacher creates a classroom atmosphere in which students feel free to discuss spiritual problems without fear of being labelled, where each one is free to express doubt and fears and know that he is still accepted, respected, and loved, an atmosphere in which issues relevant to young people's lives can be aired and guidance provided without the implication that if the students' spiritual growth had been adequate, they would have had no need of discussing such issues.

Given the life-relatedness of Bible teaching, the inquiring minds of eager students, and the eternal implications of the issues facing our young people, Bible classes should be a joy to teach. And how are the achievements of such classes to be evaluated? Far beyond a grade in a long-forgotten report card, these results are seen in committed lives here on earth and candidates for God's eternal kingdom. □

## Motivating the Reluctant Bible Student

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visits in her students' homes.

Reviewing her notes on arousal, Miss Morse underlined this sentence: *An important part of arousal is finding and adapting just the right material to meet the needs of each student.* In preparing

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