

Address at ASBCM Banquet Meeting

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INTRODUCTION

During the last two days Dr. Newport has helped us to think about the future in relationship to our ministry with students. We have talked about the need for simplifying our life styles, utilizing the arts in ministry, the impact of the media on ministry and women in campus ministry. All of these appear to be impact issues in the not too distant future. We are grateful for Dr. Newport's helping us to relate our ministries with students to these issues.

Another issue with which we as campus ministers must deal in the near future is that of accountability — for the mission dollars invested in the buildings, personnel and programs of student ministry. One of the reasons we will be pressed about accountability issues is not because we are doing a poor job; rather because we are doing too good of a job. Our ministry with students has been so effective in fact that in some quarters BSU is regarded as a parachurch organization. I feel that this is happening because BSU and Baptist campus ministry have taken seriously our call and mission to reach and grow students, and to involve them in the life and heartbeat of the organism called Baptist Student Union. We recruit and enlist students regardless of race, creed, color or denomination. BSU does not simply have an open door policy, we go out and minister to students where they are, on their turf. If we find a group of students interested in Bible study Tuesday evening at 10:30, a leader is found, a dorm room or lounge is opened, or the BSU center is available. If there is a social ministry need and students are challenged with meeting that need, they give of their time and creativity because they know that need will not be met without their involvement and leadership. Folk music groups, Creative Worship, drama teams are a part of the BSU ministry because students demand it as one way to express their God-given talents and love for Christ. This is why students involved in BSU are excited about and feel a deep sense of commitment to each other and to the organization.

As a result, these students experience the Christian faith as real and as a viable life style for them. But when these BSUers graduate and seek a church that offers BSU styles of ministry where they can place their lives, believing it will make a difference, they are often disappointed and often lose interest in church and religion. So one of the questions of accountability we are beginning to hear is, "Where have all the active BSUers gone after graduation?" or "Is BSU preparing students for a life of service in our SBC churches?"

These questions are coming simply because we are fulfilling our call to minister to students where they are, when they are available, and to the needs they express. One answer to these questions being given in some parts of our Convention is that campus and student ministry is receiving a lowered priority.

It seems to me that there are several areas of accountability that are important for us to consider. If we address ourselves to at least these areas, local and state sources of our support will recognize in a new way our professional level of competency and it will stem the defensiveness many express in the face of accountability questions.

I

Our precursor role is expected by our denomination and demanded by our students. The role is like a two edged sword. On the one side, we are expected to be creative and innovative in our ministry, our teaching and our administration. We are expected to be up to date about new counseling and teaching methods. We are supposed to have read or at least know about the newest books on religion and about the newest trends in higher education. We are also expected to be the experimental proving ground for new forms of ministry. Relational Bible studies and Christian Growth Groups were standard components of our ministry long before they became the new wave in churches. Our BSU groups have for many years been integrated and we discussed openly the issues of racial equality, women in ministry, ecology, and war and peace. In the early 70's the Student magazine was publishing issues on abortion, organ transplants and homosexuality. Campus and student ministry has led our denomination and churches in method and subject matter because it was expected and demanded of us.

The other side of that sword comes with the criticism we some-

times receive because we are out there dealing with issues our churches have not yet had to face. The questions of accountability from some are saying we are too far ahead or away from our churches. Our response simply is that, "Our churches and denomination expect it and our students demand it if we are to remain relevant to their needs." Let us not hesitate to fulfill our role as precursors even at the risk of sometimes being too far ahead for we are also accountable to be creative and innovative. Our journal, *The Campus Minister*, is one open channel for sharing our precursor role and I hope more of you will be submitting articles in these areas so that we might rejoice and share together what is new and fresh in our ministry.

II

The prophetic role challenges us to speak a word of the Lord as we see it. We do not claim infinite or ultimate wisdom, only our God-given portion. And like the prophets of the Old Testament, a part of that wisdom is choosing the proper time, place and issue. One of those issues for some of us came a few years ago amidst the "Jesus Movement." Many of our churches and pastors were being persuaded that the Christian faith was only a series of emotional highs. They were seeing their youth respond to the calls from others to "Get high on Jesus rather than drugs." Many of you responded by analyzing that root needs of students causing them to respond to this gospel of emotion and spoke to churches and pastors' groups prophetically. I wrote an article published in our state Baptist paper, and was also carried in some others, entitled, "Do We Need Jesus Abuse Centers?"

Jesus abuse is the irresponsible use of Jesus and his message which manipulates persons into accepting truth, plays on the explosive emotions of youth, inducing them to do and say what they really do not feel and believe. In short, Jesus abuse is treating people as things using the name of Jesus to make it acceptable. . . .

If we are to help our youth who are caught up in the unhealthy and abusive aspects of the Jesus Movement, there are several immediate actions open to us. One immediate concern should be to stop the abuse of our youth by stopping the Jesus 'pusher' It is time for pastors and church leaders to stop encouraging this abuse of Jesus by their silence and to openly oppose those in the

Jesus Movement who are abusing our youth.

There is the need for church-sponsored and supported Jesus abuse centers. The youth who are being angered, depressed and disillusioned by the abusive aspects of the Jesus Movement need places and persons where they can receive spiritual rehabilitation and healing. ¹

The more contemporary movements of the Institute on Basic Youth Conflicts and Campus Crusade's "I Found It" campaign seem to call for some prophetic words of wisdom. Both offer simple solutions to some of life's difficult problems. This natural desire to want all in life to be simple and uncomplicated has caused these groups to offer oversimplifications. They have tried to package and market a system for making simple every problem and issue regardless of the complexities. Such a package is attractive but seldom the best or even the right solution.

Rather than seeking simple, neat and easy answers to life's problems, I suggest we accept their complexity. Only then can we focus on our God-given resources and gifts to deal creatively with these problems. What we need are more 'complexifiers' — people who will use their training, gifts and creativity to separate out the parts of the problem and then challenge the creativity in all of us to work on one part of the solution.

Simple answers are appealing, but they encourage tyranny, exploitation and dogmatism, all of which frustrate and block the creative human resources needed to meet the challenge of solving complex problems. So, let those with the gift of complexification help all of us discover and use our creative gifts to meet the challenge of difficult problems.

Being prophetic with the wisdom God has given us is a part of our accountability to God and his churches. We do not claim that our wisdom is infallible, but we do claim the right and obligation to speak it.

III

We will, in the third place, be held accountable that there be an internal and external consistency between our theology and our methodology. Many in our denomination seem to be concerned more with technique and method than with the theology which underlies

them. I believe that the future is going to be with those who do it the other way around and allow their methods to grow out of their theology. Theory with no implementation is useless. But to use methods or techniques to accomplish a goal without any undergirding theory or theology is a mark of professional incompetency. Our denomination has abundant techniques of "how to's" – how to grow bigger and better Sunday Schools and churches, how to develop a youth or mission program. Let us be concerned that the "how to's" we employ be grounded in biblical-theological constructs. We need those among us who will press the questions of the theological assumptions underlying how we do evangelism, missions, Bible study, etc.

For example, we Baptists have given strong emphasis to the cross of Jesus and His shed blood to illustrate the sacrificial love of God. Much of the attempt to move people to accept Christ and to serve in His church is based on cross theology. Because "Jesus paid it all" for us we are called to accept his sacrificial love on the cross. This is a valid biblical motif. But, as John Westerhoff of Duke Divinity School suggests, what if we began to emphasize resurrection theology along side of our cross theology. People could be then motivated to accept and serve Christ on the belief that through the resurrection they now possess God's power to become the person Christ showed they could be – caring, loving and forgiving persons. "What if in our worship, instead of only emphasizing our sin and our need for repentance, we also acknowledged that we have indeed been redeemed by the cross and the resurrection. As a gathered community we have come not only to confess our sin but also to celebrate the power of God to overcome sin and be God's people in the world."² Our accountability will be tested on the basis of the biblical and theological truths which undergird what we do in ministry and programming and how we do it.

IV

Finally, campus ministry must deal with staying in balance. This is not easy as we are annually called upon to promote and support emphases from our state offices and from SBC agencies. But we are all called to be ministers of the whole gospel. Evangelism is as important as discipling students. Bible studies are as important as social ministry projects. Retreats are as important as revival and music groups. To stress one part of the gospel to the neglect of another is to teach or preach a partial and therefore sub-Christian gospel. Tillich's ontological polarities of individuality and partici-

pation, form and dynamics, freedom and destiny help us to look at history and see how the imbalances of heresies and schism developed. Each was caused by stressing one part or one interpretation of the gospel.

The attraction of getting off balance is great for us because it seems a new religious movement or fad that attracts students in numbers is always around the corner. And many times we are challenged by some saying, "Why isn't BSU reaching students like group X or group Y?" And we often respond on a local, state or national level by scrambling to develop a BSU version of that latest fad or movement. But by the time we get it off the drawing boards and programmed, we all too often discover that our version does not get the same results. And we realize that many of those students caught up in that new movement have seen through it, finding it false, shallow or unable to fulfill what it promised. The students saw it was out of balance and gave it up. We are accountable for keeping our ministry in balance and avoiding fadistic movements or schemes that propogate a partial gospel. I am grateful to NSM and the balanced approach they offer students through the "Journey Inward – Journey Outward" model.

For the future of campus ministry or ministry with students to make a continued positive impact for Christ through our denomination, we must be ready to be accountable in at least these four areas. What say ye?

1. The Religious Herald, June 8, 1972

2. From a speech by John Westerhoff, III, made at Religious Education Banquet, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, October 24, 1978.