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The Training of Ministers

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The Training of Ministers.

"Why should Ministers Go to College?" Under this caption the Rev. Carl Hamilton Morgan of Philadelphia wrote an article in the September 17 issue of the *Watchman-Examiner*, a national Baptist weekly. In his introductory remarks he calls attention to the fact that before the Revolutionary War of nine universities found in the United States all but one were established for the express purpose of training men for the Christian ministry, that until very recent times the history of higher education in this country is largely the history of ministerial education, that the Bachelor of Arts degree was in most of the older colleges a theological degree, but that in the course of time the study of theology lost its place in the college program.

I.

The Rev. Mr. Morgan writes on the present situation in the training of ministers and speaks of it as being an unsatisfactory arrangement. He says: "The program of theological training now generally followed by candidates for the ministry in most of the Protestant denominations is four years of training in a college, usually in the liberal arts course, followed by three years of theological training in a denominational seminary. Briefly stated, this story is the story of hundreds of young men who enter college to prepare for the ministry:—

"First, they enter college full of enthusiasm for their chosen calling and find with quite some shock that they are almost alone in their choice of vocation. On all sides are eager young doctors, lawyers, teachers, psychologists, sociologists, business executives, and artists, but the 'theologs' are almost an extinct race.

"Second, these same young men soon learn that, while there is a pre-med, a pre-law, a normal, and a pre-business course of study, there is no specially prepared course for the minister. He must take the traditional 'arts' course, which in the great majority of colleges is in no way thought of as a preparatory course for ministers.

"Third, many colleges by their system of required majors make

it almost impossible for the young ministers to gain even an elemental knowledge of Greek or Hebrew and provide no more than the bare rudiments of English rhetoric and public speaking, and at the same time science courses — valuable without doubt — are emphasized out of all proportion to a minister's needs.

"Fourth and perhaps most dangerous to the young minister is the general attitude toward religion that pervades the average college. It is by no means true that the average college sets out to destroy the student's religion. Even the most agnostic of professors are usually too sportsmanlike to attempt deliberately to destroy a man's faith out of sheer vandalism. The attitude of the average college teacher is one of indifference toward religion rather than one of definite hostility. Other things are regarded as of greater importance; religion is relegated to the limbo of condemned superstitions. Such an atmosphere is hardly conducive to the growth of a strong faith. It is quite common to see a small, but ardent group of pretheological students dwindle until at graduation just one or two graduate with any intention of entering a seminary."

II.

What does Dr. Morgan propose? He writes: "The theological seminaries must ultimately assume the obligation of providing the future ministers with a *complete education*. This is no new concept, but one practised for centuries by the Roman Church, and no one will deny that priests from the Catholic seminaries of this country are prepared for their tasks as they view it. Furthermore, many Protestant seminaries have been playing with the idea in recent years and have established subseminary courses of varying lengths and degrees of completeness. Our attitude toward such experiments must change if we are to produce the race of strong ministers that Christianity so much needs. These courses must no longer be considered as a poor substitute for a four-year college training, but must be made so thorough and so much better suited to the young minister's needs that four years spent in an average college will be considered a poor substitute for this more specialized training. How long should such a course be? . . . I would recommend a course of six years' length above high school. In terms of semester hours such a course would normally consist of one hundred hours of general cultural background material and approximately ninety hours of specialized theological education."

III.

The plan which the writer whom we are quoting proposes would in his estimation have the following definite results in favor of better men and better trained men for the ministry: —

"1. A larger and more select group will enter the ministry. Many of the most promising boys in high school feel a call to the work of

the ministry; and if they could enter immediately upon such a course, there is little likelihood of their dropping by the wayside.

"2. The six-year exposure to the contagious Christian atmosphere of the theological seminary is more likely to produce an ardent ministry than the indifferent climate of the college.

"3. A better and more complete training can be given under such condition than can be given in college. . . .

"4. At least one year of formal training could be eliminated and the student sent out into the world at an earlier age and with less debt.

"5. With a longer training period at its disposal, the seminary will be able to guide its students through a practical internship in Christian service. In the early days of medical training it was generally understood that the young physician would gain his practical experience on his patients during the first five years of his practise. Any medical institution which sent out its graduates to-day with such a philosophy and necessity thrust upon them would be counted guilty of wilful murder. Has the seminary, dealing as it is with the precious souls of men, any more right to send forth men totally inexperienced in the practical application of Christianity to the real needs of the world?"

Finally Dr. Morgan calls attention to a seminary that is following his plan. He says: "The Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary has been carrying on such an experimental course for five years and can show that even with a five-year course — two years of college and three of seminary training — the graduates do just as well scholastically as the graduates of four-year colleges, are usually stronger preachers and better-equipped evangelists."

IV.

It was with great interest and satisfaction that we read Dr. Morgan's pronouncements. For almost a hundred years our own church-body has been doing almost exactly what Dr. Morgan proposes should be done. We have our preparatory schools, offering a four-year high-school course and a two-year college course, with a curriculum especially adapted to prepare our students for the study of theology at the theological seminary. At our preparatory schools we teach the usual high-school and college branches, and in addition to the study of English we teach German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; and, of course, throughout the entire six-year period our students are given instruction in the doctrines of the Christian religion. It is self-evident that under the circumstances we cannot give the same time and attention to *all* the branches of study that are ordinarily taught in high schools and junior colleges. Yet in addition to our heavy language course and our religious instruction our students are

given courses in algebra and geometry, chemistry, biology, and physics, mythology, ancient, medieval, and modern history, American government, modern culture, public speaking. Such studies as logic and psychology, which one might miss in the list just given, are taught at the Seminary. Our experience has been that our students have fared well, also scholastically, when compared with graduates of other colleges.

Dr. Morgan recommends a course of six years' length above the high school. In accordance with a resolution passed by our Synod a fourth year is to be added to our seminary course at St. Louis beginning in 1938, giving us the six-year course above the high school proposed by Dr. Morgan.

We have not only the *specialized* pretheological college curriculum for the training of our ministers, as proposed by Dr. Morgan, but also a specialized high-school curriculum for our ministerial students. Many years our preparatory schools were attended *almost exclusively* by students who had made the ministry their goal, and even to-day this is true as far as the large majority of our students is concerned.

What has been said gives us much food for thought. Of late years some among us have been deploring the fact that our students lack certain credits that the usual college graduate has. In order to make room for such courses in our curriculum, it has been suggested that we, for instance, cut down our Latin, perhaps also our Greek. Now, the point at issue is not whether we should improve our educational system for the training of ministers,—many of us are even now in favor of a four-year college course,—but whether our specialized course as we now have it serves our purpose well. We believe that it does. Getting away from that in order to conform our educational system to the usual high-school and college courses would, we are convinced, be a great mistake. Medical students and law students are required to take a specialized course preparing them for the medical college or the law school. Certainly the same requirement should be made of ministerial students. Also the fact that our specialized course has kept non-ministerial students from attending our institutions may, after all, not be something which ought to be much deplored.

After all has been said and done, we must admit, with due acknowledgment of the blessings given us by God, that our educational system for the training of ministers has given us able pastors and preachers, such as compare very favorably with the preachers of other denominations; also as far as scholarship is concerned, our graduates do not compare unfavorably with the average college graduate. Any improvement, therefore, of our educational system for the training of our ministers must not only be along the lines of general culture, but also distinctly along the lines of specialized training.

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