
A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE IX.

MODERN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION.

BY PROFESSOR JOHN WRIGHT BUCKHAM, D. D.

It would be a great discredit to theological education, if, with all other departments of education undergoing revision and reconstruction, it alone were stationary and inflexible. Equally discreditable would it be, if, panic-stricken or infatuated by the clamor for change, our theological seminaries should respond too hastily or indiscriminately to every new interest or demand.

To furnish the best possible education for the type of ministry needed to-day, and to-morrow, is a task of serious magnitude. And it is not only a task, but a problem,—a problem immensely complicated by the fact that the requirements made of the modern minister are so large and so varied. To become all things to all men means much more to-day than it did in the day of the apostle. But if the requirements made of the ministry to-day are varied, equally varied are the avenues of approach to men afforded by all modern disciplines and knowledges. No form of training, no field of knowledge, is useless to a minister of the gospel. More than any other servant of humanity, he can put to fruitful usury any and all wisdom that he can acquire. He is the modern Midas, at whose touch everything turns to gold. All that he learns, all that he experiences, is turned to the riches of his ministry, for nothing human is alien to him. It might be much nearer the true significance of those much-abused words of St. Paul to the Corinthians than that usually attached to them, if they

were interpreted as meaning, 'I determined to know nothing among you, save in relation to Jesus Christ and him crucified.' In this sense the more the minister of the gospel learns, the more he understands, not only of men, but of Christ.

It is this very fact of the extreme value to the ministry of all forms of training and knowledge which broaden contact with truth and with life that constitutes one of the chief difficulties in determining the content of a theological education. There is an embarrassment of riches. The training of ministers is not the training of mere specialists. The ministry cannot be strictly defined in the terms of a specialty. If you say the minister is to be a specialist in preaching, at once you are compelled to admit that for the material of his preaching he is no specialist, but must draw upon the universe. His work is a special work, and for it he must have a special training; but it is a work and a training that reach out toward everything human as well as divine.

To make the wisest possible selection from among the varied subjects and disciplines helpful to a minister, and then to unify and coördinate the chosen subjects to a single end, is a task requiring wise insight and patient experiment. It involves exclusion as well as inclusion. In attempting it, we must rely upon the experience of the past, as well as upon the rationale of the task itself. For the framework of a theological education, these four fundamental subjects are essential: 1. The New Testament; 2. Theology; 3. Church History; 4. Applied Christianity (including Homiletics and Pastoral Work).

Christianity centers in Jesus Christ. The ministry is a ministry of the gospel of Christ. The first requisite, therefore, as a preparation for the ministry, is to understand the life and teaching of Christ as contained in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels; the second requisite is to study

Christianity as it expresses itself in doctrines; the third, to follow Christianity as it unfolds itself in history; and the fourth, to acquire the means by which to make Christianity practically effective through the gospel ministry.

About these four structural studies all the others may be grouped, both elective and required.

1. What subjects are needed to elucidate and interpret the New Testament? Manifestly there must first be acquired a knowledge of the text in the original. New Testament Greek is by almost universal consent a legitimate requirement for graduation from a theological seminary. It opens an understanding of the New Testament which cannot possibly be had from a translation. There should be, therefore, the reading of a portion of the New Testament in the original, together with sufficient instruction in exegesis to give the student a thorough knowledge of the exegetical method and purpose. Beyond that it is far more advantageous for him to gain a comprehensive outline of the New Testament teaching from the English, with the Greek as an auxiliary. In other words, the desideratum is a course in New Testament interpretation, including New Testament introduction, together with what has gone by the inadequate term "biblical theology of the New Testament," i.e., a formulation of the teachings of the several authors and writings.

Ancillary to New Testament study, as an essential and invaluable adjunct to it, but not demanding the same prominence and the same proportionate attention, the Old Testament finds its proper place and function. In the light of the Christocentric theology, it is already becoming a source of wonderment that the Old Testament has so long kept its place of practical parity with the New Testament, not only in the life of the church, but in theological education. Only the concen-

tration of interest upon the critical problems involved has enabled the Old Testament to hold its traditional position in modern theological education. As soon as these problems have been approximately settled, the Old Testament will fall into its place of rightful subordination to the New. None are so frank and explicit in acknowledging this as our ablest Old Testament scholars themselves,—men like Professor George Moore and the late President Harper. It is they who have led the way in suggesting that Hebrew, valuable as it is to the Bible student, should be made an elective, not a required study. In spite, however, of this subordination of the Old Testament to the New (through which it gains its meaning and its value, as well as its standards of interpretation), it will always demand, and deserve, a large place in the curriculum of the seminary, as well as in the usage of the church,—but as an aid and adjunct to the New, rather than itself a hemisphere of revelation.

2. The subjects which group themselves about theology are theism, ethics, philosophy of religion, and psychology.

Christian theology needs to be relieved, once and for all, from all such limiting and restraining encumbrances as "systematic," "dogmatic," "polemic," and "doctrinal"; so that, laying aside every weight, it may run with patience the race that is set before it. In this race, strenuous as well as inspiring, Jesus Christ should be both starting-point and goal. Christian theology should be no longer—to change our figure for one more adequate—a scramble after the divine truth, starting from natural theology and ending with eschatology, thus going back to the beggarly elements and forms respecting the process of its own genesis and development,—a process in which Christ is but a factor, a stage, a new point of departure. Rather should theology be the radiation of truth

from Christ as a center. Such a theology will be systematic only so far as system contributes to truth, no farther. It will be dogmatic only in the sense that truth is convinced as well as convincing. It will be apologetic only because religious truth needs constant adaptation to the changing thought and life of the age.

Theology thus Christologized—may we say Christianized?—describes and fills its own autonomous, well-defined sphere. About it revolve the supplementary subjects which have already been enumerated. Of these, theism is the nearest. And yet theism is in reality a distinct science, for it attempts to postulate the existence of God apart from the Christian viewpoint, or with Christianity only as aid and abettor, not as leading witness. The subservience of theology to theism is now about at an end. Whatever the defects of Ritschlianism, and they are serious, Ritschl has brought it about that henceforth natural theology, including theism, can no longer be regarded as the main entrance and central hallway of Christian theology, but rather as itself a contiguous structure, which Christian theology seeks to appropriate to its own uses and inform with its own life.

Ethics and psychology sustain a similar relation to theology with theism, and are but a trifle more remote. They, too, offer to theology, material, constructed as well as constructive, which cannot be wisely overlooked. Both should have ample recognition in a thorough course of theological study, unless the student has already given them especial attention in his college course. Even then he had best pursue them further.

3. Associated with church history are two closely related subjects, both of them demanding increasing recognition,—comparative religion, and missions. It might be urged that the former has a more intimate relationship to theology than

to church history. Theoretically regarded, this is true, but it is from the historic rather than the philosophic view-point that the great world religions can best be approached. It is as historic faiths that Christianity meets them. And it is most significant that, as Christianity comes more fully and firmly to the consciousness of her own universal nature and commission, the deeper becomes her insight, her sympathy, her sense of kinship with the elements of eternal truth in the ancient religions. And this is true because the elements of truth which she finds in other faiths are those which she is conscious of in herself glorified with a light that no other religion possesses or can possess,—that of the Eternal Son of God.

4. As regards the department of applied Christianity,—and a moment's reflection will show how much fitter a term this is than "practical theology,"—the two forms of it which remain foremost in the present, as in the past, are preaching and pastoral work. To the aid of applied Christianity there rush in a multitude of assisting studies, so many, as has already been pointed out, that it is difficult to select among them. But these at least may not be denied a place: English literature, pedagogy, sociology, church administration, and church music. Of the value to the ministry of a thorough knowledge of English literature, President Harper spoke none too strongly, saying, "A most fertile field for occupation in the training of the ministerial student is that of English literature. It may fairly be questioned whether a mastery, so far as possible, of this field may not be reckoned as second in importance only to the mastery of the Scriptures." [1]

[1] Art. "The Theological Curriculum, American Journal of Theology, January, 1899.

As respects pedagogy, a mere allusion to the overwhelming need of reconstruction in the teaching of the Sunday-school and the growing importance of the pastor's children's class is sufficient to demand the inclusion of this science. The ethical nature of the movements now agitating society calls for acquaintance, also,—the wider the better,—with sociology. Equally valuable, in a more practical way, is it for the minister-to-be to acquire in advance some knowledge of the science of church administration.

A brief backward glance over this outline will reveal the fact that the number of subjects included, as compared with the old curriculum, is so large as to leave most of our seminary faculties inadequate to cope with the new demands. The widening of the range of theological education has long since made it evident that there must be either an affiliation of the seminary with a university, or an enlargement of the corps of instructors so as to cover the needed subjects. Which of these alternatives is preferable is still an open question. Without much doubt, affiliation with a university is best. Yet there are compensations to the advantage of the isolated seminary. The ideal of the true teacher—one who possesses that rare combination of talent, character, and acquirement that calls out all that is best and highest in the pupil—this ideal is in danger of being lost out of our higher educational institutions. The seminary must cherish this ideal, or its work will result in absolute failure. With all due recognition of the need of extended and expert instruction in the preparation for the ministry, the church might, with far more confidence, intrust a score of candidates for the ministry to one really great teacher, with power to arouse the mind of the pupil to its highest exercise, to create a great absorbing love of truth and

of men, and let him teach the whole range of subjects needed, than to provide the finest possible equipment and the best possible corps of expert instructors without a single true teacher among them. Personality is, after all, the ultimate factor in teaching. Yet it is best to have the student of theology breathe the air of university freedom, and if it lacks in reverence and in moral enthusiasm it belongs to the seminary to furnish these.

But to return to the question of courses. The problem is not one simply of the choice of subjects, but of their order and arrangement. One of the most serious difficulties of the theological course is that of so correlating the subjects, both prescribed and elective, in the right order of succession, that they will form a harmonious unity. Under the old arrangement it often came about that the student of dogmatics came upon the doctrine of Justification by Faith before he had reached the Epistle to the Romans in his exegesis (or his biblical theology), and the doctrine of the Trinity before studying the Nicene period in his church history. Such mal-adjustments are unfortunate, to say the least. Only practical experiment, arrangement, and rearrangement can remedy these mal-adjustments, and perfect the details of a well-ordered course. The following is constructed in accordance with the scheme that obtains in most seminaries, but with certain modifications and additions to make it conform to the plan already outlined.

I. JUNIOR YEAR: 1. New Testament Literature, including (*a*) Greek New Testament, (*b*) Exegesis, (*c*) Life of Christ, (*d*) New Testament Interpretation (or what is unfittingly termed Biblical Theology of the New Testament); 2. Old Testament Interpretation (using English versions);

3. History of Religion. Electives: Hebrew, Philosophy of Religion, Psychology.

II. MIDDLE YEAR: Theology, Church History, Missions, Applied Christianity (Preaching). Electives: Ethics, Pedagogy, English Literature.

III. SENIOR YEAR: Applied Christianity (Preaching, Conduct of Worship, and Pastoral Work), Church History, Theology. Electives: Philosophy, Sociology, Church Administration.

By this arrangement a basis both for theology and church history is laid in the first year, while the other three main subjects are begun in the second year and run through the third. It is better not to defer any one of these subjects to the third year, nor to close it at the end of the second, but rather to let each of these studies pour its uninterrupted stream of inspiration into the opening years of the ministry.

The electives are grouped about the subjects with which they are most nearly associated; but, as this association is of a general rather than a particular kind, the order suggested does not require a close adherence. Besides the electives named, there should be elective courses in collateral branches of each of the main courses, e.g., books of the Bible, individual doctrines in theology, special periods in church history, and particular forms of applied Christianity.

The objection may be raised, that the proportion of elective work provided for in this course is not sufficiently large. President Harper would have the first year, only, given to prescribed courses covering in outline Old Testament, New Testament, systematic theology, and church history, and then permit each student to select and pursue for the remainder of the seminary course a line of study looking toward the special work in which he expects to engage. The objections

to this plan are: (1) that it would make the first year crowded and confused, and (2) that it would give the work of the remaining years altogether too limited a range to serve as preparation for a vocation so wide in its interest and demands as the ministry. Would it not be better to allow such concentration as is possible within the limits of a partially prescribed course for the pursuit of a specialty throughout the three years, and then to provide a fourth year for further specializing?

As to methods of seminary instruction, it may be safely affirmed that the old-time method, which has been described as that of boring a hole in the head of the student and pouring in a system of theology, certain rules for the construction of a sermon, and as much Greek and Hebrew as possible, has been almost entirely abandoned. The lecture, by virtue of its own merit, will always hold an important place in the classroom, but it has permanently lost the dominating, one might almost say the domineering, character which it once had. The vigorous, though but partially informed, onslaught of Presidents Hyde and Slocum, upon the old methods of seminary instruction, at the International Council of Congregational Churches, in 1899, did much to accelerate this reform, though it did not by any means inaugurate it. Nor is the text-book to be despised as an instrument of instruction. But lecture and text-book imperatively need the unshackling and vitalizing of the seminar method, the stimulus of personal investigation and free discussion to make the dry bones live. How far these methods should be supplemented by outside work, or what President Harper calls the "clinical method," is still an unsettled question. Practice for the mere sake of practice, either in preaching or in social or parish work, except under the close supervision of an instructor, is apt to be

both ineffectual and superficial. A student in the seminary ought to hear all the good preaching possible, rather than to attempt it himself. Any considerable amount of preaching during his seminary course will inevitably redound to the disadvantage of his regular work. The same is true of parish work. When a man finds himself in his own field of work,—and it ought, as a rule, to be a limited one for the years of apprenticeship,—he will find that he needs all the theoretical resources he has accumulated in his preparatory work to meet the demands of a work that is constant and taxing. He will learn then by doing,—doing that has the reality and responsibility which constitute its chief value as discipline. Woe to him, then, if he has no ideals to work out, no theories to try, no resources to fall back upon,—the garnering of a thorough and undissipated theological training.

In examining the catalogues of the leading theological institutions of the country, with reference to departures from the old *régime,* one is struck by two facts:—

The first of these is the extent to which the newer subjects and methods have been added to the curriculum, though often in a loose and unassimilated manner and without dropping any of the older subjects to make room for them. Sociology, for instance, is offered by almost all of the leading seminaries; and yet only a very few seminaries have had the courage to remove Hebrew from the list of prescribed studies to that of electives, in spite of the increasing recognition of the subordinate place of the Old Testament as related to the New, and of the difficulty of acquiring a new language so late in life. If room is to be made for the newer and more humanistic studies, the curriculum must be shorn and simplified of some of the less essential of the older studies. Why burden our courses and frighten away candidates for the

ministry by sending out catalogues bristling with such scholastic terminology as Propædeutics, Hermeneutics, Dogmatics, Systematics, Polemics, and Halieutics? Scholasticism must be resolutely banished from our seminaries if they are to attract the young men of to-day.

The other fact which impresses one in comparing the seminary curricula is the emergence of specialties in connection with several seminaries. Thus Hartford Seminary offers especial attractions in church music, Union Seminary and Harvard Divinity School in ethics and comparative religion. The Divinity School of Chicago University has both a department and a professorship of sociology, giving this subject an especial prominence. Yale has a professor of the theory and practice of missions. Oberlin has a professor of the harmony of science and revelation, worthy of imitation. Chicago Seminary has a Swedish and a German institute, and Oberlin a Slavic department. Chicago University, Union, Hartford, and other seminaries have established departments for lay women. It is very evident, from a comparison of the courses announced by prominent seminaries of different denominations, that the whole subject of theological education is in a fluid and transitional state. Still there are certain developments and modifications in the direction of ethical, humanistic, and practical interests which are so general and decisive as to constitute what may be justly called a new movement in theological training,—a movement which promises much for the ministry of the future.

It would be short-sighted not to recognize the dangers that attend this movement. If it should operate to the lessening of spiritual cultivation and concentration, it would bring disaster and confusion of face to all concerned. It were better that a student for the ministry had never heard that there is

such a study as sociology or comparative religion than that he should never have heard that there is such a thing as the Holy Ghost. But the two knowledges are consonant and harmonious. All knowledges are spiritual to the man who is spiritual. And there is no schism between faith and science, scholarship and spirituality, when we get near enough to the Source of both.