

NAZARENE THEOLOGY CONFERENCE
November 27-29, 1972
Overland Park, Kansas

Undergraduate Teaching in Bible and
Doctrine
Robert L. Griffin

"ACCOUNTABILITY AND UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING IN BIBLE AND DOCTRINE"

My approach to the subject of "Undergraduate Teaching in Bible and Doctrine" will be limited to the relationship of the subject to the concept of accountability. To be accountable is to be held responsible for certain actions--to be answerable--to have performed up to expectations. Clearly some minimal ground rules must be laid down if the principle of accountability is to be meaningful. One such guideline is that the teacher ought not be held responsible for those matters outside the normal performance of his duties. Unless we set some limits on the extent of responsibility, we may fall in the kind of trap when everyone becomes responsible for everything--no one is responsible for anything.

Irving Howe has an essay entitled "Beleaguered Professors" in which he observes:

In one of Thomas Hardy's novels, there is a rustic who whenever he drinks a bit too much, suffers from a curious affliction called 'the multiplying eye'...professors...have in the last few decades been troubled by a similar complaint. It was not always so. There was a time...when the American professor knew exactly who he was (and the nature of his task)...He transmitted the fixed content of his discipline to students who rarely disturbed him by an unseemly eagerness for knowledge or controversy...

What happened in college was mostly decoration...seldom was it supposed to have much to do with the way men earned a living, structured their society, clawed their way to prefferment; once, however, it came to be assumed there were close vocational, social and psychic links between higher education and economic mobility, the life of the American professor started radically to change. (Irving Howe, "Beleaguered Professors," The Troubled Campus, Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1966, pp. 53-55).

The professor of religion on a Nazarene Campus identifies with this shift in thinking. He no longer is able to hide in the ivory tower--the all pervasive, all knowledge syndrome protecting him. He is expected to become involved with the dynamic interaction between faith and practice. Increasingly, he is facing a difficult task as he attempts to sort out his priorities.

Coupled with this dilemma is the identity crisis. The college is being asked its reason for existence. The student is asking "who am I." The faculty member is likewise having an identity crisis. And the end is not in sight. Performance based teaching methods with their emphasis on accountability through programmed learning modules are a threat to the time honored lecturer who is the dispenser of truth and the guardian of the right. The preacher professor must recognize he is a teacher which implies learning is the result of encounter. This is not an easy accomplishment for men accustomed to the sanctity of the "sacred desk."

Frank Newman in a Report On Higher Education observed:

The beginning of the decade of the 1970's seems a time unprecedented crisis for higher education. After a long and satisfying period of growth, high...esteem and ever-increasing financial support, higher education now faces a period of student unrest, public antagonism and financial uncertainty...higher education needs reform. (Frank Newman, et al., Report On Higher Education, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, March, 1971, p. 61).

If this is true, and it is, instead of folding our tents and retreating it seems to me that the church college with its Bible centered courses and its theological orientation should face the problem head on. Where may one better find the answers to the

riddle of life than the Bible? Where may one find a more solid foundation for life than a Biblically oriented theological position.

If we are to face the challenge our teaching must be effective. Higher education came into being in the western world when someone had something to share with someone else. The sharing was, at first, an informal personal interaction between a teacher and a student. Somehow, we must recapture the dynamic interactive process of the dialogue. Because in many instances students have to experience the pro and con of preconceived ideas before they learn the truth.

Allan O. Phnister, University of Denver, has identified three roles in which the faculty is accountable. The categories are described by the words, teacher, master and academician. It will be necessary to limit our discussion here to the first, namely, accountability and teaching. Of course, the framework within which we operate must take into consideration the student. Without the student our discussion here would be a practice in futility. Under ideal conditions, students and teachers of Bible and Doctrine are involved in a search for truth. The student contributes potential, enthusiasm, hope; the teacher contributes response, experience and judgment.

TEACHING AND RESPONSIBILITY

The teacher is expected to be competent. His responsibility is in terms of acceptable teaching.

What is involved in being a competent teacher in Bible and Doctrine? Richard B. Mann in "The College Classroom" describes the

teacher under six approaches--expert, formal authority, socializing agent, facilitator, ego ideal, and person. The teacher in each mode is accountable in a Nazarene College.

The teacher is first of all an expert. He has knowledge of the disciplines of religion--Bible and Doctrine Students have a right to expect to be able to learn something from him. He is accountable to the students for at least a knowledge of the discipline and Doctrine courses. We need our best teachers to encounter students at this level.

In recent years college teachers of religion have had to face the same kind of anti-intellectualism their colleagues in other disciplines face. Some young people come to college already convinced that truth is subjective and assume an immediate equation between truth and feeling. They would argue, there is no such thing as an expert. This would suggest it is more a matter of how one feels about doctrines and Bible truths than it is a matter of factual knowledge. According to this approach, anyone is able to make a contribution to what is being considered irrespective of knowledge, the only criterion necessary being that one has feelings about what is being considered. The extreme of this position argues there is no exclusive category of experts for all are experts.

The teacher has a responsibility in these confused times to challenge the student with mature judgments which do not always square with the students' immediate perceptions. A teacher would be derelict if he failed to make known what he knows and to guide in the selection of topics for discussion and debate. While being sensitive

to the concerns of students he must raise the level of their understanding and on the basis of his own expertise, objectively expose incorrect assumptions and statements which may be sincerely held and emotionally advocated.

This is a particularly sensitive area in the field of religion. I suppose it would be unnecessary to add that the teacher must not get caught out on the limb advocating subjective, emotionized feelings which have no basis in fact. Where verified knowledge is still being sought the teacher would do well to give an unbiased presentation of both sides of an issue.

The whole spectrum of relevance comes up at ^{this} point. Students are calling for subjects that are relevant. Teachers in the field of religion must relate their discipline to students' wants, feelings, ideas, conscience and what is taking place in the real world. While maintaining an intellectual stance the teacher must draw inspiration from where the student is and to make the connections to where he should be going.

Secondly, the teacher is formal authority. Nazarene Colleges gives grades for academic performance in Bible and Doctrine courses. The teacher is responsible in setting clearly defined standards of excellence, goals and assignment deadlines. He administers examinations, assigns grades and reports achievement.

Contemporary students are challenging the formal authority of the teacher in terms of goals and grades. To what extent is a faculty member accountable in evaluation of performance? In brief, it is probably true that as long as degrees and certificates are awarded by colleges and religious courses are accepted as creditable

toward degrees just that long will faculty members be involved in evaluation of achievement.

It would be interesting to know how you feel with regard to changing the philosophy of grades. There is a growing attitude in academic circles that in order to get away from the failure approach to college credit, we move to a credit/no credit system. In this approach a minimum standard would be identified and a student would receive credit if he reached the minimum standard. No official transcript grade would be made if the student did not reach minimum standards. He would take the course over until the competency was reached.

In the third place, the teacher is a socializing agent or perhaps more descriptive he is a recruiter for his field. He is the practitioner. The faculty member in religion not only shares his knowledge of Bible history and doctrine, but he becomes the one person who may create a life-long interest in the study of the Word of God. Also, he is the gateway which either opens or closes the religion department to majors and to ministry beyond college. He is a public relations man for the entire department of religion.

In the fourth place, he is a facilitator. He finds out where students are, helps them identify goals and serves in a counseling capacity to help the student find his own direction and then as administrator clears the way for the student to reach his goals.

Probably one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching is the interpersonal relationships developed out of informal counseling sessions as students recognize their professors to be concerned human beings. Serving as facilitators, we find ways to make our teaching

more relevant. Here too, we are accountable.

In the fifth place, the teacher serves as an ego ideal. We teachers in religion never know how many young men and women are looking on us as models. There is a continuous process of formulating and approaching ideals--and the college classroom is a center of this type activity. While it is true that charisma, competence, and influence do not necessarily go hand in hand, it is certainly a winning combination in a religion department when these elements are united in a teacher. In this happy combination of charisma and influence via personal warmth a teacher may deserve to be an ego ideal. If we build into our characters the ingredients of warmth and rapport--we may, like the boy become a man, reflect the image of *the greater than* the "great stone face."

In the sixth place, the teacher of religion serves as a person. As a person the teacher places the student at ease to the point where both may feel free to share ideas in an environment of trust and freedom. The personal encounter is not limited by the classroom and the academic environment. This is another way of saying the kind of man we are comes through. Both teacher and student have an existence beyond the academic setting and what occurs in the classroom is not completely divorced from the life-style without. We are persons and persons have points of view. When a student asks a question *relative to* of moral and spiritual truth--he has a right to more than neutrality--he has a right to objective analysis plus dedicated personality. This is what makes a Nazarene College unique not only in religion classes but through the length and breadth of the entire curriculum.

In this brief analysis we have attempted to point out some of the dimensions of teaching religion in a Nazarene college and to identify elements of accountability in the profession. Probably it should be said that teaching is only the means to an end. Learning to know God's Word and its precious truth by young men and women is the goal. Ultimately, this is the final test for which we are accountable.

SOME OBSERVATIONS RELATIVE TO RESPONSIBILITY:

Religion professors are responsible to:

1. Be aware of the limitations of lecture and to identify the difference between teaching and preaching.
2. Be aware of the dynamics of learning.
3. Create new situations in which learning the Word of God or Doctrinal Truth is facilitated.
4. Look on students as persons and ourselves as persons.
5. Make learning a personal response (i.e. individualize instruction).
6. Be loyal to the Church while, at the same time contrasting the Wesleyan-Arminian position with other points of view.
7. Be alive to creative change.
8. Create an atmosphere where students come to possess knowledge by acquaintance (personal) as well as knowledge by description (factual).
9. Put the emphasis on learning rather than on the means, namely teaching.