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UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN THIS PRESENT AGE.

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*On the Occasion of His Inauguration as President of Union
Theological Seminary in Virginia, May 11, 1927.*

It has been a year now since I was called to become President of this Seminary. I wondered why you called one with such little acquaintance with theological education or the problems which confront a modern seminary. I had hoped to have the counsel and advice of Dr. Moore at least for a time, but within a little over a month after my election, and before I had an opportunity even to consult him once, he had passed from us. My study of the problems of theological education has been broken and fragmentary and I cannot hope to bring you much that is either fresh or original. Some things, however, have impressed themselves upon me with great force and I wish to share with you my thoughts on this subject: "Union Theological Seminary in this Present Age."

I. Development of Professional Schools.

We are fond of emphasizing the fact that the first college in America, Harvard, was founded for the purpose of educating ministers. The gates of Harvard carry the following quaint inscription:

"After God had carried us safe to New England, and wee had bilded our houses, provided necessaries for our livli-hood,

again. What we put into the hearts of these men will soon be in the heart of the Church at large.

There, as I looked at them, so eager and hopeful to reach their fields, a great joy came over me that I was to have a part in training men for the greatest task ever committed to men—that of going out to those in the grip and power of sin to free them in the name of the Son of God. After all arises the same task, though the age is different, which Christ assigned to the Twelve in Galilee, “Make disciples of all men; lo, I am with you alway”.

YOUTH AND THE CHURCH.

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Seminary in Virginia.*

Youth is our yesterday, the child's tomorrow, the fair morning of life after the dawn when the dew is still on the roses and the grass is invitingly fresh; when the stream of life runs swiftly, if not perilously full. Because of the complexity of life today and the evident dangers of this period we have asked ourselves again and again the question, “Is the youth of today better or worse than the youth of yesterday?” I gave this question to a hundred and fifty of my students about a year ago. Most of them were in this period; many of them had had rich contacts with boys and girls of this age through High School teaching, work at Boys' and Girls' Camps, and with Boy Scout and Girl Scout Troops. They were well qualified, therefore, to answer the question. From one class I received fifty-two answers. Only four of them said that they felt that youth today was worse, and one of the four remarked, “Please don't put too much reliance upon my statement, as I am hopelessly pessimistic about everything”. Several stated that they thought that youth was “not so much worse”, as there

were wider variations today, more pronounced extremes—that the good were better and the bad were worse, but that they could not strike a balance and say which preponderated. I doubt if anyone can answer that question with absolute accuracy. Perhaps the question should not have been asked at all. Certainly we are weary of it and we feel that it ought not to be further agitated, as such agitation serves to make an already self-conscious group more self-conscious. I am not so much concerned with the answer to that question as I am concerned over the fact that there are in youth, all youth, whether better or worse, of yesterday and today, certain great characteristics upon which we can count and which should interest and guide and challenge the Church as it deals with life during this period.

Characteristics of Youth.

Youth is *a time of independence*. Through childhood, his timidity, his weakness, his size, his ignorance, his inexperience, his strong imitative instinct have all been saying to him, “conform, be like everybody else, obey those around you”. But with the advent of puberty all is changed. His increasing size and strength, his growing knowledge, his larger contacts with life, his developing individualistic instinct all say to him, “Be yourself, be different from everybody else, cast off restraint, have your own way”.

Dr. Starbuck tells us of a boy just entering this period, who, while walking down street, caught a glimpse of his image in a plate glass window. “There swept over me,” he said, “the overwhelming consciousness that I was I. I drew myself to my full height and with a new dignity and a new purpose for life walked on.”

Quite often I send out my students armed with questionnaires to examine the boys and girls of our community. One question is “Whom would you rather be like?” The smaller children will put in the name of some great man such as Lee or Washington or Jackson or Wilson or more recently that of Babe Ruth and Gene Tunney. Jack Dempsey’s star has disappeared

below the horizon. The adolescents, on the other hand, often say "I want to be like myself". What a right and holy desire this is, insuring the integrity of one's own life, the presence in the world of an individual, a voice, and not of an automaton, an echo. Through this strong urge the world gains variety and interest and the race moves forward in new and fearless endeavor. Yet, in the Church and in the School and in the Home we sometimes rebuke or thwart or even break this person growing into self-consciousness and power.

How much better it would be for us to assume the attitude of the mother of Phillips Brooks who said: "The period of which I speak appears to me to be one in which the boy dies and the man is born; his individuality rises up before him and he is dazed and almost overwhelmed by his first consciousness of self. I have always believed that it was then that the Creator was speaking with my sons, and that it was good for their souls to be left alone with Him, while I, his mother, stood trembling by, praying and waiting; knowing that when the man was developed from the boy, I should have my sons again, and there would be a deeper sympathy than ever between us."

Youth is a *time of mighty social urge*. Small boys and girls play with each other with little consciousness of the difference of sex. In the pre-adolescent or gang age they become aware of each other in a new way and pull apart with an indifference to or scorn of those of the opposite sex. When they grow a bit older, however, as inevitably as the poppy lifts its face to the sun, boys and girls turn to each other, drawn by an impulse as irresistible as God's purpose for the human race. Miss Margaret Slattery, who knows young people as few persons in America do, tells us that hardly a girl reaches sixteen without having a love affair. "What are you thinking about?" one girl in this period asked another. "Why, beaux and clothes, of course," came the ready reply. Open the diary of any boy during this period, if you can find it, and you will discover on its pages the luminous words "love" and "date" and "Mary" and "Helen". During this period they long to be with and be

like the crowd. The boy is miserable if his trousers are not exactly *a la mode*. He lingers for hours before the mirror, parting or plastering back his hair until every strand is in accordance with the fashion. The girl would "rather be dead than out of style". And some of them in their desire to be lithe and willowy are actually starving themselves to death. This surrender to the group often influences their moral life hurtfully. A keen student of adolescents declares that "a sixteen year old girl would rather be wrong than ridiculous". I feel sure that that could often be said with equal truth of the boy in his later teens.

At the time when the young people are feeling the over-mastering compulsion of the group the girl adores an older woman, becoming as clay in her hands; and a boy worships an older man to such an extent that Mike Murphy, the coach of the University of Pennsylvania's football team, could say to his men between halves, "If you can't win for the sake of Penn., if you can't win for the sake of your mothers and sweethearts, go in the game and win for me". The story goes that they went in and won.

Youth is likewise *a time of idealism and altruism*. Centuries ago a prophet cried to Israel, "Your young men shall see visions". That prophecy has been fulfilled in every generation. It is perennially true of youth. Youths have always been our discoverers, our pioneers, our explorers, our reformers. Their clear eyes have looked into the future, have seen beneath the surface, and their brave hearts have never counted the cost. Someone has defined an idealist as an individual under twenty-five years of age!

"Just as the world war ended a boy of seventeen, aiming at France, under age as he was, who had drilled in season and out, but never had left this continent of ours, wrote: 'You can't depend on this old war any more and there is no telling what is going to happen to us now. It seems too bad to fool around in uniform when there is no fight. The United States ought to rush around with its huge army and reform the world now that there is a chance.'"

“Reform the world.” Let your mind rest on these two words. Youth is thinking in world terms and lofty terms. Stanley High in his “Revolt of Youth”, gives us a remarkable picture of youth around the world, dissatisfied with the condition in which the War has left things, unwilling to rest content with the injustice and inequalities that remain.

Youth is always willing to pay the price of the service it desires to render. Mazzini declared that “the highest call that youth hears is ‘Come and suffer’”. How abundantly the war proved this to be true of Italian youth, German youth, French youth, British youth, American youth—youth around the world. A mother whose son was hurt in practice flying wrote: “There is a quality in my son, it is in all the boys, I have felt it before the War. I never could name it before, but now I can—boys want self-sacrifice.” The mother of an only son who enlisted in the Canadian army, speaking in like strain, said: “You see, I only want to save his life and he only wants to give it.”

It is at this time when boys and girls are ready to fling their lives away that they become selfish through deliberate choice. Unless some avenues of service are open before them, unless they are caught by some definite plan to help their fellows, their love and enthusiasm for others will die out and selfish desires will grow into iron mastery over their life.

Youth is a *time of disillusionment*. Youth, as we have seen, is a dreamer. He dreams of a world in which all women are pure and kind, in which all men are brave and generous, in which the true, the good and the beautiful reign. But the rose glasses are soon dashed from his eyes by the hard hand of reality, and he sees an ugly world, a hostile world, an unjust world, where some women are false and some men are knavish. As his idealism was high, so his cynicism is deep and bitter.

He has dreamt of himself as a success in every sphere of endeavor but added years have brought him into sterner competition with stronger men, and his frank eyes look unsparingly at the weaknesses which are being revealed in his own life. He has not made the football team at College, though at High

School he was a star. He is left out by the fraternities though in his own town he was something of a social lion. He is far back now in his academic standing though a year ago he was valedictorian of his class. His spirit is now stained by sin though at home he was clean. His mind is in a turmoil of doubt about spiritual conceptions that were unquestioned in former days. To crown all of his miseries, the lady of his delight looks with favor upon another man. He has hitched his wagon to a star in his dreams, but the star has disappeared behind inky clouds or the traces have broken and his little wagon is fast in the mud of the ordinary, leagues behind the glowing hopes which he had so confidently flung ahead. A few years ago as I was talking along this line at a Young People's Conference; a boy whose face I had noticed because of its intelligence and seriousness, came up to me after class and said: "This morning you certainly were right where I have been living for the last two weeks. During this time I have wanted to do nothing so much as to take father's car out, tune it up to sixty miles an hour and run it into the first telephone post." Far too many of the 16,000 suicides in America in 1925 were boys and girls in this period. With all of his independence and cock-sureness and recklessness, he is sensible of his weakness, hungry for helpful fellowship, eager for the touch of power.

It is at this time when these urges are to the fore that life is at the flood tide of power—physical, mental and spiritual. It is during this period, likewise, that the great choices of life are made. William James speaks of the major choices of life as those which control great areas of life and determine a vast number of lesser decisions. To my mind, there are three major choices.

The first is the choice of Christ. The most recent and accurate study of the age of conversion was made in 1921 by Dr. Athearn. This shows conclusively that over half of those who accept Christ, do so between twelve and twenty-four.

The second major choice is that of one's life work. Dr. Campbell White, who has made a rather exhaustive study of

this question, and has had large experience with youth, tells us that five-sixths of those who really choose their life work, make that choice before twenty.

The third choice is the choice of a life partner. I have seen it stated on good authority that more girls marry between the years of eighteen and twenty-four than in all other periods of life put together.

If the Church is going to do anything at all with the individual, it seems to me that it must lay hold of him in this period when these great urges are to the fore, when life runs so full and strong, when these all-important choices are made. It is at just this period, however, that the Church loses its hold upon life.

The one satisfactory study of an American state was made a few years ago under the direction of Dean Athearn, who has a remarkable gift for detail. The Indiana "Survey" shows that the peak of attendance at Sunday School is reached at 12. At 14 from 10% to 15% of the girls have dropped out, and 25% of the boys. At 18, 16% of the girls, and 75% of the boys have been lost. At 22, 88% of the girls and 92% of the boys are gone.

The task, of course, isn't a simple one. A year or two ago I received a note from a lady in Texas, stating that her Sunday School was not getting along very well and that the Young People's Society was functioning poorly and would I please "*drop her a line*" and solve the problem of youth for her and her Church. What a joy it would have been to me if I could have done it. If, in a few nicely turned sentences, I could have solved this whole problem. But God does not deal with us in that way. He compliments us and challenges us by giving us tasks that are beyond our powers, so that we may give our best and then be forced to depend upon Him. The problem is just as difficult and complex as life itself and can be met only by the most pains-taking thought and earnest endeavor. I believe that the solution lies along the following lines:

1. We need first of all an organization which will give these

independent, capable young people a chance to bear responsibility, to exercise leadership, to know the thrill of achievement. Dr. Coe, in his penetrating little book, "What Ails Our Youth", tells us that in the past we have considered youth to be a time of action and age a time for thought, but we have come to discover that youth is a time for both thought and action. He urges us, therefore, to take them into our counsels, to give them a larger share in the work of the Church and to turn over to them increasingly the management of their own organizations.

2. We need a *program* which will make provision—a. For clean recreation. In a paper received from a young person, I found this, "Many times these words were said to me when I was growing up, 'Don't do this, don't do that. It isn't lady-like'. My sister next to me did many tom-boyish stunts on the sly and she has always been healthy, while I have never been strong". How much better it would have been if the Church had said to its young people in that community, "Come and play".

b. The program must also provide an opportunity for wholesome fellowship with members of the other sex. What a tragedy it is that a young girl has to write, "My parents will not let me have dates with boys. I have to lie to them when I go out with a boy". How much better it would be for the Church to sponsor and guide such joyous and blessed association. The Young People's Society has been criticized as being a "match-making institution". It seems to me, however, that it should rather be its glory that it brings boys and girls together under holy auspices.

c. This program must also offer a chance to serve, so that the fresh, full-running tides of youth will flow out helpfully to the very ends of the earth, to the joy and growth of youth itself; for, as one young person expressed it, "Youth is active and not willing to be passively good".

3. We need *buildings* so arranged and equipped that such a program can be comfortably carried out, and such organizations find full opportunity for development. "How can your

Sunday School be made more interesting?" a young person was asked. "We ought to have better furniture in our Department," was the reply. "It isn't half so good as that in the Junior Department. They seem to think anything is good enough for us."

Leadership Needed.

4. But more than an adequate building, more than an effective organization, more than an all-round program do we need *leadership*—noble men, splendid women. I have asked hundreds of my students this question, "Why do young people drop out of Sunday School?" They have interviewed numbers of girls and boys, consulted scores of superintendents and teachers, and read dozens of books; invariably their first answer is, "lack of the right kind of leadership".

We need men and women *who understand* these deep urges of adolescents, who will be sympathetic and patient and will help them interpret the experiences which are more of an enigma to them than they are to us.

We need leaders *who will respect* them and give them a chance for self-expression. Can you imagine anything worse than for a leader of a group of young people, among whom were several seniors in High School, beginning what she has to say to them with the words, "now *children*"? Yet it was in just that way that I was introduced to such a group. What a tragedy it is for a teacher of young people to do all of the talking, asking no questions and giving no opportunity for discussion, measuring her ability to teach by the rapidity and continuity of her speech! Yet there are scores of such teachers in our Church.

We need leaders *who trust* young people, their capacity and their character, and are themselves what the young people should become. As one young person expressed it to me, "Youth is tired of being criticized, tired of being held up to ridicule, tired of being told that it is going to the dogs. If only we are helped to see the better way, we are willing to

walk in it. What we need is not so much criticism, as examples”.

We need leaders *who will face the young people with the type of religion they need and desire.* They should have a *rational religion.* So often we are intolerant of any effort on their part to think their way into truth. While I was in Knoxville a young man asked if he might talk to me. Of course I told him yes. He began by telling me that he had doubts about the atonement. Knowing that he was a member of another Church I advised him to go and see his minister and give him the pleasure of helping him with his difficulty. Immediately and vigorously he replied, “That would do no good. The only thing he would say to me if I told him that I was concerned about the atonement would be ‘you are on the way to hell’”. Of course, by an attitude of that kind all that his pastor did was to block forever the avenue between his mind and that of this troubled man.

George Sherwood Eddy, in one of his books, tell us that doubt is a door, which may swing out into the blackness of darkness forever or may swing in to fuller light. We all begin life on a borrowed basis. We receive our faith ready-made at the hands of our parents or Sunday School teachers. If it is to become our own, we must think it through for ourselves. So often, therefore, doubt is a door to a clearer understanding of spiritual truth, to a firmer conviction concerning Christ, to a more devoted and passionate loyalty to Him. What happens in the case of so many is that they do no thinking in the sphere of religion. All of their other conceptions are on the march, only in religion is truth static; so that they grow up with a man’s idea of the universe and a child’s idea of God, and it is impossible for them, therefore, to have a man’s joy and faith in religion.

Last year I was holding an evangelistic meeting in a co-educational college. I was told almost the first day, that one of the girls in the school was greatly disturbed in her faith, doubting particularly the miracles and that it was hoped that I could talk to her. The last day of the meeting she came to

see me and began by saying, "I know you are going to be startled by what I have to tell you". "No," I said, "I have been working with young people for a long time. I shall not be surprised, only interested." "Well," she said, "I don't believe in the personality of God." "That is interesting," I replied. "What do you believe about God?" "I believe that God is a Principle or a Force." "Well, let us see what you think about that Principle or Force. Do you feel that it is operating in the world according to any plan?" "O yes," she said. "Is it exercising itself to put that plan into effect?" "Yes." "Is it aware of the development of that plan or its retardation?" "Yes." "Does it experience pleasure as the plan progresses and distress as it is interfered with?" "Yes." "Then you believe in the personality of God." "Oh, no," she said, "I don't." "But you do, if you meant what you have just said. What psychologists and philosophers today mean by 'personality', as far as they can define it, is capacity to think and to feel and to will, plus self-consciousness." "But," she replied, "it is almost impossible for me to think of personality apart from the body and the Church didn't give me that conception of personality." "What idea did the Church give you of God?" "It caused me to feel that God was just a great man, residing somewhere in the universe and in control of it." "That isn't the way in which thoughtful men in the Church think of God," I said. "Well," she answered, "I can believe in the personality of God if that is what is meant by it."

Then she shifted her position and said, "But I don't see the need for Christ as the Son of God". "Just now you said that it was almost impossible for you to distinguish personality apart from bodily form. Don't you see how difficult it would have been for God to have caused us to understand that He was a Person and to have enabled us to see the qualities of His character if He had not manifested Himself in bodily form? It was as the Word became flesh and dwelt among us that we could behold His glory." Her face lighted a bit and she said, "I can see that and understand now why the incarnation was necessary". "But," she said, "I can't see any necessity for

the miracles." Her difficulty had been reached at last. "Well," I replied, "if in order to let us see His personality and character, God must become so like us, wasn't it necessary for Christ to perform miracles in order to enable the people with whom He lived to be certain that He was God?" Her face was shining now and she said, "I see and believe".

The difficulty with this girl was that her knowledge of Christian truth had not developed as her study of philosophy and psychology had enlarged. With her, "I don't believe" meant rather "I don't understand".

I am not meaning to say at all that we should encourage our young people to doubt. I am simply urging the necessity that they see that there are grounds for their belief, that faith is an intelligent act, and not what a boy described as "believing what you know ain't true". We must let them see the necessity of moving from doubt to faith and of assuming, therefore, a morally earnest attitude toward belief. We must convince them that only faith is creative, that while doubts may destroy a building that is cumbering the ground, only faith can erect a structure that is a fit habitation for the mind and spirit of man. We must assure them that a man's doubts are no more his spiritual capital than the money he hasn't is his financial capital.

In the second place, we need leaders who will give them *a religion that is real*. Toward the close of a meeting that I was holding in a college in eastern Tennessee, three boys came into my room for conference. One of them was President of the student body, a second, Captain of the foot-ball team and the third, prominent likewise, in the life of the college. For a few moments they sat without saying anything; then one of them blurted out: "We have been doing a lot of thinking since you have been here." By the "we" he meant a good many others whom he and his two friends were representing. "And we have come to realize that religion doesn't mean to us what it ought. We pray and we don't seem to get anywhere. We read the Bible and it has no vital message for us. Now

we have come to the conclusion that religion must be either real to us or we are going to lay it aside."

This is one of the passions of youth today—reality. Psychologists tell us that that is real which is present to the senses. We can, I think, make youth see that that is also real which is present in their hearts in transforming power, which makes a difference in their lives. When I spoke just now of the need of a rational religion, I did not mean that we should reduce religion to a mere philosophy of life, drained of its supernatural elements and power.

Youth needs a *redemptive religion*. With all of its vigor and hope, it is again and again aware of failure, stricken with a sense of sin, lonely, yearning for fellowship with someone stronger than itself. Youth at times feels the need of forgiveness, longs for peace, cries out for strength beyond its own, is eager for fellowship with someone who understands and sympathizes. Youth is not a logical machine. He has a heart as well as a mind. He has problems and perplexities and disappointments and griefs, that while different, are as real as those of age. He needs to know that Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He needs to experience the power of His resurrection. He needs to hear the Matchless One say, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends".

During an evangelistic meeting at the University of Tennessee, I was helping in the conference work. A senior came to see me and said at once, "I am surprised to find that I have lost my faith. I am the son of an Elder in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Back home I was rather active in the Church and Sunday School, but recently I find that my faith is gone". In reply I asked him this question, "What are you reading?" He outlined for me the course he was taking, which was Engineering, giving me a list of books, most of which were unfamiliar to me. When he stopped, I asked again, "What are you reading?" "Why, I am reading some novels and magazines and newspapers."

"What else are you reading?"

"I don't exactly understand what you mean."

"I mean just exactly what I say, what else are you reading?"

"I am reading some letters, advertisements—I can't think of anything else I am reading."

"Are you reading the Bible or any devotional books?" "No."
"And you are surprised that you have lost your faith? Why, I should be surprised if you had any faith! You have been studying science and you realize that in the material realm you don't expect to get results without causes. How is it, therefore, that you have expected in the spiritual realm to get results without fulfilling the conditions? There are laws in the spiritual world just as there are in the physical." He had grace enough to be ashamed of himself and to see and admit his mistake.

We must let youth understand that there are conditions which have to be fulfilled before Christ and the things of the spirit will be real to him. We must show him what these conditions are, and help him to fulfill them; for it will be only when he enters into a vital fellowship with Christ through an obedience to these laws that his religion will become rational, real and redemptive.

The chief reason for the so-called "revolt of youth", its restlessness, its impatience with restraint, its extravagant search for thrills, is its failure to achieve the deeper satisfactions of the spirit which can come only through an experience of the abundant life which results from fellowship with Him who is the Life.

Finally, we must present to youth *a challenging religion*. One young person told me, when asked why young people drop out of Sunday School, "Because religion is presented to us as a sissy thing". What folly to present to youth religion as easy. What a travesty on Christianity to present as soft and unexacting, the religion of Him who went to Calvary, and called to all others, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me". We want our young people to see that Christianity is a call, not to security, but to sacrifice and adventure; that while, in the

mercy of God, it doesn't take much of a man to be a Christian, it takes all there is of him. We want them so to see our religion that they will feel as that young missionary did who had written on his tombstone by his friends, "Here lies the body of one who relished his task for its bigness, and took to it with a fierce joy".

The hope of the world is in youth—forward-looking youth, friendly youth, fearless youth, sacrificial youth; in youth with its unsullied ideals, its undiminished enthusiasms, its unspent power.

A student of economics in one of our great universities went to the head of the Department and said something like this: "Professor, our study together has made me discouraged; as I look out upon the world, things seem dark. Is there any hope?" The Professor thought for a moment and then replied rather sadly: "No, there is no hope." Not satisfied, the student went to a man of another ilk and put to him the same question: "Professor, as I look out upon the world, things look dark and I am well-nigh despairing. Is there any hope?" After a moment's reflection he said, "Yes, there is hope. Just one". "What is it?" "That great souls like yourself get down and lift."

But youth will not desire to lift, youth will not know how to lift, which has been untutored by the Church, uncaptured by the mind of Christ, uninspired by the face of the Eternal.

"Is the youth of today better or worse than the youth of yesterday?" One of my students replied: "Youth is better today when it is given a chance."

God grant that our Church in this day may give its youth a chance!