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PRACTICALITY IN THEOLOGICAL TRAINING IN  
THE UNITED STATES.

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Practicality must mark discussion of this theme, else we shall not practice what we preach or reach the end desired.

An eminent scientist, who is an excellent lay-preacher, too, in his popular addresses usually follows this outline whatever his subject may be: 1. What it is not. 2. What it is. 3. How to get it. 4. What to do with it. "Do we need it?" if added as a middle term would doubtless complete his scheme. With this addition, we borrow and use his plan.

Practicality is, so the dictionaries say, the quality or character of being practical, and "that is practical which pertains to or is governed by actual use and experience, as contrasted with ideals and speculations—the practical is opposed to the theoretical."

With due deference to what the definers say, this statement of the term is not that taken here. The practical is not in opposition but is in addition to what is theoretical, doctrinal alone. The practical is related to the theoretical as is deed to creed, or as the fruit to the root. There is no opposition here.

But what is here is this: An estimate of utility and usefulness in—not of—theological education. Utility and usefulness are not identical terms. "Utility" refers rather to the abstract; "usefulness" to the concrete sense. Without actual usefulness, utility and futility are not very far apart.

This last statement finds sufficient proof, with reference to theological teaching, in these facts stated by Dr. Howard Osgood, of Rochester Theological Seminary. Said he: "More than a few men have taken a whole theo-

logical course and degree, and then gone out of the Seminary less fit to preach than when they entered it." In that case, too, the fault was not in what was taught, but rather in what was not.

In short, "I sing of arms and men" and victorious service as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, able ministers of the new covenant. It is not merely that our seminary students shall be equipped with the weapons of sound doctrines, necessary as are these; but that they shall be also trained in the skilful wielding of the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Has there been, and is there now, a lack of the latter in our seminary training schools? In answer, consider these few, of many such, pertinent facts, in an argument from progressive approach.

All around, and to too considerable an extent outside of, the churches, institutions have sprung up engaging in the churches' work. Of these, we mention particularly the various fraternal and charitable orders, the Y. M. and Y. W. C. A. Of course, on the one hand, these may be regarded as "committees of the church," and on the other hand it is true, "a church is not to be considered merely a soup-house." But just as surely, somewhere between these two extremes there lies the golden mean. Churches, in their ministrations, are not to neglect the widows and orphans or any in bodily or spiritual need. Sociology and theology are, and of a right, ought to be, the very best of friends. Jesus announced, as the credentials of Christianity, "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them." As reported by Matthew and Luke, He added immediately "And blessed is he whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me." Jesus seemed to anticipate the state of affairs today when on every side one may hear strictures passed on His chosen institution for relieving the world's distress. Notwithstanding such Scriptures as these: Matt. 25:34-40; Acts 6:1-6;

Gal. 2:10; I Tim. 5:3-16; Jas. 1:27; 2:15, 16, it is yet far too true, as Dr. E. C. Dargan declares, "It is deplorable that this branch of church work is so neglected today."

Another respect in which the churches when weighed are found wanting today is that of concern in needed reforms. It is not meant to say that churches should participate, as churches, in partisan, "practical" politics. But it is meant that the deep principles underlying and the moral issues involved in movements affecting social weal (or woe) should be faithfully, fearlessly taught. The Master and Head of the church enjoined not only to "preach the Word," but also to "make disciples" unto Him of all men in every land. Alas! that largely the churches have forgotten that they are to do more than merely evangelize. Here is the point of departure of the workingman from the church and here is the real reason why churches are losing their hold on men and other institutions arise. To be sure, increasingly more is doing each year in educational and medical and industrial missions abroad and institutional churches at home; but as a whole it is yet true that Zion is far from awake and putting on all her strength.

One monumental instance alone suffices to convict us on this count—the churches' criminal negligence with reference to the legalized traffic in strong drink. Practically all admit, and yet all practically deny, that the words of both men and God unite in condemning this monstrous sin. It is as freely admitted in ecclesiastical conventions as it is stoutly denied in political conventions, that the saloon or the church must die. And all this by the same members' votes. "A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?" Some modern Jeremiah should lament that among us also practical preaching has waned and to a disastrous degree.

A not less serious consequence of the practical failure of the churches in practical, social concerns is evinced in the spirit and statements of some so-called self-styled "higher" critics of the Word of God. True, their "results" are negative for the most part; but it is held here that they are positively the result of failure on the churches' part. In other words, do-nothing-ism within and among the churches is the mother of the whole brood of isms alive. "If any willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God." However the latter may apply, whole libraries are being filled with pondrous volumes displaying through their polychrome patchwork of emendated guesswork a condescending desire to apologize for Jesus' mistakes. Learned dissertations pour forth their murky streams, and even theological journals sometimes mistake their muddiness for depth. Thus it shall continue as long as our revised rendering leaves out "Thus saith the Lord," and practically inserts in its stead, "Thus thinks scholarship." Disobedience and doubt are religious Siamese twins; slay the former, and the latter will die ere long.

An added demonstration of the impracticability of modern-day preaching and practice in the churches is seen in their relegation of the Greatest Commission to a subordinate place. Yet, this statement is true even in this "modern mission century." As indicated on the set of charts prepared by the Young People's Missionary Movement, accurate statistics show that Americans spend for Foreign Missions \$7,500,000; for chewing gum, \$11,000,000; for tobacco, \$750,000,000; for intoxicating liquors, \$1,243,000,000! As an eminent American said: "So long as these are true, we are not 'a Christian nation' in the best sense of the word, but raw heathen in the worst sense." His statement is accentuated by the figures showing that we have means and men enough with which to obey the Commission this year, if we would. The title of the annual net increase of wealth of the Protestant church members of the United States, over and

above all expenditures, is shown to be \$80,000,000. This sum with the amount now annually contributed is more than sufficient to maintain an evangelizing force in all the heathen world, so that every man might have a fair chance to know the truth as it is in Christ. The 33,000 more missionaries needed to do this work could be easily obtained, if only they would be—from the 330,000 now in American universities, colleges and high schools.

With these figures and facts staring us in the face, consider these significant things: Even with the means at hand, the boards are not able to find men enough to send out. Only this year, the foreign boards sent an application to the Students' Volunteer Movement calling for 1,000 volunteers a year as soon as they would respond. Set that fact over against this one, that all the missionary societies in the United States and Canada had on their fields last year only 4,817 missionaries, and two other facts of great significance emerge: 1. The churches so far have hardly more than played at missions. 2. The reluctant response to the call for an increase of only one-fifth in the total foreign missionaries on the field shows the churches just beginning to awake, to open their eyes on the work. One other item suffices to discover this state—the Young People's Missionary Movement has sought for years, but in vain so far, for several more denominational secretaries for that work. These posts are as yet unfilled simply because the seminaries and churches have not yet produced even this many suitable and available men. Seeing these things are so, and in reference to the end for which preaching exists, may we not rightly conclude that there is something sadly wrong in the teaching of the teachers of the church?

To the writer it is perfectly plain that all the above is so, not wholly but largely, because the seminaries are not teaching as they should do. To too large an extent, it appears we have been tithing the mint and the anise and the cummin of theories about God's Word while leaving undone the weightiest thing of practicing the will

of God—that all should come to repentance and eternal life. Not that we should or would despise the processes of sympathetic criticism or other than prize the results of reverent research in all ways; but that even these means should in no way be exalted to the place of an end in themselves. All this because of the truism that largely “as go the seminaries, so will go the pastors; as go the pastors, so will go the churches; as go the churches, so will go the land even to the uttermost parts.”

Now we are ready to regard our theme from its positive point of view. Looking backward, we have seen results showing that the seminaries have fallen short in practical things. We will now look within and see whether these things are so. With this purpose, the inquiries below were recently sent to all the larger theological schools—seminaries and theological departments—in the United States: 1. What is your present arrangement for teaching the English Bible? 2. Have you a course in personal work in soul-winning, and if so, what is its plan? 3. Do you offer special training in Sunday School work—such as teacher-training, methods, etc? 4. What do you give in the way of specific training in Missions—the principles, forces and fields? 5. How does your institution afford facilities for rescue, or city, mission work? 6. Please give an outline statement of the history, in your school, of the courses and methods above referred to. 7. Is it your purpose to devote more attention, proportionately, to practical, pastoral training, and in what ways would you enlarge such work? 8. In your courses at present, what special attention, if any, is given to the matters of convert-culture and Christian stewardship? 9. Is stress laid upon more aggressive evangelism in your work, and if so to what extent?

As quite all the larger schools addressed responded to the questions above, the answers represent fully and accurately the status of practical theological training in the United States. From them, summarizing their statements, we deduce the following facts:

1. Practically all the theological schools now offer regular courses of study of the English Bible. Most of them have full chairs—that is to say, a professor is so occupied all or most of his time. But it is notable that many of these schools have had such English courses only a few years. In a few cases even yet the Bible is studied almost altogether in the original languages. The tendency, however, is to correct this speedily and to give the English Bible a department of its own. That students can no longer do—what has been done many times under the late regime, namely, take theological degrees without having read the Bible through so much as once—that this can never recur is a “consummation devoutly to be wished.”

2. A sad deficiency is shown in regard to training in personal, soul-winning work. It is sorrowfully safe to say that not five per cent. of our theological schools give any adequate attention to this subject. Many have nothing of this kind, and nearly all only touch the hem of the garment at best. Whatever is taught on this theme is usually relegated to an insignificant place as a sub-topic connected with the work in pastoral theology. And yet some of the schools which answered “no” to this question concluded their reports by saying: “Our work is arranged in due proportion with reference to practical training.” In only a few cases, even where opportunity is afforded, is anything considerable done in rescue mission work.

3. There are brought to light also some very significant facts as to training in Sunday School work or “Christian Pedagogy,” if the term be preferred. The college pedagogy courses seem to suffice for the most part—with the small amount of such training work in pastoral theology. Within the last half-dozen years, however, not a few have arranged courses of about a dozen lectures by Sunday School specialists, generally in an Institute. But only four report full courses, chairs, of Religious Pedagogy, while a fifth seminary (the Southern Baptist) has a chair of S. S. Pedagogy. Here, again, the future is



bright with promise and hope. Several of the larger representative schools have already much work in Sunday School Pedagogy, Child Study and Convert Culture, and several more contemplate founding such chairs in the immediate future. Very wisely some of the presidents say: These subjects have hardly been begun as yet. All teachers should more and more realize that saving the saved is quite as important as seeking out the unsaved.

4. With reference to specific course in missions, the policy of the schools seems to represent somewhat the condition of the world described in Genesis 1:1—it is utterly unsettled as yet. But abundant material is at hand and order is coming out of chaos both in and out of the seminaries. Another “great awakening” is occurring in the churches resulting from, and in, an awakening in the seminaries. Not only in the theological schools but also in the college and churches, mission-study classes are coming to their own and proving their right to a lion’s share of attention and time—thanks particularly to the Student Volunteer Movement and the Young People’s Missionary Movement. But even now we may say mission study is simply in a formative stage. Yet it is gratifying that nearly all the seminaries supply the demand somewhat and report regular courses of varying length on various phases of the work, and almost all have voluntary study classes and occasional lectures at least. Consequently we behold an increasing number of volunteers for the foreign field and a mighty stirring of the hosts at home.

5. These statements suggest another deficiency in our regular courses now. It is perhaps safe to say that the columns supporting Christianity’s triumphal arch are personal evangelism and systematic contribution by those who confess Christ’s name. If this be even nearly true, our curricula are seriously at fault; for only the fewest number provide any considerable teaching in the principles and practice of Christian stewardship. All that

is taught by practically all is "nothing very special," by "general instruction," "very briefly," "in pastoral theology." A few report "clearly and emphatically taught," "by precept and example;" but only a very few indicate that much is done by special lectures or text-books. The assertion is ventured here that not one school in America is giving anything like due attention to this extremely important theme. Yet the present rising tide of mission study and zeal can be properly followed only by a succeeding one in Christian stewardship, and surely the seminaries ought to form the crest-wave.

6. The last, best question of all, as to aggressive evangelism, evoked a hearty response. Nearly all answered decidedly affirmatively as to advancing this end—the end of the preacher's work. As to whether stress is laid on more aggressive evangelism, only one or two schools sent forth an uncertain sound. All others testified strongly that the spirit of evangelism and revival is more and more possessing our schools. Here is, undoubtedly, the most hopeful sign of our times. Given a thorough realization of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and of how great a salvation is provided in Jesus Christ, among our religious leaders, and destructive criticism and general do-nothing-ism will melt away like the snow before the summer's sun. The lamented George McGregor, while studying many books, began to doubt the Book, but could not doubt his sin; and the Bible's response to sin made him believe God's Word. His case represents the rightful experience of the race—led by the men of God, if they be able ministers of the new covenant, good ministers of Jesus Christ.

The conclusion of the whole matter is that there is in nearly all our theological schools an increasingly practical trend, and that this spirit needs special strengthening in the methods suggested above. As the earth's surface gradually arose from mud and mist of seas, so theological teaching is surely rising out of and above the mire of scholastic pedantry. The old colored sexton

observed: "Yaas, suh! De las' pastor ob dis church sho' wuz about de most *confoundest* preacher dat dis church ebber had!" It is more and more clearly observed that the obscure and impracticable in teaching and preaching are not necessarily profound, and heterodoxy is ceasing to be a hall-mark of brilliancy. The best "scholarship" is seen to be sitting at the feet of the Great Teacher, hearing and doing His words.

And all this, happily, without depreciating in the least really "advanced thought" or reverent research in any way, without encouraging the "shorter course" or shallowness at all; but by due and long delayed appreciation of the end above all these means. "*Respice finem*" ought to be our motto evermore. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, . . . honorable, . . . just, . . . pure, . . . lovely, . . . and of good report . . . think on these things."