

Tribute to Robert A. Traina

Teaching is a calling, a gift, a discipline and a ministry. When the Apostle Paul urged the Ephesians to live and work worthy of the particular grace which Christ Jesus had apportioned to them, he identified teachers as colleagues with apostles, prophets and evangelists and saw their common task,

...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of god and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13, NIV).

Robert Traina answered the call of God to teach and accepted the gift of teaching as his lifetime ministry. Consequently, he stands among apostles, prophets and evangelists as a colleague in the common task of preparing "God's people for the works of service." I am only one among multitudes who can witness to the influence of Dr. Traina's teaching, which has not only built the Body of Christ in the unity of faith and knowledge but also nurtured our maturity toward the "whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Although I never took a class from Robert Traina, he is my teacher. As a young seminarian in the early 1950s, I had a thirst to know the Word of God. Survey courses in Bible had given me a "skimming knowledge" of the Word. Critical courses in Bible had given me a "needle knowledge" of the Word. Both were needed and valuable. But then I enrolled for my first course in English Bible, a study of the Book of Judges. *Methodical Bible Study*, by Robert Traina, served as our textbook. The course awakened me to the Word in a way that I shall never forget. After I learned the principles of inductive Bible study and applied them to the study of the Book of Judges, the Spirit of God broke through my study with an insight that was at once creative, inspired and practical. My mind raced and my spirit leaped as never before in a learning situation. For the first time, I knew what the Apostle Paul meant when he described the "unity of faith and knowledge" as an outcome of teaching. Throughout the night, I found myself waking up with the anticipation of sharing a biblical insight with my professor and fellow students. Naively, but honestly, I was convinced that I had discovered a truth in the Word of God that no one had ever seen before. Then and there, inductive Bible study became a lifetime commitment.

Years later, as president of Seattle Pacific University, I learned that Robert Traina and his wife Jane were graduates of the school.

In the search for our most distinguished alumni, their names surfaced as two people whose lives and ministries exemplified the ideals of the Christian university. The circles of their influence were far wider than might be expected. Dr. Traina, as a professor at The Biblical Seminary in New York and then Asbury Theological Seminary, stood at the very center of the movement to bring English Bible into the heart of the seminary curriculum. Although the classical tradition of theological education and the critical tradition of biblical study militated against this more practical intrusion, the values of English Bible were spelled out in the responses of students whose preaching and teaching were measurably enhanced. They did not hesitate to say so. When the time came to nominate the Alumnus of the Year for 1978 at Seattle Pacific University, Robert Traina was named and selected. Together with Jane and the family, we honored him in the University Chapel, the annual homecoming event, an alumni dinner and a community reception. Not without significance, the event stands out as highlight of celebrating the new status of Seattle Pacific as a "University."

When I accepted the presidency of Asbury Theological Seminary in 1982, the Trainas and McKennas were joined together again as colleagues in a new dimension of preparing God's people for works of service. Early on, I remember passing his classroom door and seeing his meticulous and penetrating outline on the ever-present overhead screen. When I asked students about their learning, they invariably mentioned the insights of Dr. Traina's classes for preaching value and spiritual growth. When the opportunity came to establish a new professorial chair in the Seminary, I had the privilege of presiding at the installation of Dr. Traina as the Fred M. and Ada Thompson Professor of Biblical Studies. Most notable for the occasion, Pat Robertson, the television evangelist and presidential candidate, came to give the installment address for Dr. Traina. As one of his students at The Biblical Seminary in New York, Robertson spoke the witness, "Dr. Traina brought the Word of God to life for me."

More recently, we have seen the consecration of Robert Traina to his calling. Periodic bouts of physical illness have sapped his strength. Yet, even if it has meant getting out of bed only for the hours of his classes, he has taught whenever it is humanly possible. As a former dean of the Seminary, his preparation for teaching and his dedication to the classroom are exemplary for our faculty.

Although Dr. Traina managed his own physical suffering, the dreaded cancer that took the life of his wife, Jane, caused him pain that seemed to know no limit. The brightness, bounce and

beauty which Jane exuded so naturally was taken from his life. Only his faith and family have sustained him during the time of grief. Outwardly, he has kept his composure, faithfully carried out his duties, and continued to minister to the others, but inwardly he weeps over his loss even while he cherishes the memories of life with Jane and claims the promise of eternal life. The "Jane Traina Bookstore" at the Seminary is a permanent memorial to her "counter ministry" with students, faculty, administration, book agents and visitors alike.

Retirement is only another chapter in Dr. Traina's life history. His influence at the center of the English Bible movement will continue to spread in ever-widening circles wherever the gospel is preached. At the Seminary, his students who are now professors, Drs. David Thompson and David Bauer, are already rising in professorial, pastoral and scholarly stature to take his place. The revision of his *Methodical Bible Study* will continue to be a widely-used textbook that is timeless. Our Seminary curriculum gives required study in English Bible its rightful place among more classical courses. And, in the future, we envision the full endowment of the Professorial Chair of English Bible.

Dr. Robert Traina, on behalf of the trustees, faculty and students of Asbury Theological Seminary, we thank God for you and celebrate your lasting ministry among us.

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