

Evangelism and Education

George Allen Turner

Can Higher Education Be Really Evangelistic?

The place of education in an evangelistic church has seldom been clearly defined. Since the days of Robert Raikes and the modern Sunday school movement, education of children and youth has been widely accepted as part of evangelism -- it is really educational evangelism. What is called "higher education" is a different matter. It is not the inculcation of Christian doctrines and virtues, which is the province of catechetical schools, but rather the training in the general arts and sciences of one already committed to the Christian way. It is "higher education" within a pattern of Christian idealism which constitutes our immediate subject of concern. This inquiry focuses in the question of whether Christian higher education can effectively serve the cause of evangelism.

The Catholic Church, during the Middle Ages and at other times, has viewed the free inquiry after truth as dangerous. It has felt it safer to so channel investigation as to insure that it does not call in question the correctness and supremacy of the church militant. In self-defense it has often resorted to the theory of the twofold truth -- that what is true in the natural realm may not be true in the spiritual realm and vice versa. This involves a separation of the categories of faith and knowledge or religion and science. The alternative conviction, and the sound one, is that all truth is a basic unity. Pietism and Methodism have sometimes been inclined to accentuate the difference between the mind and the heart or the intellectual and emotional aspects of religion. It appears in such slogans as "a man's religion should be beneath his collar bone." This implies the basic truth that the Christian religion involves more than doctrine or theory but is really the transformation at the seat of personality, including emotion and volition, as well as cognition, i. e., "the heart." But it ignores the fact that "the head" is more nearly the seat of the soul than is "the heart." In Pietism (including Methodism) this emphasis came about as a protest against Protestant scholasticism which over-emphasized the rational and liturgical in religion to the neglect of the dynamic.

In many instances both individuals and denominations which have placed great stress on acquiring a broad liberal arts education have experienced a loss of evangelistic fervor. So frequently has this been the pattern that some have concluded that one's zeal for the Lord is in inverse proportion to one's educational achievement, and that there is danger in "much learning." A closer look at the

facts justifies the conclusion that it is not the amount of learning that accounts for diminished spiritual fervor and "passion for souls," but rather the wrong kind of education. There is no basic contradiction between learning and evangelistic zeal. Indeed, historically it can be shown that evangelism of the best type has been best sustained by education.

Education Often an Aid to Revivalism

History disproves the assumption that education in itself is hostile to purity of faith and perpetuation of spiritual fervor. It is true that in ancient Israel the prophets were often suspicious of the priests and wise men, regarding them as betrayers of the nation's spiritual heritage. But during the four centuries of twilight between the Old and New Covenants the scribes kept alive the lamp of both learning and devotion. Ezra is the prototype of the scholar-saint who sustained the people of God when the going was hard. During this period the synagogue came into existence and proved to be both unique and unprecedented as an educational factor but equally effective as an evangelistic agency. In the synagogue the instruction of the masses in religion first became practical. The synagogue was, in addition, the center for Jewish evangelistic outreach to the Gentiles. Jesus recognized the evangelistic zeal of the scribes and Pharisees when He said, "ye compass land and sea to make one proselyte." In Judaism, therefore, education proved an aid to evangelism, not a hindrance.

In the Protestant Era the Pietists set an example hard to equal in missionary zeal. The Danish-Halle mission is an outstanding example of this. The University of Halle was the intellectual center of Pietism and also its missionary center. It was from the University of Halle that the first modern missionaries -- fore-runners of a host of missionary volunteers of the modern era -- went forth in 1705. Closely allied with these people were the Moravians whose leader, Zinzendorf, was educated at Halle. The Moravians have set an example of missionary zeal which no other church group has even approached, sending one missionary to every ninety-two members as compared with the average church's record of one missionary for every 2500 members. They have three times as many members on the foreign field as in the home churches. The Anabaptists, who represented spiritual fervor with less educational background, were less evangelistic than the Pietists, especially the Moravians.

Education and the Great Awakening

The Great Awakening during the colonial period in American history was one of the greatest spiritual life movements since Pentecost. One of the major factors in its continued influence was William Tennant's "Log College." William Tennant, educated in

the Established church in Ireland, later became a Presbyterian pastor in Pennsylvania. In Buck's County, Pennsylvania, he erected a log house twenty feet square in which he opened a school for the training of ministers. His school became outstanding for the lasting impression he made upon his students. Among the "Log College" graduates were fourteen young men who entered the Presbyterian ministry. These young men were the first American-trained ministerial candidates, and they played a major role in determining the course of their church for the next hundred years. Graduates of Tennant's "Log College" not only became outstanding preachers of their generation, but some of them founded other "log colleges" which in turn produced outstanding preachers. Exactly one hundred of these "log colleges" were founded between 1726 and 1800. It was the graduates of these schools which were the chief instruments used by God in the Great Awakening in the Middle Atlantic colonies.

Meanwhile in New Jersey, T. J. Frelinghuysen, a Dutch Reformed minister educated by the Pietists, was the pioneer in the Great Awakening in that area. He made common cause with Gilbert Tennant, son of the founder of the original "Log College," and together through their influence the whole frontier experienced a powerful revival of religion.¹ Ministers graduated from the "log colleges," so named in derision, could be counted on to perpetuate the revival. It is to their impetus that the new movement extended and sustained its influence. The older ministers of the Presbyteries opposed the revival and sought to control the situation by enacting laws which would recognize as ministers only graduates of Scottish and New England colleges -- a blow aimed directly at the "log college" graduates. Another law aimed in the same direction sought to restrict the supplying of vacant pastorates. In self defense the evangelical ministers set up a Presbytery of their own, the New Brunswick Presbytery, and ordained men sympathetic to the revival. Later these men, ousted from the Philadelphia Synod because of their revivalistic views, formed the New York Synod consisting mostly of evangelical ministers from the "log colleges" and those graduates of Yale who were favorable to revivalism. The same group later founded the College of New Jersey, later to become Princeton University and Seminary. For years Princeton was the stronghold of both learning and evangelical views. To a large extent, the "Log College" and its graduates set the pattern for evangelicalism in America which survives and is flourishing today. When George Whitefield came to these shores he found his most enthusiastic support in the elder William Tennant, and his alumni.

¹W. W. Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, pp. 268-281.

In the Second Great Awakening (c. 1800-10) likewise colleges played a major role. A revival occurred in a little Presbyterian backwoods college, Kampden-Sidney in Virginia during 1786. It soon spread to nearby Washington College. From these college revivals came the most influential leaders in American Presbyterianism for the coming generation.² The Presbyterian revivalists on the frontier were college trained men.

Among the Congregationalists, the revival at Yale in 1800 under the leadership of Timothy Dwight exerted a nation-wide influence and helped set the pattern for others. The greatest revival preachers of that generation came from these school centers.

This suffices to indicate that learning is not necessarily hostile to a warm evangelistic fervor, but rather, the right kind of education is its bulwark.

Education Aids Missions

Education has played a prominent role in modern missionary evangelism. The roving missionary like Francis Xavier, who covered a wide territory and superficially influenced thousands, has proven less successful than the evangelist-teacher who has influenced only hundreds but has taken time to train others to do the same work. This was Jesus' method. The example of William Carey and Alexander Duff, who made Christian education prominent from the first in their missionary enterprise, has proven to be the sounder strategy. The policy of such modern missionary organizations as the Oriental Missionary Society, with their emphasis on training a native ministry to take the primary responsibility for evangelism, is both Scripturally and historically sound.

The Free Methodist church in its early days had two courses to take so far as its educational program was concerned. It could train its leaders in Bible institutes with little concern for general education with emphasis on the spiritual life and evangelistic outreach. The latter alternative was adopted. Thus, the Church now has liberal arts colleges accredited, or on the way to become such, rather than Bible schools. This liberal arts curriculum is the basis for specialized training at the professional or graduate level. The Bible institutes, which multiplied during the latter portion of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, are now realizing their mistake in neglecting the broad field of study. They are now rapidly becoming four-year liberal arts colleges and seeking regional accreditation. Such is the case, for instance, with God's Bible School in Cincinnati, and the National Bible Institute in New York (now Shelton College). But another precedent should serve as a warning. The older denominations, which built liberal

²W. W. Sweet, *Revivalism in America*, p. 119.

arts colleges in which to train their youth, found that their denominational schools had a habit of departing from the faith of the fathers and founders and becoming "modernistic." This has been the pattern in the major institutions for the training of ministers -- Harvard, Yale, Brown, Columbia, Union and others. Just as the influence for revival came through some schools, so the trend toward rationalism began also in other schools and spread into the church. In one or two generations the churches become like the schools in which their ministers are trained.

Education. a Tool of Evangelism

Education then is not to be feared as hostile to vital Christianity. It is rather a tool, which, like science, can be either a bane or a blessing. It has been utilized to begin and to promote a revival of primitive Christianity in both Europe and the American colonies. Today the emphasis which holiness schools occupy in the modern Holiness Movement attests the importance higher education plays in the perpetuation of an evangelical Christian witness. The Free Methodist Church has laid a solid foundation in stressing the liberal arts permeated by the Christian ethic and evangel. It can now utilize this agency to foster an even more varied and effective evangelistic emphasis. Such it now seems to be doing. The alternative is to permit the schools to follow the precedent of older denominations and, under the pretense of being "free" and up-to-date, to betray the cause for which they were created. The way to avoid this is not to be suspicious of higher education and educators but to expect from them, yea, to insist upon a learning which is Christ-centered. When a church is served by Christian schools that are academically respectable as well as spiritually vital and evangelistic, the pattern for perpetual revival has been set. It has happened thus before; it can again. Indeed, it must again if our way of life is to prevail.