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Teaching

METHODS OF TEACHING IN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES

BY PROF. P. E. KRETZMANN, Ph.D., D.D.



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METHODS OF TEACHING IN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES.

BY PROF. P. E. KRETZMANN, PH.D., D.D., ST. LOUIS, MO.

In his book on "Theological Education in America" Dr. Robert L. Kelly makes the remark, concerning methods of teaching, that "the Seminaries, along with other types of higher institutions, need thoroughly to inspect their teaching methods." This charge agrees in substance with that made by other educators and investigators, such as Prof. Hefelbower, of Carthage College. The latter says, in his paper, "The Place of Scholarship in Ministerial Training": "The Seminary must prepare to serve its particular and local constituency better than it has been able to do in the past. It must fairly meet the increasing requirements in scholarship and practical training demanded by the times, and must be able to send out men qualified not only to perform the usual tasks, but to cope with extraordinary conditions. This means greater specialization and differentiation in its work, more subjects in its curriculum, more teachers and more intensive training in all departments." A little farther along in the same paper the author says: "How much should we emphasize scholarship in our theological seminaries? The general principles that should determine our answer can

be set forth briefly. Man's highest calling demands of him the best work of which he is capable. It is the preacher's first duty to speak the Word, re-enforced by every human device that will increase its power. If there is any responsibility laid upon man which demands the greatest effort of the intellect, which God gave us to use in His service, it is the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, remembering that the intellectual element is and must ever be subordinate to the spiritual character of the message, which alone gives it absolute worth. If a man enters the ministry with anything less than the best preparation in head and heart of which he in his circumstances is capable, he is guilty of sin. If a church is to render its best service in spreading the Kingdom it must have a ministry with the best possible training that the age affords. This means that our seminaries should be places where our young men preparing for the ministry sit at the feet of Christian scholars who are teachers; anything less is unworthy of our Lord. Piety is indispensable, but it is no adequate substitute for a well-trained mind. If our church would grow and be effective it must have seminaries that are the best possible educational centers for preparing men for the ministry." There are other points made by Prof. Hefelbower which are well worth a most careful consideration, as they all point forward to the need of at least discussing the matter of methods in theological training.

For the sake of brevity, we place an outline of methods now in use in the greater number of our universities and some of our seminaries at the head of the discussion.

Methods of Teaching in Seminaries and Universities:

A. Informational Methods.

I. The Lecture Method.

- (a) The straight lecture method, with tests or examinations during the term or at the end of the course.
- (b) Lecture-recitation method, with recitations at the beginning of every lecture period.

- (c) Outline-talk method supplemented by reference work and special papers.

II. The Textbook Method.

- (a) Single textbook method, or textbook-recitation method, by assignments for the whole class.
- (b) Textbook work, two or more books supplemented by outline-talks and reference material gathered by class.
- (c) Textbook group reports and discussions.

III. The Socialized Method.

- (a) Socialized group work from assigned textbooks.
- (b) Socialized group work without definite textbooks, but from assigned topics, with criticism and discussion by the class.
- (c) Problems and projects in a regular plan, with individual members or groups in charge of the lesson.
- (d) The entire course as a problem, with projects either chosen by students or assigned by instructor, and only general objectives.

IV. The Research Method.

- (a) The seminar method, with formal or informal discussions by the entire class, on basis of material submitted by individuals in more or less formal reports.
- (b) Individual research work along highly specialized lines, with only general progress reported in class (chiefly for advanced degrees).

A. INFORMATIONAL METHODS.

I. THE LECTURE METHOD.

Of the lecture method as used in the theological seminaries of America, Dr. Kelly has the following to say: "The cases in which the lecture method is used with

stimulating effect and with evidence of outside work by students are outnumbered by those exemplifying its abuses both on the part of the teacher and the taught. Nor is this impression drawn from the lecture alone; it is confirmed by the fact that the libraries in seminaries visited were sometimes found locked and unheated, with little to indicate workshop conditions. Some lectures, many in fact, should rather be called sermons. Often they are rhetorical, rambling, hortatory sermons. Too often the prevailing atmosphere is that of the church rather than that of the school. In numerous instances entire periods are spent in reading from old manuscript lectures, line by line, as the students copy verbatim. On the margin of some of these manuscripts have been seen dates reaching back a quarter of a century, indicating the point the professor had reached in his annual journey over this well-traveled course. In other cases, more care has been taken in the preparation and revision of the lectures, but the manifest interest of the lecturer lies in his highly specialized subject rather than in the student; or the lecture may be marred by rapid or monotonous reading with very little "time out" for incidental observations by the lecturer, or by hasty or evasive replies to questions propounded. When the lecturer makes persistent efforts to secure student response, the responses are, sometimes, given timidly and by a limited number of students. The students do not have the habit of free participation.

Some masterly teachers in the use of the textbook method were found guiding the organization of the material in most stimulating fashion. They showed great skill in building up the recitation around concrete situations with fine application of the Socratic method to the textbook material and to general student knowledge and experience."

The lecture method of which Dr. Kelly speaks may be divided into three groups or sections. The first division is that of the straight lecture method. If this system is in use, it usually means that the instructor will use practically all the time of each class period for a formal lec-

ture, sometimes delivered without the use of the scriptum, at other times read very carefully from the manuscript. The work of the students, in that case, consists of copying as much as they can obtain either in long-hand or by some system of short-hand. The instructor checks off on the progress made by the students by means of stated tests or examinations at given intervals during the term or at the end of the term.

Another variety of the lecture method is one which has been termed the lecture-recitation method. On the part of the instructor it does not differ from that just discussed, but a more careful check is exerted with regard to the students by means of regular recitations at the beginning of each lecture period, sometimes supplemented by an informal discussion.

The outline-talk method gives a little more liberty to both the instructor and the students. According to this method the instructor will work out a more or less detailed lesson plan or outline, usually according to the logical progression of the subject, although he may sometimes use the psychological plan. If the plan is worked out with any degree of care, it will enable the instructor to stop at the end of each section, or even each subdivision for questions and discussion. In this way he is enabled to check off on the understanding of the students and to supplement any recitation which he may have at the beginning of each class period. This method is especially effective where much ground must be covered and the students have not yet learned to work independently. It is usually supplemented by reference work assigned to the class and by special papers written by individuals in the class or by groups.

II. THE TEXTBOOK METHOD.

Of the textbook method Dr. Kelly has the following to say: "The abuses of the textbook method are quite as common, relatively, as those of the lecture method. Cases have been observed in which the assignments, as in the

high school, were by pages or chapters in textbooks of elementary character. The recitation sometimes displays lack of mastery of the assignments both by the professor and the students. In one seminary, the textbook consists of a series of questions and answers. The aged professor read both the question and the answer and made elaborate hortatory and homiletical comment. In another instance, the students in succession took the floor and gave expositions of the textbook by sections. In another the teacher, who is the president of a well-known seminary, asked the students during the first half of the period to write, on the first part of the assignment, with the textbook open; and during the second half he gave a rambling and reminiscent talk, with frequent and copious readings from the same textbook. Another professor read from the textbook during the entire hour.

"Superb language recitations have been noted—rapid reading by students of Greek or Hebrew, with or without rendering into English, with a training of the tongue and the ear, as well as the eye and the mind in the use of the language. Usually, however, the professors were doing most of the translating that was being done; and in more than one case the time of the recitation was being taken up largely by preaching by the teacher. In a certain part of the field, it is the general practice for the professor in Greek exegesis to give both the translation and the exegesis. In one instance the students spent the hour in elementary Hebrew in writing out the translation with the free use of the lexicon, while the professor was assisting and correcting. It was a case of supervised study, not a recitation. The dean of one institution occupied the entire hour in translating with homiletic observations the lesson assigned, not calling upon a student during the period. To the visitor he defended his method on the ground that he had long ago abandoned the old recitation method, inasmuch as so much valuable time was lost while the students were floundering around in making translations."

In discussing the textbook method, the following di-

visions may well be observed. There is the plan, according to which a single textbook is made the basis for the entire course. The instructor, as a rule, simply assigns a certain part of the textbook either by chapters or by pages, and then uses a good part of the next lesson period for a recitation on the sections studied by the class. The assignments are invariably given to the entire class, and, in many instances, there is no discussion of the material offered in the textbook, except that the instructor may point out some particular difficulties.

Another form of the textbook method is that which requires two or more textbooks in a given course, those establishing various points of contact and permitting a number of view points. In this case the recitation may be given in just the same manner as in the previous method, but it has been found advantageous to supplement the plan by having actual outline-talks and by having reference material, which has been gathered by the class, submitted either by the class as a whole, in the form of written reports, or by designated individuals in the class in the form of oral reports.

A still further variation of the textbook method is that in which there are as many groups provided for as there are textbooks, and each particular group of students will report on the view point of the author represented by that particular textbook, the subsequent discussion by the whole class serving to bring out the judgment of the individuals pertaining to the material presented.

There is no doubt, as Dr. Kelly says, that both methods are still used successfully by able teachers. These teachers who are found here and there within all types of seminaries, rank as masters of their profession. They possess what we call scholarship, often highly specialized, together with practical wisdom, power of clear analysis, and interesting statement, power to stimulate initiative, sympathetic interest in student attitude and attainment, personality. On the other hand, as Dr. Kelly also states, much of the teaching by the lecture method and by the textbook method, especially in its formal aspect, is dull

and uninspiring. It is frequently puerile and intellectually benumbing. At this point the suggestions given by Parker in his "Methods of Teaching," are well worth heeding. He says: "Textbook study should be supplemented by other required readings and by independent investigations by students upon assigned topics. The recitation period should be used primarily for interpretative and supplementary discussion, although testing should not be neglected. Contribution recitations can be effectively organized on the basis of such supplementary reading and of more elaborate independent investigations of special topics by individual students. In such investigations, students should be trained to pursue standard bibliographical methods. The system of oral reports based upon such investigations should be standardized and routinized so as to include frequent conferences with the instructor, descriptive bibliographies, carefully prepared briefs, and oral reports of varying length adapted to the capacities of individual students."

B. FUNCTIONAL METHODS.

III. THE SOCIALIZED METHOD.

The socialized method, generally speaking, includes all plans of teaching and study which bring the students into relation with actual life problems, either theoretical or practical, and make use of the abilities of the students in groups organized along socialized lines, with the idea of mutual assistance. The socialized method keeps before the eyes of the students at all times definite objectives through engaging in socially valuable experiences, such as will have an actual bearing upon situations to be found in the profession for which they are preparing themselves.

The first and simplest form of socialized work is that of the group working from assigned textbooks, so differing from the third method under II. discussed above, inasmuch as the students in this instance are encouraged

to work together in going over the assignment and to penetrate into the meaning of the author. In this way the interest of all members of the group is stimulated and their various abilities are given the best opportunities for exerting themselves. The method necessitates a very careful preparation on the part of the teacher, and, of course, a thorough acquaintance with the textbooks introduced by him.

An extension of this method is that of socialized group work without definite textbooks, but on the basis of assigned topics, and the group carrying forward a particular section of the work of the entire class and of the entire course. The reports are made before the class, either from manuscripts fully written out, or from fairly complete outlines, and the entire class is invited to take part in the discussion of the topic.

A still further extension of this method is that of working out the course for the entire term or semester in the form of a problem, with as many practical projects as the instructor wishes to have brought out clearly. It is absolutely necessary, in this case, that the entire plan be very definitely bounded in every particular, and that the instructor keep the objectives of the entire course clear, not only in his own mind, but also in the mind of all the members of the class. In this method individual members as well as groups may work on the projects, and it is necessary that the loose threads of the discussion always be taken in hand by the instructor and made to yield a bond which holds the entire course together.

The most difficult and advanced method according to the socialized scheme is that by which the entire course is made a problem, either chosen by the students, or assigned by the instructor. In this case the objectives are so general that they require not only an instructor with specialized knowledge of the entire field, but also students that have been doing advanced work and have a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the fundamentals in the branch which they are pursuing. *Con*

IV. THE RESEARCH METHOD

The research method includes chiefly that functional plan of teaching which is known as the seminar method. In this instance there may be either formal or informal discussions by the entire class, on the basis of the material submitted by individuals in more or less formal reports. This method can not be undertaken except where there has been a very thorough training in logic and in some work beyond the fundamentals of the course.

The highest form of functional method is that which calls for individual research work along highly specialized lines, with only general progress reported in class from time to time, or no reports made except to the instructor or the committee in charge of advanced work. This work is in use in universities and seminaries where candidates are enrolled for advanced degrees.

Of the so-called functional methods, Dr. Kelly has the following to say in his book: "In increasing measure, a small group of institutions is introducing the methods that are usually considered more pedagogical for advanced students—the methods of the seminar, the library, the laboratory and the field—and are thereby assisting in the development of student initiative and resourcefulness. Here the seminar method is in common use among the advanced students. In small groups instructor and student work together at a common task. For other students more elementary methods are used in the purpose of teaching men to use their own minds, to familiarize themselves with the sources of information, and to make effective use of such information when found. The students have projects which give them experience in analysis, synthesis, discrimination, organization, expression."

The caution given by Dr. Parker concerning all conversational methods and one which applies particularly to functional methods as they have now been discussed. He writes: "Conversational methods depend largely on the past experiences of students as the sources of subject matter.

These methods are popularized in the form of Pestalozzian oral instruction and Herbartian development methods in the nineteenth century.

Conversational methods are very likely to be wasteful unless controlled by definite objective points and unless the teacher frequently tells the subject matter instead of waiting to elicit it by questions."

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