

# Crisis and Student Ministry

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This Easter was absolutely the worst I have ever had in my life. Leading up to it were a series of events. My wife had surgery and was at the groaning stages of recovery. My father had been in and out of the emergency center at the hospital; we didn't know whether he was going to live or not. We had a lot of difficulty in and around our state. And then Easter Sunday afternoon my younger daughter and I were driving to greet a new faculty member, Robert Cannon, and were broadsided by a California hit-and-run driver.

But, that really wasn't why it was a bad Easter. What made it a bad Easter was that I woke up on Easter Sunday morning having spent a rather sleepless night prior to a trustee meeting trying to figure out how to balance a budget and solve a number of problems. The Cooperative Program hadn't kept up with our growth inflation. Therefore our increase was only about half the inflation rate of the Bay Area; we needed to build a new library building and I had to figure out how to put that together when I'm not an architect, an engineer, or a finance person. I was so busy trying to determine what we should do in regard to a lot of those details that as I woke up that Easter Sunday morning, I realized I really hadn't given one thought to the Resurrection!

I remembered William Sangster, the great English preacher, who had awakened one Easter morning, suffering muscular atrophy to the point he couldn't speak. He asked for a pen and a piece of paper and he scrawled a note for his daughter which read, "How terrible it is to awake on Easter and not have a voice to shout, 'The Lord is risen!' How much more terrible to have a voice to shout, but not to know to say, 'The Lord is risen!'" I thought, "I'm worse off than either. I have voice and know, but I haven't."

Have you ever been there, so caught up in the routine of it all that you forget the purpose—involved in banquets, meetings, planning sessions, leasing buses, making arrangements for people, and figuring out how to staff what needs

to be done until one morning you wake up and realize you have forgotten the why of it?

I did what I always do when I hit the dips. I started calling friends. I called Jimmy Allen and explained my plight to him, and he laughed and said, "I was just about ready to call you!" He had recently moved from being the pastor at First Baptist Church, San Antonio, to being a denominational executive. I had warned him earlier, "Allen, you are in for absolutely the worst time of your life. There is nothing more terrible than leaving a good, warm, wonderful church and becoming a denominational executive."

He said when I called him, "You were really a prophet. I've been struggling with this myself. I remembered a man who used to work where my daddy worked in a Ford plant in East Dallas. The man was in charge of the electrical system. He didn't even work on the assembly line. He worked back in the room where they had all the wiring. Every once in a while, as he was pulling levers and checking wiring, he would wonder if it really made anything happen. When he began to bog down in the routine, he got out of his room and walked out to the assembly line to the end where the cars were coming off. He would watch them come off the line and be driven to the loading area; then he went back to his electrical room satisfied that indeed something was happening. It's important to get out of the room sometimes and take a look at the finished product, to realize something really is happening."

In preparing to speak to you I've been attempting to gain perspective, to see again clearly the value of ministry to students. I've done this by reviewing my own life as a student. When I entered college, I came from a church thoroughly segregated and prejudiced, but I wasn't aware of it. I went to a campus which at that time was also segregated, and my first encounter with the gospel's claim for **all** people was in the B.S.U. program. It came not so much because of somebody's theory or several hours of ethics, but because a student director brought into our group people of many colors and backgrounds and shared what the Bible had to say about God's love for all people. That was a pretty painful experience for me, as I recall.

I was a person who was newly discovering the wonders of the Bible and of the Christian faith. I was named (I don't even know if you have these anymore or not) Chairman of the Citizenship Committee. It was the first job I ever had in B.S.U. I didn't know what I was supposed to do. Bill Moyers and I got together and plotted some programs which upset a few people on campus. We put together a forum to help people discover what the issues were. Showing up on campus one day, at the invitation of our B.S.U. director, was a man who kept insisting that the Bible was not simply something to study; it was something to do. He kept talking about applying the gospel, and doing the truth. He stressed that it was important to believe the right doctrine, but that it was also important to behave in the right way; it was important to believe what was true, but important also to do the truth. After Foy Valentine got through speaking I said, "I want to talk to that man. I've never heard those things before. Not like that anyway."

We huddled together in the B.S.U. Center back room and as we talked I began to discover dimensions of the gospel which I had never encountered before. It was an association which led me to a major in ethics, work with the Christian Life Commission, and determine to try to do the truth as well as speak it.

None of this would have ever happened to me if it had not been for people such as you. You are able to stretch the minds and spirits more than most pastors are. You are able to bring students to confront truth as it is and not like some of us ecclesiastical types wish it were. If you ever advocate the status quo or the doing of business as usual or allowing people to stay comfortably in their rut, you will have forsaken the special ministry to which God has called you. It's not primarily a cerebral ministry; it's essentially a person formation ministry which along the way involves thought. But mainly it involves bringing people to confront persons who are mind-mending—in local campus settings, at Ridgecrest, Glorieta, and state conferences, and in many other places.

Sometimes when you grow weary and perhaps on Easter forget you have a message to shout, remember that it is put-

ting all the pieces together that ultimately produces a finished product. (Now don't misunderstand me; I realize no one is ever really finished.) What you are doing is wonderful. As one who has been touched by the lives of people who are committed to student ministry I testify that without what is happening in Southern Baptist lives engaged in student ministry, we would be a denomination of Neanderthals. That means that often you are out on the cutting or growing edge where there is some risk; people in your state conventions may not understand and they may not like what you do. But part of the process of growing and forming people is that sort of stretching, and I hope in the midst of the battle you'll never grow weary of it to the point that you quit it. Just go find a retreat somewhere and recharge your batteries.

In that process of formation, in dealing with the ethics of the eighties, although it is important to know what the issues are going to be in regard to family, economics, politics, war and peace, genetics, and other things, the most crucial and basic issue has to do with authority and the "ought" of life. The issues will change to some degree more rapidly than sometimes we are able to comprehend. But you can help students get a grasp on who is in control in their lives, where authority resides, and what they ought to do. It is at the point of doing that most people fall short. We know far more to do than we ever get around to doing. The basic task in regard to the eighties may well be understanding authority and motivating to action.

I guess I feel a little more concern about the college scene than I have before because we are sending our older daughter off to college this year. I find myself writing frantic letters to the B.S.U. leader on what I think he ought to do and sending epistles to the pastors of the local churches—the sort of thing which I'm sure many of you get from time to time. Not that I lack confidence; I just want to make sure the ministry of person formation is done very well.

Let me state, not theoretically, what I would like to see happen on campuses, but practically what I feel should happen regarding persons who are coming to you for shaping and forming, for growing and stretching. I think I am more

aware of this sacred trust now at Seminary than I was earlier. If God calls people and sends them to Seminary for equipping, we are to take that task with great seriousness. We are charged with eternal kinds of commitments. So it is with the people God brings your way. That is a lot of responsibility, my friend, for a life to be placed in your hands for shaping and molding, for stretching and forming. Not that you are totally responsible, but you, probably more than any other, have opportunities to help these persons.

The crisis of the eighties is not going to be family life or genetic control or whether we have outerspace farming. It is not going to be war and peace, or economics, or whether we'll have the demise of the two party system. The basic issue of ethics in the eighties is the issue of authority, of "Who says so." When I was moving to California I had a lot of people tell me, "Well, you know as far as Southern Baptists go, you are moving out of the mainstream." And I laughed and said, "That's right. When you get out of the mainstream, you get into the cutting edge." Well, I thought that was just a cute response, but I found out it wasn't so cute when I got there. Marin County has been identified by sociologists as the beginning point of numerous major trends in the United States for the past twenty years. That is where I live now. I look out across the Bay toward the University of California at Berkeley and down the way to Stanford and realize that in academics and politics I am in a place that seems to be an indicator of what is to come. Well, if that is the case, it is pretty obvious what is to come—a crisis in authority.

Now I don't mean violating the law. (They violate the law in the rural flats of West Texas.) Or people who are disrespectful of authority. (I had choice words to say about my parents and teachers when I was going through school, too.) The problem is having no concept of who is in charge in the world, no ultimate commitments, none. We have a series of articles in our local paper about interviews with high school students; two or three of them have been done on morals, values, and religion. It's pretty frightening when you begin to realize that you are living in a culture where for many there is no commitment to a source of authority beyond

oneself. You can call it anarchy or you can call it a lot of different things, but what it comes down to is a life style where God is removed and a kind of basic secular humanism takes His place, a life style which doesn't lend itself to ultimate value commitments. You are left with nothing except the individual as the source of authority, with "me-ism."

I perceive the greatest crisis that you have on your campus and that I have even in a Seminary setting where people are supposed to believe in God is summarized in questions such as, "Who is in control? Who says so? Why should I? Is there anything right? Is there anything wrong, apart from some kind of personal relativism?" We in our seminary classrooms have sometimes pretended that the battle between science and religion is dead. It is not dead. It hasn't even been fought yet. We haven't had enough of the input of science over enough generations to even know what all the issues are, but give us time and we will know.

The crisis shows itself in several ways, it seems to me. One is in a kind of panic response by those who have some rational capacity and who realize that there must be some source of authority beyond self: "Good Lord, if I am the source of authority, we really are in trouble." Reacting to the clear danger of being one's own ultimate authority, a person tends to reach for the most authoritative religious, economic and political structures available, which seems to be why, even in our part of the country, there is such a tremendous move toward authoritarianism.

Authoritarianism shows itself in religions such as the Moonies. One of the largest Moonies groups in the country is right up the road from us. Many of the people who relate to the movement are bright, able to relate and communicate, and they give themselves to a system of authoritarianism. We had a debate on our campus a few weeks ago between the President of the Unification church and Professor Bill Hendricks. I'll have to say I don't know who won, but Hendricks is not a Moonie so I judge it was at least a stand-off. I'm amazed frankly, at the number of people who will put themselves in the hands of some authoritarian group as if to say, "It is just too heavy a load for me to carry to be told that I am my own ultimate authority. Please be my authority."

When I see people willing to give themselves to a religion of an authoritarian approach with a chain of command emphasis it makes me believe that when the Moslems really do gear up their mission effort this country is a sitting duck for Islam. If Islam can ever be separated from the oil problems and become an option for a religion or a way of life, or whatever, I have a feeling that many people may capitulate to Islam.

I was in an international student conference about ten years ago, not far from where we are right now, talking with a young Moslem who was a student in this country. We were discussing Christian missions and he said to me: "Now let me tell you something. One of these days soon we are going to have the money that you capitalists have had, and when we get it, you are going to see Moslem missions at work. Let me tell you another thing. You are going to experience what we have experienced in the third world where people have converted to western capitalist Christianity because it seemed to be working in materialistic terms. When we begin to dominate in terms of economics many will convert to Islam because it will then be the successful religion." I laughed, showing how bright I am. He was accurate. Economics of the world may soon be controlled by Islamic cultures. Materialistic success, as an indication of blessing, coupled with a yearning for authority, makes a lot of people bright prospects for conversion to Islam. Adding to the tragedy is that there is not one Southern Baptist out of a thousand that knows anything about Islam. Check seminary catalogues, Baptist college catalogues, denominational programs. We don't even know what Baptists believe much less what Moslems believe. The crisis of authority shows up in many different ways.

The second crisis is that of finding authority and then not doing something about it. As a Christian my authority is God. God has revealed Himself in Christ. We do what we do because God has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ, through His Word, and through the ministry of His Spirit. But then a question comes in light of that: to quote a book title, "How Then Shall We Live?" That book doesn't answer the question raised by its title, not at all, but it is a legitimate question. With God as our authority and the Bible as the

Word of God, "How Then Shall We live?" This crisis is not so much in belief as in integrity of character.

A big issue of the eighties is not going to be so much a philosophical concept of authority as the issue of integrity and character. I'm discovering an interesting thing about being a part of institutions: institutions tend to trap you, calling for their own existence sometimes at the undermining of personal conviction. I think people in business structures feel that. People in churches feel that. People in government feel that. I think that is why students tend to be anti-institutional, and you know how anti-institutional they are. They are trying to extract themselves from the institutions which must exist if we are to exist in our society. We can't exist apart from them. And yet how do we maintain our integrity as individuals to do and to say the truth when it seems to threaten the institution? Students are going to be looking to you as a model as how that can be done.

If they ever go to an annual associational meeting or attend a business conference where you are having to deal with student budgets and other things, students will watch how you behave. As they see you deal with people from denominational offices who write the checks, they are going to be listening carefully to how you talk. They have the feeling that most of us, when it comes right down to it, sell out to the system. And their honesty is painful. In our realism (or is it cynicism?) we know they will sell out to the system, too, someday—many of them anyway. But that doesn't make it right. An issue of the eighties is the integrity of the individual as related to the Southern Baptist organization and institution. You've experienced it. We all have.

I hope you can put mind and thought to the crisis to help all of us as well as the students who come your way. Don't be so idealistic as to think we can convert the systems, they never have been and never shall be in a sinful world. But how do we live within those systems committed to the integrity of doing the truth as we know it? The Southern Baptist Convention is caught up in the struggle over system and institution. I pray somehow we will go through it with our integrity intact and our institutions somehow clarified in their commitments.

As you affect the generation of students coming through, you will shape what God has put together as a Southern Baptist Convention in the next ten, twenty, thirty years. So, for the sake of our institution, the Southern Baptist Convention, do it well. For the sake of individuals, do it well. And to the glory of God, do it well. It is important work you are about.