
A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

Problems of Today.

VI. Ministerial Training.

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The problem here is, in general, that of all education, namely, how to combine, in due proportion, intellectual discipline with technical training, how to train men to think accurately and to give them as broad a culture as possible, on the one hand, and, on the other, how to equip them for the special tasks of their future occupation. But the problem is accentuated, in regard to training for the Christian ministry, by several factors. The Christian ministry requires for its proper discharge a conscious *vocation*, the call of which may often not come until school age is past, and other occupations have been entered. Consequently, a grown man may often have to give an apparently disproportionate time to schoolboy work, such as learning Greek, and this, too, at a time when the man is eager to deal directly with the subject-matter of his future life-work, or more probably to get through his training for it as soon as possible. Further, an efficient ministry depends on general qualities of *character and personality* to a more marked degree than any other profession. The private character of a lawyer or a doctor does not affect his professional work, at least in the eyes of the public, to anything like the same degree as the personal conduct of a minister. Preaching depends on conviction, and conviction is the expression of character. If the word of a minister's lips is contradicted by his life, that word is not simply left unconfirmed; it is blasphemed. The training and testing of a minister ought, therefore, to be much more rigorous in this respect; in fact, certain faults of character ought definitely to disqualify any one from admission to work in which a man must be 'above suspicion.'

It should, of course, be recognized that both the problem and its practical solution will vary considerably according to the particular religious community in which, and for which, the training is given. The present writer bases what is here said on more than thirty years of responsibility for the training of Baptist or Congregationalist ministers in four colleges. In such a *milieu*, methods are probably more individualistic and the results more varied than they would be within more closely and uniformly organized systems of Church government.

(1) The first aspect of the problem is that of *selection*. The candidate presents testimonials as to character and preaching ability, submits to a written examination as a test of his scholastic powers (unless he has already adequate academic qualifications) and of his general knowledge of the Bible, and is interviewed by a Committee chiefly in order to reach some judgment as to his personality. Here we have, at the very outset, one of our greatest difficulties. We are desiderating half a dozen qualities in the ideal candidate, all in due proportion to each other, and at a time when some, at least, of them have to be taken on trust. The efficient Free Church minister is expected to be a man of blameless character, animated by strong human sympathies, with good social address, a good speaker, a lover of study (to ensure both a successful college course and the continuance of study when in the pastorate), a man of clear religious convictions, and loyal to the particular Church from which he asks for training. This is the ideal; yet how rare a thing it is to find all these qualities equally developed! In practice, those who are experienced in the task of selection know that they must compromise, and strike a balance. Some of these qualities are doubtless more important than others; some of them must be discerned by prophetic intuition rather than by actual evidence; the apparent absence of one or another must be condoned, in the hope that college training or early pastoral experience will add what is wanting. When that hope is not realized people will say in days to come, 'How could any college have accepted Mr. So-and-so?'

(2) In the actual training, the *intellectual discipline* calls for primary notice, not merely because it is the element most subject to control, but chiefly

because the years in college are the unique opportunity for learning how to think and how to read. If these capacities are not acquired then, they probably never will be, whereas the rough-and-tumble of life will usually impart something of the others. Ideally, of course, the acquisition of such elementary and essential mental capacities ought to precede the proper work of a theological college, but, in very many instances, it does not. It would be quite impracticable to make graduation in Arts a condition of entrance on theological study for all candidates in all colleges in the communities already named, whilst the possession of a degree is no certain guarantee that these qualities *have* been acquired. The result is that more or less of Arts work must be incorporated in the curriculum, and the theological work is constantly hampered by the inability of the student to make a brief but comprehensive précis of a chapter, or to write an essay in accurate English, an essay that keeps rigorously to its point. These simple exercises will always be the best tests of attentive reading and clear thinking. If a man cannot do these two things —and how many theological students cannot !— he has not learned to read and to think, and he will never be reliable in what he says. A man who cannot make a clear and impartial analysis of what he reads will always distort evidence. Essays are apt to suffer from the influence of the sermons as much as the sermons suffer from that of the classroom essay—a difficulty again peculiar to our special problem. The only adequate corrective is that which comes from historical studies based on actual documents, and from philosophical studies requiring the concentration of abstract thought. Most of the subjects in a theological curriculum contribute to one or the other group, that is, they are ultimately either historical or philosophical.

When additions to the normal curriculum are suggested, it is often forgotten that these are not likely to be as fitted for mental training as those which have proved their worth by long experience. If we gain more direct contact with the surrounding world by, for example, the study of sociology, we may find that we have displaced studies less exciting to the student, but better suited to enable him to read sociology for himself, in the after years. (As a matter of fact, this subject is best handled through a Settlement course.) Language work at Greek and Hebrew is not only necessary in order to open the doors to the proper understanding and exegesis of the two Testaments, but also because we rarely find accuracy in the use of the English language by those who have not given close study to some other language. No theological training ought to be considered adequate which does not include Hebrew and Greek.

(3) In regard to the other side of our problem—that of *technical training*, we ought to recognize the fact that nothing taught in the classroom can be other than theory. The practical training of men for a Free Church ministry can be carried out only very partially in the college period. There is need for more general recognition of the importance of the first years in the ministry. Personally, I should like to see a year of practical work as assistant in a large church under a suitable senior minister made compulsory as a sequel to the college course. This would correspond to the clinical work in the training of a doctor. The alternative method of allowing students to hold pastorates whilst in training would now be generally recognized as impracticable. On the other hand, the experience of student-pastorates, in which a strictly limited time is given to such work (without detriment to college studies) is certainly profitable. As for the theoretical instruction which can be given in the classroom, the sermon class is distinctly valuable, provided its limitations are recognized. Pastoral problems seem to me to be dealt with best by occasional talks rather than in a formal course; in this connexion, visits and addresses by men in the active pastorate are important aids. But it is impossible to systematize the future work of a Baptist or Congregationalist minister to the extent perhaps possible in other religious communities. Useful hints can, of course, be given, and useful knowledge about certain aspects of the minister's work, such as the legal requirements at marriages and burials, together with instruction in the proper administration of the Sacraments. But a great deal must necessarily be left to the personal initiative of the minister, and any attempt to prescribe rules for all possible contingencies is not only impracticable, but contrary to the *ethos* of the Free Church ministry.

(4) In the fourth place, something must be said about the all-important question of *religious life*. If this is not maintained and developed in the college years, all other training loses its chief value. We have a right to expect that students entering college have reached some degree of conviction and some development of personal devotion. The maintenance and improvement of these is a delicate matter, for it is as dangerous to do too much as to do too little. Regular devotional exercises of some kind are obviously important, and in a residential college these would naturally take the form of morning and evening prayers. I have found a

weekly communion service of great value as the religious focus of college life. It also provides the opportunity for devotional addresses, which can cover a wide field. I think that such services should be taken by the Principal of the college rather than by students in rotation. It is very difficult to maintain the devotional spirit in a semi-critical atmosphere, and such an atmosphere is unavoidable when a student speaks in presence of his tutors. Most students are ready enough to organize their own devotional meetings. Our colleges are generally affiliated in some way to universities, and this means that there will be many inter-collegiate religious organizations in which students are likely to take part, according to their particular interests. In fact, the risk here is that there shall be too many outside religious interests rather than too few. I remember receiving from somewhere in America an appalling list of the practical activities of the students in a theological college—so many miles travelled, so many thousand gospel meetings, so many hundred conversions, and so on. At the bottom of the list was the rather pathetic note: 'These students need your prayers.'

(5) Our problem is focused most sharply in the actual teaching of *theology*. 'Systematic' theology in the older sense has been greatly modified by the substitution of 'Biblical' and 'Historical' theology, but sometimes with the unfortunate result that the 'constructive' part of the subject is reduced to a minimum. It is natural that a teacher who has worked carefully through the history of dogma with his classes should shrink from imposing his own *obiter dicta* as the crowning pinnacle of this stately edifice. I am inclined to think that the teacher's own views are best given informally, for example, in a 'seminar'. There are many possible forms of this, and the capacity of the particular grade of students must dictate the choice. But a good method, for the benefit of the average student, is to take some recent theological book and ask for an analysis of it, chapter by chapter, which then forms the basis of a discussion, guided and summed up by the tutor in charge of the group. This gives ample opportunity for bringing the great theological issues into relation with the preached Word, and for their correlation with the living issues of the day. It is especially valuable for its elasticity, since it enables the college to supplement the university at any point at which there seems to be a lacuna. It also trains men in the shaping and expression of the theological views to which they are tending, whilst encouraging individual thought. Once more, let it be emphasized for theological teaching, as for the practical work of a Free Church minister, that it is futile to dictate a number of formulæ. If a man has been taught to think clearly and to read attentively, and to follow up his convictions until they are proved or disproved, the chief contribution to his future usefulness in the ministry has been made. That is most of all true to-day when the art of propaganda has been so developed. The Christian minister ought to penetrate the disguise of current 'slogans' in every department to the degree of truth or falsehood behind them. To teach his congregation to do that, chiefly by positive insistence on the great Christian verities by which they must all be tested, is a far greater contribution to the common welfare than adherence to any political party or any theological tenet.

We all agree that the training of ministers must not be too exclusively academic; the difference of judgment is as to the best methods of correlating intellectual discipline and book-knowledge with the actual life of men to-day. Through the changes in the modern world the issues are becoming simpler and clearer for those who really think. One of them is that peril emphasized by Professor G. M. Trevelyan at the close of his *History of England*: 'In the earlier scene, man's impotence to contend with Nature made his life brutish and brief. To-day his very command over Nature, so admirably and marvellously won, has become his greatest peril.' Alongside of that we may put the remark made by the inventor of the Diesel engine a few days before his death, and a year before the beginning of the Great War. He stood with his son looking at one of his 800 h.p. motors, and remarked, 'It is a fine thing to shape a thing like that in the manner of an artist. But whether the whole affair has a purpose, whether men are made happier by it—that I am no longer able to decide.' The chief aim in all ministerial training is surely to enable men to recognize and express the divine purpose in the creation of the world, the purpose that emerges in the gospel. We need more gospel preaching to-day, but it must be informed gospel preaching, with a sufficient intellectual background to make its application intelligent and convincing to the mind as well as to the heart. There is not enough *thought* in much of present-day preaching, the thought that is very simple in utterance because it is very profound in preparation. That is one justification for the intellectual emphasis in ministerial training, which this article defends.

As I read over what has here been written, I

am conscious of having said all I set out to say, yet of having left the chief thing unsaid. This is not the demand for a better quality in the men who come for training. Every generation is apt to think of a golden age lying in the past—like the old convict at Dartmoor, who, after the prisoners' revolt, was pressed by a visiting commissioner to give the reason for it. 'Well, sir,' he said, 'the fact is we're not getting the same class of men as we used to do.' Nor is the lacuna in this article the need for any drastic change in the curriculum, whatever minor alterations may be desirable or practicable. I am thinking rather of the spirit in which the curriculum is administered, which means the impact of the personality of the teacher on the taught. This is the soul of teaching, and all the rest is body. The ultimate value of all that is learnt will lie in the learner's contacts with reality. This is made through the teacher's whole personality and the convictions which inspire it. These lie both within and beyond all his professional equipment, all his ecclesiastical loyalties, all his theological beliefs. In the last resort, these are the incarnation, the necessary accompaniment and expression, of his outlook on life and death, time and eternity, God and man. Sometimes he ought to get above them all, even the most cherished, and, like Rossetti's 'Father Hilary', climb to the tower of his church and look out on a wider horizon. He ought again and again to test himself and his work by wider and higher standards than that work itself supplies. His vocation, to a peculiar degree, is to be a 'live point' in the contact of the eternal beyond the temporal with the eternal in the temporal. It might be said that this is the task of every Christian minister, and indeed of every Christian. So it is; but the unique opportunities of ministerial training, the personal contact with young men at their most impressionable period, even the exaggerated estimate they often form of his ability in their ignorance of higher standards—all these lay a special obligation on the teacher in a college for ministerial training. It is only too easy for him to settle down to the routine of a safe job, or, on the other hand, to use his position as the basis for all sorts of public activities which may leave his primary task but half done. As to private study or public work, he must strike the balance for himself, and there will necessarily be wide differences of judgment, directed by differences of capacity and opportunity. But he should always remember that the chief contribution he makes to the training of his students, and that which they will remember when most other things are forgotten, is what he is as a man. *There* is the ultimate problem of ministerial training.

'A fire of coals with fish laid thereon, and bread.'

By the Reverend Eric F. F. Bishop, Newman School of Missions, Thabor, Jerusalem.

The romance of the Lake of Galilee never grows spiritless, and each visit, when there is time to think and watch and listen, brings out a touch of Jesus and the Gospels. We had two quiet days down by the lake just after Christmas, and on the only fine afternoon were privileged again to watch some fishermen working their 'jurf,'[1] sweeping the sea for fish. They had toiled—some twenty men in all—though not through the night, yet long enough for disappointment in these hungry days with numerous little mouths to fill. For fishing in the Lake of Galilee as a means of livelihood is becoming harder and more precarious every day. It seems that the strictures of the good Dr. Christie are justified. The artificial control of the lake level by the electrical concession at the southern end has been a very doubtful blessing to the fisherfolk despite whatever compensation may have come their way. Much less has it been a blessing to their wives, especially in summer time (and Galilee is over 600 feet below the level of the Mediterranean), when water has to be fetched for household purposes over burning rocks. But this is by no means the

[1] The σαγήνη of Mt 13[47].