



the role of conversion in nineteenth-century sunday schools

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No activity seems to characterize nineteenth-century Americans so much as their mania for creating new institutions. Indeed, the list of familiar modern institutions which trace their origins to the last century is so long and varied that it testifies not only to Americans' interest in institution-building but also to their skill in doing so. Such a list would include not only asylums, prisons and Protestant denominations, but also political parties and modern corporations. One particular type of institution-building—the creation of institutions for children—yields an equally impressive list. The public school, the orphanage, the reform school and the Sunday school all had their beginnings in the early nineteenth century and all quickly assumed important roles in the socialization of nineteenth-century children.

Just as the development of new institutions in general marked major shifts in American ways of handling the age-old problems of maintaining social order, imposing social control and promoting social goals, so too the creation of new institutions for children indicated basic changes in Americans' methods of raising children. That so many people saw the need for so many new institutions suggests that a major reorientation in family life was taking place, one which resulted both from children's own changing experience of childhood and adults' changing perceptions of children. The occurrence of such changes should not surprise us. It would be surprising if the vast upheavals of the nineteenth century—widespread geographical and social mobility, structural shifts in the economic system, technological innovations—were not reflected in methods of raising children. What emerged in the nineteenth century was a new and widely shared faith in institutions as useful adjuncts to the family in its central concern: raising good children. This faith, reflected

in the founding of public schools, reform schools and Sunday schools, was based on the belief that families in the nineteenth century had lost the network of informal adjuncts—kin, church, community—on which they had relied in the colonial period for support, reinforcement and, when necessary, replacement. Nineteenth-century institution-builders were confident that their creations could not only serve as family adjuncts or even family substitutes, but could also fulfill these roles better than had the old, informal adjuncts.¹

My purpose here is to evaluate the organization and programs of one such institution—the evangelical Protestant Sunday school. I hope to show, first, that the specific programs developed in Sunday schools were not the results of mere chance, but were carefully devised systems which reflected the ideas and goals of Sunday school workers. In working out their programs, Sunday school organizers expressed in institutional form their ideas about the psychology of children and adolescents, their theological beliefs about children's religious natures and capabilities and contemporary educational theory about how children learn. Although these three categories often overlapped, the central factor in shaping Sunday school curricula and internal organization was theology, particularly the theology of conversion. I will show in addition, that conversion—the central experience of evangelical Protestantism—was the main goal of Sunday school training throughout the early nineteenth century. Only when Sunday school workers' understanding of religious psychology changed did they begin to abandon conversion in favor of Christian nurture as a goal. For the most part, their faith in the possibilities of the institution was seldom shaken; they merely sought better methods of realizing those possibilities.

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The founding of Sunday schools began in urban areas in the 1790s as an attempt to provide rudimentary instruction in reading, writing and religion to working children who, in the view of founders like Benjamin Rush and Samuel Slater, lacked other means of acquiring this knowledge. These schools quickly died out, to be replaced in the 1810s by new Sunday schools which, although superficially similar to their predecessors, had very different goals and curricula. Modern Protestant Sunday schools evolved from these later schools which by 1832 numbered over 8000, and enrolled almost ten percent of American children aged 5 to 14.²

Like the creation of other nineteenth-century institutions for children, the founding of evangelical Sunday schools reflected several different phenomena. In the first place, there was an objective need which the schools met: some children had no other means of learning to read, and many children were unfamiliar with basic Christian doctrine.

Without such needs, parents would not have sent their children to the schools. More important, however, were the ideas and subjective needs of the founders and teachers. Most were newly converted or newly awakened Protestants from orthodox denominations, particularly Presbyterian, though a significant group were low-church Episcopalians. A majority were women. These individuals had gone through the revivals of the Second Great Awakening where they had learned that converted Christians had a duty to work for the salvation of others. In founding Sunday schools, they fulfilled a subjective need for a meaningful way in which to express their religious convictions.

At first, teachers in these evangelical schools set goals for themselves based on their assessment of current social needs and on their understanding that there were certain common beliefs shared by all evangelical Protestants. In order to be able to experience conversion, they argued, individuals had to be familiar with some of the basic information contained in the Bible, information such as the depraved state of human nature and the need for regeneration. Such knowledge alone could not guarantee conversion, since orthodox theology held that only through God's action could a person be regenerated, but it was a necessary precondition. Yet, these people believed, thousands of poor individuals, young and old, black and white, were unable to acquire this knowledge because they could not read and had no means of learning to read. Sunday schools, taught by unpaid volunteers, concentrating on the basic common denominators of evangelical Protestantism, would fill the need.⁴

Given these goals and beliefs, it is easy to understand why Sunday school workers in the 1810s formulated the program they did. They organized classes according to knowledge, regardless of age. Students progressed from the alphabet class, through the one- and two-syllable word classes, to the reading class, all the while using the Bible as a text. They remained in school until they learned to read the Bible, and in the course of their schooling might have half-a-dozen different teachers. As for results, teachers did not expect their instruction to guarantee conversion—such an expectation would challenge the orthodox doctrine of inability—but they did hope for subsequent conversions among their students who participated in revivals. In addition, they were confident that Sunday school instruction would make the students prudent and circumspect individuals; if it could not make them holy, it would teach them basic evangelical doctrines such as human depravity and future punishment.⁵

During the 1820s and 1830s, this program underwent a major overhaul. Increasingly, teachers sought to divest themselves of the burden of teaching reading and writing by lobbying for free public schools. Whereas previously they had made few age distinctions, refusing only very young children, they now began to separate children from adults, relegating the adults whenever possible to separate classes (often on

separate days), and excluding children under five entirely. At the same time they began encouraging church families to send their children to Sunday school, arguing that the schools “are not designed for the poor alone;—but for children of every grade.” Age-grading gradually replaced classification by reading skill, and teachers sought to keep children in the schools for longer periods of time, suggesting that they should attend consistently from age 5 to 14 or 15. Classes of six to eight pupils, once considered desirable, now became mandatory, and teachers were assigned to individual classes on a year-long basis whenever possible. Corporal punishment, a staple of discipline in common schools, was banned. Sunday school workers began, also, to organize special separate classes for adolescents, designed for intensive study of the Bible but also as a recruiting ground for new teachers. Curricular materials used in the schools underwent changes too. From an emphasis on reading and comprehending the Bible as the only text, the curriculum moved to a wider use of auxiliary materials, particularly “question books,” which were designed to “bring [the Bible’s] truths to bear through the understanding upon the heart and conscience.”⁶ In other words, actually precipitating conversion, not merely preparing students for it, became the goal.

All these changes—in curriculum, organization, clientele—can be traced to Sunday school workers’ increasing concern about the nature of childhood and adolescence in a rapidly changing society, to their altered understanding of child and adolescent psychology, and to revisions in the theological interpretation of children’s religious capabilities. And in each of these areas, Sunday school workers found themselves reinterpreting the nature of the conversion experience and its functions in the individual life.

Sunday school workers’ concern about the experience of childhood and adolescence stemmed from the rapidly changing social conditions they saw around them, conditions which dramatically affected young people’s experience of growing up. Increased geographical mobility, technological innovations which radically affected both the job structure and the shape of existing work and growing social mobility all made childhood irrevocably different from what it had been in the past. Urban middle-class children acquired a leisured childhood, free from economic demands, but became increasingly burdened with psychological pressures. Theirs was a more stressful adolescence during which they had to face a bewildering variety of choices: what occupation to pursue, what religion to follow, where to live, whom to marry. Working children lacked the leisure of their middle-class counterparts, yet acquired similar freedoms in their choice of friends, religion, marriage partner and, to some extent, occupation. The result was that young people began to experience modern adolescence, with all its internal and external conflicts, and adults began to observe it, criticize it and try to cope with it.⁷

Coinciding with these changes in young people's experiences came new theories of childhood and adolescence. While Sunday school workers did not originate these theories, they seized upon them and developed them in great detail in the magazines and books offering advice to teachers. Furthermore, they attempted to use the understanding gained from such theories to develop Sunday school programs. Much more than their contemporaries who were public school teachers, these workers scrutinized their charges in an effort to develop programs based on what they thought to be the true psychological characteristics of children.⁸

In the view of Sunday school workers in the 1820s and 1830s, the most distinctive characteristic of children was their malleability, their susceptibility to "impressions." In a favorite image, writers often described children as wax-like creatures, "pliable . . . tender, and capable of impressions" more lasting than those received later in life. This pliability, they suggested, resulted from their greater openness to feeling, their immaturity in matters which required logical thinking. Whereas adults used thought and reason as customary modes of dealing with the world, children were "governed in a great degree by their feelings." "Of one thing we are certain," asserted one writer, "that there is no time in the whole life of man, when the heart can be so effectually pressed with the enduring principles of religion . . . none when the minds of children, in every condition of life, are more susceptible of fortification against pernicious sentiments." Occasionally in discussing children's impressionability, Sunday school workers were referring to their mental capabilities; usually, however, they referred to their moral character, their emotions, or as they usually put it, their "hearts." This aspect of a child's being was most easily and most permanently impressed.⁹

Several pedagogical principles followed from this analysis. First, children could be consciously molded in ways that would shape their entire future lives; hence positive fashioning by teachers or through institutions could counteract bad influences they received elsewhere. Second, any attempts at conscious shaping should proceed through the child's emotional life, rather than through his or her intellect. Third, teaching methods which worked with adults could not be used with children because of their different psychological makeup. And finally, because each child was different from others in experience, emotions and temperament, teaching had to be geared to the individual child.¹⁰

When Sunday school workers attempted to apply these principles to religious teaching, however, they ran into difficult theological terrain. No good evangelical, committed to the doctrines of original sin and inability, could properly hold that a child's *religious* nature was fully malleable. Such a view would be heretical because it gave human agency the power to achieve what only God could rightly achieve: the transformation of the sinner into a saved person through the experience of conversion. Various evangelical denominations had worked out different

theological positions on the question of childhood sinfulness and all except the Methodists held that until he or she experienced conversion, the child was incapable of acting except from self-love. During the 1820s and 1830s, however, theological revisions developed by Nathaniel Taylor and Charles Finney modified the positions of most evangelicals. Using Taylor's and Finney's theories, evangelicals argued that children remained morally neutral until they reached an age when they could make rational free choices; only then would they act from self-love and be in need of conversion.¹¹

Sunday school workers incorporated these theological revisions into their thinking, combining psychology with theology to develop new goals for their schools. Since children operated more with their feelings than with their minds, and since religious experiences had to be monitored through the "heart" (no amount of knowledge could save one; salvation came only through the emotional experience of conversion), children were particularly susceptible to religious impressions. Because of their nature, then, children were easier objects of religious instruction than adults; indeed one group of Sunday school workers gave up on adults in favor of teaching children so their "time and talents . . . could be much better employed."¹² And while no evangelicals argued that religious training and impressions would eventuate in conversion, they did suggest that early training, such as that provided in Sunday school, would ease the transition from morally neutral child to regenerate adult. At the very least, such training would enable children to avoid the depths of sinfulness which adults had to undergo and make the conversion experience that much less traumatic.

If children were pliable and impressionable, adolescents were a good deal more problematic. The success of the Sunday school program depended upon being able to keep adolescents in school until they experienced conversion; yet teachers noticed that, upon reaching 13 or 14, students dropped out, claiming they were "too large or too old to remain in a school where there are so many children so much younger and smaller" than themselves. The reasons for this problem seemed clear to Sunday school workers, who drew upon contemporary understandings of adolescence as well as their own observations. At around 13 or 14, they noted, children began "escaping from the restraints of childhood" and "learning to act for themselves." This was, they believed, "the most critical period of life" not just physically and emotionally but also religiously, because during this period "the mind generally takes a decided turn, and the happiness and usefulness of the character is insured or destroyed." In other words, an individual's future life was decided by choices made in adolescence.¹³

During these critical years, Sunday school workers noted, youths were extremely vulnerable to influence, whether good or bad, and sought out new experiences unavailable to children. Their vulnerability

was very dangerous because it meant that a previously good youth could be led astray by evil companions, curiosity or mere carelessness. Once led astray, a youth could be ruined for life. Worst of all, in the view of these observers, the chances for any youth, but especially the “large boys” over whom Sunday school workers fretted, to be led astray were increasing greatly because of changes in American life in the nineteenth century. Migration to the cities removed young people from familiar restraining influences such as family and community while at the same time exposing them to a wide range of new influences—most of them bad. Increased freedom in career and marital choice had similar effects, leading young people, again especially boys, into new associations which they might not recognize as harmful until too late.¹⁴

When these commentators spoke of youth being led astray, they referred not only to sexual and physical dangers but also, perhaps centrally, to religious ones. Their concern was over the boy or girl who left the Sunday school at the critical age, migrated to the city or some new community to work, and then, in the face of new experiences, new temptations and new associations abandoned the practice of religion. All previous religious training and all preparation for conversion would come to naught.

Such concerns led Sunday school workers in the 1820s and 1830s to create Bible classes especially for young people. Reasoning that teenagers would like the idea of a class specifically for them, one that would set them apart from the “mere children” in Sunday school, teachers hoped that such classes would keep adolescents in school. In another shrewd insight, Sunday school workers, recognizing that youths seek out adult role models to emulate, urged the selection of Bible class teachers who could best serve in that capacity. During adolescence, suggested one widely read advice manual, a young person’s close attachment to a teacher would give the teacher “a moral influence over [the student] which, if kept up and rightly employed at a time of life so exposed to danger, may, under the blessing of God, be attended with most beneficial and enduring results. . . . [F]or what can be more gratifying to a youth than to be affectionately noticed by a kind and sympathizing friend and teacher, his senior in years and superior in knowledge?” Bible class teachers should develop close relationships with their students, cultivate their confidence, and spend time with them in “earnest conversation” over the state of their souls.¹⁵ The effect of this close relationship, Sunday school workers hoped, would be to keep the “large boys” and girls in school, guide them through the conversion experience, provide a supportive environment to minimize backsliding after conversion and encourage them to become teachers.

The Sunday school program which took shape in the 1820s and 1830s resulted from the new goals formulated during those decades, goals which developed from a new understanding of childhood and

adolescence. Not content with merely providing poor children with basic religious information, Sunday school workers devised a whole system of religious education intended for all children, supplementing home religious instruction where it was provided and substituting for family religious education where it was lacking. No longer were Sunday schools merely preparing students for subsequent conversion experiences; now they were attempting to precipitate conversions. Ideally, in this system, students would enter the school at age five or six and proceed through several age-graded classes in which they would study the evangelical interpretation of the Bible. Throughout this portion of their education, students would be the subject of "appeals" made to their "hearts," appeals designed to make them feel, not merely know intellectually, the doctrines of original sin, human depravity, future punishment and regeneration. At adolescence they would graduate to the Bible class, where, in addition to studying Biblical antiquities, Biblical history and denominational theology, they would be encouraged to dwell at length on the state of their souls. Through visits with the Bible class teacher, conversations with fellow students and private self-examination, they might be brought through the conversion experience. Later, some might become teachers. If at any time during this process a student moved away from his or her original school, the student could simply transfer to a school in the new location.¹⁶

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These attempts to precipitate conversion are important given the historical significance which conversion assumed in American Protestantism. Conversion had been the central experience in Protestantism since the seventeenth century, and testimony to such an experience was a necessary precondition for membership in most Protestant churches. It was an experience of profound significance in an individual's life, a life-defining event which marked the start of a new career as a Christian. It was also an event with broad social and cultural significance because of the meanings associated with full membership in the colonial period. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, conversion and admission to the church signified and coincided with accession to full adult responsibilities and the achievement of independence from one's parents. Conversion was closely linked with personal autonomy; hence it usually occurred in one's twenties, or later.¹⁷

During and after the Great Awakening the gradual decline in the age of conversion pointed to new social patterns in which young adults achieved independence earlier and acquired greater personal autonomy in areas such as marriage and career choice. The Second Great Awakening saw a further lowering of the age, into the late teens, while the advent of Sunday schools brought it down to the mid-teens. In working

to precipitate conversion among Bible class students, Sunday school teachers were attempting to reorient the event to fit the needs and experiences of nineteenth-century youth. By creating a systematic program to guide adolescents through conversion and then to recruit them as teachers, Sunday school workers offered a new institutional setting to replace the family-community setting which was now disappearing. Without such a setting, they believed, the child's religious training was threatened by the youth's independence and impatience, and conversion, if it occurred, was likely to be followed by backsliding. With an institutional setting, youth had buffers against any threats to their religious commitment. Best of all, this setting was available wherever there was a Sunday school; thus pious youths need merely seek out a Bible class or a position as a teacher as protection against the temptations surrounding them. Adolescence could become a period, not of rejecting childhood religious values, but of bringing them to fruition.¹⁸

The Great Awakening had also seen the evolution of a close theological link between conversion and emotion, one which was further cemented by the Second Great Awakening. As Jonathan Edwards formulated this link, when conversion occurred, the individual came to know God through the "heart"; intellectual knowledge, knowledge acquired through the "head" was virtually worthless as a means to conversion. As the emotional element became paramount in religious experience, women, who were traditionally seen as more emotional than men and who made up a majority of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century converts, began to have their experiences held up as exemplary ones. In this context, attempts to precipitate conversion experiences among children and teenagers, justified on the grounds that their "hearts" were more impressionable than those of adults, signaled a close tying of children's religious experiences to those of women, as well as a legitimization of children's experiences. Perhaps because women made up a majority of Sunday school teachers, it became easy to link them to children in a bond of feeling. If the effort to minimize adolescent religious trauma through early conversion represented an attempt to mitigate the strains which economic change and migration were visiting upon the family, perhaps similar functions were fulfilled by offering Sunday school scholars ideal mother surrogates to whom they could become attached. In any event, the drive to convert children, largely based on the belief in their susceptibility to religious emotions, represents yet another aspect of the sentimentalization (or as a recent writer has termed it "feminization") of nineteenth-century Protestantism.¹⁹

In succeeding decades Sunday school workers continued their efforts to carry out a systematic program of instruction oriented toward conversion, to retain older students in the schools and to recruit a continuous supply of new teachers from among members of the Bible class. The most striking fact about Sunday school education in the 1840s and

1850s, however, was that teachers bent their energies toward earlier and earlier conversions of students. Whereas in the 1820s they saw conversion as appropriate for pupils in Bible classes, during the 1840s and 1850s they began arguing that conversion could and should take place in children of as young as seven. Advice literature for teachers placed increasing stress upon “early piety” and offered suggestions about precipitating such early conversions. Be of “vital religion” yourself, the advice-givers urged, so that you can appeal directly to your students’ “hearts” and guide them toward conversion. Believe that children can be converted, they suggested, and you will see results. In a typical article, a Baptist minister argued that children should be converted as soon as they reached the age of moral accountability, somewhere around seven years. “Early in life,” he wrote,

the advantages for conversion are greater, the mind is retentive to what is taught, the conscience is comparatively unhardened, the heart is tender, prejudices are few and feeble, and they readily yield to, and more permanently retain the impressions made on them during that period.

Similarly, magazines for students ran frequent stories about children who had experienced conversion, “in the hope that many will by this means be led to realize” the importance of seeking God “in the season of youth.” Individual schools began keeping records of the number of conversions they witnessed. At monthly teachers’ meetings, the subject was discussed, commented on and prayed over; teachers offered each other suggestions about how to precipitate conversions and commiserated with each other when the incidence of conversion was low. In their annual statistical reports, Sunday schools began including a column for the number of conversions during the year and a cumulative column listing the number of children in the school who were church members.²⁰

The significance of this development was three-fold. First, it showed that among the evangelical denominations new psychological and theological theories of childhood had gained wide acceptance. Although there were hold-outs, especially among Old School Presbyterians and conservative Baptists, most evangelicals now held that children experienced a period of moral neutrality and did not begin to sin until they reached the age of moral accountability. Second, efforts to convert children represented a desire to minimize or obliterate entirely the individual’s experience of sinfulness. If children were converted upon reaching the age of accountability, they would never have to go through a period of alienation from God. Third, these efforts signified an attempt to downplay the religious traumas of adolescence. If the child converted at a tender age, he or she would not have to go through a period of religious questioning in adolescence, but would move through that critical period securely attached to the church.

The broader reasons for these attempts at earlier and earlier con-

versions seem clear. During the 1840s and 1850s, the social milieu in which children and adolescents matured became increasingly complex and, in the eyes of many adults, dangerous. New and “heathenish” ideas competed for children’s attention; crime was on the increase, as were popular violence and intemperance. The chances of reforming this milieu by converting adults seemed increasingly remote, but the prospect of training children who would bring into the public arena evangelical values and virtues seemed more hopeful. By bringing the experience of conversion to young children, Sunday school workers were attempting to enlist the power and symbolism of this event as weapons against adolescent religious trauma, adult sinfulness and the social disorder which, in their view, resulted from ignorance of the evangelical doctrines of human depravity and future punishment.²¹

When major changes in the Sunday school curriculum did come about, in the 1860s and 1870s, they came as a result of new theories of childhood. In those decades, Sunday school workers virtually abandoned their efforts for conversion of children in favor of what came to be called “Christian nurture,” a term first coined by Horace Bushnell in a series of discourses published in 1847. According to Bushnell, at birth the child was a “bundle of possibilities” whose character could be shaped by the impressions surrounding him or her from birth. Hence, the “aim, effort and expectation” of parents would be that the child “open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a technical [conversion] experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years.”²²

Although in 1847 Bushnell’s views had seemed to evangelicals so heretical that the book’s original publisher withdrew it from circulation, by the time two decades had passed, similar views gained ready acceptance. Rejecting the notion that children, as inheritors of original sin, “must be converted,” Sunday school workers now turned to the theory that children, because of their impressionability and malleability, were more readily able to embrace religion than adults. If religious experiences were monitored through the “affections,” and if children lived to a great extent through their emotions, then they had a greater capacity for “reception of religious impressions.” Children’s impressionability, this theory held, made it possible for parents and Sunday school teachers to surround them with religious influences so that they were “religiously impressed long before they have any consciousness of it.” A child might thus “be converted from the cradle, and grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Bushnell himself, considered for years too liberal by most evangelicals, found himself invited to an 1869 convention of Sunday school teachers, where his view that “children are a great deal more capable” of true knowledge of God than adults, must have seemed quite reasonable to his audience.²³

But it was not to Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture* that evangelical Sun-

day school teachers of the 1860s and 1870s looked for theoretical support. Rather, their views were drawn from the educational writings of Johann Pestalozzi, evangelical theology about the centrality of the “affections” in religious experiences, and increasingly Romantic views of children’s natures. As these theories gained acceptance, a new Sunday school curriculum emerged. Discussions on how to precipitate conversions all but disappeared from Sunday school publications and curricular materials now stressed gradual growth and nurture. Because the new theories placed such emphasis on early impressions, Sunday school workers began establishing kindergartens and infant schools for children under five, in order to provide them with good “impressions” at their most impressionable stage. Adolescence remained a major concern of Sunday school workers throughout these decades, but they had little new to offer on the subject. In the 1870s, they were still urging the creation of separate classes and the establishment of close personal ties between teachers and “older youth” as a means of keeping them in Sunday school.²⁴

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Looking at the Sunday school as an example of nineteenth-century institution-building, one can draw some conclusions from an examination of its programs and organization. That the founders’ and teachers’ beliefs significantly determined the institution’s goals and structure is clear. Indeed, the schools were the institutional embodiments of their founders’ ideas; as these changed, especially as theological ideas changed, so too did the schools’ programs.

Equally important were the needs of the children they served, at least as Sunday school workers perceived those needs. Thus teachers thought that nineteenth-century children and adolescents lacked what their eighteenth-century counterparts had found informally in their communities: an environment in which to prepare for and experience conversion. In devising a formal institution to fulfill that purpose for nineteenth-century children, Sunday school workers sought to create such an environment; indeed, they often hoped to make one that was more perfect than what had existed. As institution-builders, they were concerned not with re-creating any golden past, but devising new mechanisms which would meet the needs and demands of the nineteenth century. Thus in their model the Sunday school not only provided an environment which nurtured conversion but, in response to the requirements of a dynamic society, made that environment available across space and time.

Everywhere one looks in the nineteenth century, one finds Americans devising new institutions to do jobs previously handled by home, church or community. From the example of the Sunday school, one can discern the faith that nineteenth-century Americans had in their institutions as

the means for perfecting the informal mechanisms of an earlier age. Similarly, they viewed their institutions as adapting old values to the nineteenth century by providing surrogate homes and communities in every locale, thus mitigating the potentially harmful effects of the changes they saw occurring about them. Just as few teachers or parents questioned the assumption that Sunday schools were the best places for children to receive religious training, nineteenth-century Americans assumed, in general, that institutions could readily do the jobs set out for them. They did not question the idea of institutions, only the techniques or methods employed within them.

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1. On nineteenth-century institutions, see especially David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston, 1972); and Carroll Smith Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise of the American City: The New York City Mission Movement, 1812-1870* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1971). One study which offers the Sunday school as an example of centralization and institutionalization is Robert H. Canary, "The Sunday School as Popular Culture," *Midcontinent American Studies Journal*, IX (Fall, 1968), 5-13.

2. The most recent history of American Sunday schools is Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, *The Big Little School: Sunday Child of American Protestantism* (New York, 1971); the only complete history is Edwin W. Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement, 1790-1917, and the American Sunday-School Union, 1817-1917* (Philadelphia, 1917). The statistics are derived from American Sunday School Union, *Eighth Annual Report* (Philadelphia, 1832), 43-55.

3. On the Second Great Awakening as a catalyst for action, see Lois W. Banner, "The Protestant Crusade: Religious Missions, Benevolence, and Reform in the United States, 1790-1840" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1970). Examples of Sunday school foundings which grew out of the Awakening are numerous, but see, for example, First Presbyterian Church, Utica, *Semi-Centennial of the Sunday School* (Utica, N.Y., 1866), 173-175. On women's activities, see Anne M. Boylan, "Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Women in Sunday Schools," *Feminist Studies*, 4 (1978), 63-82.

4. Examples of these beliefs can be found in New-York Sunday-School Union Society, *Fourth Annual Report* (New York, 1820), 29; and Kensington Sunday School Association Minutes, "Constitution," 1817, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. See also, Clifton Hartwell Brewer, *Early Episcopal Sunday Schools (1814-1865)* (Milwaukee, 1933), 20-21, and J. Leslie Dunstan, *A Light to the City: 150 Years of the City Missionary Society of Boston, 1816-1966* (Boston, 1966), 28-31.

5. Rice, 297; Frank Glenn Lankard, *A History of the American Sunday School Curriculum* (New York, 1927), 134; Albert Matthews, "Early Sunday Schools in Boston," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, XXI (1919), 273-274; New-York Sunday-School Union Society, "Hints on the Establishment and Regulation of Sunday Schools" (New York, 1817).

6. Raymond Betts, *The Curriculum of Religious Education* (New York and Cincinnati, 1924), 98-121. The quotations are from *Religious Intelligencer*, IX (15 January 1825), 518; and *Sunday School Journal and Advocate of Christian Education*, II (14 March 1832), 42.

7. Throughout this article, I will use the modern term "adolescence" interchangeably with the nineteenth-century term "youth." I should point out, however, that the term adolescence itself was not coined until the 1870s and thus not used by Sunday school workers in the period discussed here. This issue is treated in Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York, 1977), especially chapter 1. See also, John Demos and Virginia Demos, "Adolescence in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, XXXI (1969), 632-638; and Bernard Wishy, *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (Philadelphia, 1968).

8. An excellent guide to these theories is Peter G. Slater, "View of Children and of Child Rearing During the Early National Period: A Study in the New England Intellect" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1970).

9. These quotations are from W. F. Lloyd, *Teacher's Manual: or, Hints to a Teacher on Being Appointed to the Charge of a Sunday School Class* (Philadelphia, 1825), 47-48; Boston Society for the Moral and Religious Instruction of the Poor, *Third Annual Report* (Boston, 1819), 11; Massachusetts Sabbath School Union, *First Annual Report* (Boston, 1826), 5-6;

- Providence Sunday School Teachers' Association Records, 15 April 1833, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence; and "Begin Early," *Youth's Companion*, I (May 1833), 20.
10. See, for example, Lloyd, chapters IX and X; Frederick A. Packard, *The Teacher Taught: an Humble Attempt to Make the Path of the Sunday School Teacher Straight and Plain* (Philadelphia, 1839), 73-79, 92-116; and John Todd, *The Sabbath School Teacher* (Northampton, 1837), 164-165.
11. See Sidney Earl Mead, *Nathaniel William Taylor: A Connecticut Liberal* (New York, 1943), 171-199; and George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven, 1970), 46-52. For a fuller discussion of the impact of these ideas, see my forthcoming article, "Sunday Schools and Changing Evangelical Views of Children in the 1820s," *Church History*, September, 1979.
12. Philadelphia Male Adult Association Minutes, 9 October 1817, Presbyterian Historical Society.
13. Quotations are from "The Elder Scholars," *American Sunday School Magazine*, II (February 1825), 38; Lloyd, 82; and Packard, 87. See also, Boston Society for Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Sixth Annual Report* (1822), 10-12, and *Ninth Annual Report* (1825), 5-6.
14. Packard, 90-91; Todd, 68-72; *Sabbath-School Treasury*, V (November 1832), 247-248; Asa Bullard, *Fifty Years with the Sabbath Schools* (Boston, 1876), 193-194.
15. Quotations are from *Religious Intelligencer*, XIII (15 November 1828), 390; and Packard, 87-88, 162-166.
16. Rice, *passim*; Addie Grace Wardle, *History of the Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York and Cincinnati, 1918). For evidence on how the program worked in individual schools, see, for example, New York Seventh Presbyterian Church Sunday School Teachers' Association Minutes, 1830-1837, Presbyterian Historical Society; Baltimore, McKendreean Female Sabbath School Society Minutes, 1817-1843, Lovely Lane Methodist Museum, Baltimore; Providence Sunday School Teachers' Association Records, 1827-1838, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.
17. See Philip Greven, "Youth, Maturity, and Religious Conversion: A Note on the Ages of Converts in Andover, Massachusetts, 1711-1749," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, CVIII (1972), 119-134; Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton, 1969); Kett, chapter 3.
18. Evidence on how the system actually worked is sketchy and impressionistic. There does seem to have been a gradual increase in the proportion of teachers who had once been students in Sunday school, but it is not clear whether they attended for years or only for a few weeks. In 1832, the American Sunday School Union made an effort to collect systematic data, sending out 2500 seven-page questionnaires to Sunday school superintendents. Only 138 were returned. These are deposited in the Presbyterian Historical Society archives and reveal a general pattern of inability to maintain a full program. For a composite report on this survey, see *Sunday School Journal and Advocate of Christian Education*, II (10 October 1832), 162-163.
19. See Margaret W. Masson, "The Typology of the Female as a Model for the Regenerate: Puritan Preaching, 1690-1730," *Signs*, 2 (1976), 304-315; Lonna Myers Malmshemer, "New England Funeral Sermons and Changing Attitudes Toward Women, 1672-1792" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1973), especially chapter 6; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1977).
20. Quotations are from New York Willett Street Methodist Episcopal Church Sunday School Society Minutes, 25 April 1859, New York Public Library; Basil Manly, Jr., "A Sunday School in Every Baptist Church," *The Baptist Preacher* (New series) (July 1852), 127; "Account of the Death of Franklin Bryant Howard, A Scholar of Grace Church Sunday School" (Boston, 1840). See also, Northern Liberties Central Presbyterian Church Sunday School Association Minutes, 5 July 1842, Presbyterian Historical Society; and Boston Sunday School Teachers' Convention, North Baptist Association, *Minutes* (Boston, 1854), 15-17.
21. James W. Alexander, *The American Sunday School and its Adjuncts* (Philadelphia, 1856), 18-25; American Sunday School Union, *Twentieth Annual Report* (1845), 29-31.
22. Horace Bushnell, *Views of Christian Nurture*, 2nd ed. (Hartford, 1847), 195.
23. Rev. Hutton sermon, American Sunday School Union, *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report* (1851), 8; Reuben Jeffery, "Duty of Baptist Churches to the Children," Second National Baptist Sunday School Convention, *Proceedings* (Philadelphia, 1873), 87; Horace Bushnell, "God's Thoughts Fit Bread for Children," Sermon Preached before the Connecticut Sunday School Teachers' Convention (Boston, 1869), 24-25.
24. Rev. Thomas Robinson, "Religious Life in Childhood," *Presbyterian at Work*, I (1873), 1; Henry Ward Beecher, "Child Christians," *Sunday School Times*, XII (8 October 1870), 644. On adolescence, see O. P. Eaches, "The Perilous Period," *Sunday School Times*, XII (8 January 1870), 27.