

Campus Ministry: Calling/Profession

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“Professionals, they don’t seem to care!” says Goldie Hawn’s character of state department officials in the movie “Protocol.” The late George Buttrick used to ask in class, “When you grieve do you want a professional or a pastor friend with you?”¹ Such statements capture the strong resistance many people have to professionals, particularly ministers as professionals. Ironically many ministers would see Buttrick as the consummate professional. Examining whether ministry in general, and campus ministry in particular, is a calling/profession is the focus of this article.

Definitions: Calling and Profession

In two dictionaries, The American Heritage and Webster’s Collegiate,² calling is first defined as “a strong inner urge or impulse.” Webster’s adds “toward a particular course of action especially when accompanied by conviction of divine impulse.” The second definition in both dictionaries is “an occupation, profession, career or vocation.” In defining profession both characterize it as “an occupation, vocation or calling requiring specialized knowledge or training and advance or intensive academic study.” American Heritage adds that this advanced study follows training in the liberal arts or sciences. The salient features are “inner urge” for calling and “advanced study” for profession, yet the two nouns are also used almost interchangeably, a reflection of how our society is not precise in its understanding or usage of the terms.

Ministry as Calling

Henlee Barnette in his book *Has God Called You?* writes of a general and a specific call. “Every Christian is called to be a minister regardless of how he (sic) earns his daily bread.”³ Thus, the general call to be a minister is to every Christian, perhaps the key focus of Barnett’s book.

Yet Barnette also traces the Biblical and historical practices of Christians, and Baptists in particular, in recognizing a specific

call to various roles of ministry needed by the church. Of the specific call to the pastorate Barnette writes, "Throughout all their history Southern Baptists have consistently held that the pastor must have a distinctive and divine call from God to preach the gospel and to shepherd the flock."⁴ Although Barnette does not specifically mention campus ministry, he notes the Sunday School Board's department of church-related vocations' key role "in defining the concept of Christian calling and recruiting personnel for church-related vocations"⁵ as the concept of special calling to ministry expanded beyond the pastorate. Barnette also emphasizes the divine and human side of the call. "Both God and church are involved in the calling of a person to a church position."⁶

Problems With Calling and Profession

After tracing changes in the Baptist clergy from the calling out and ordination of an unpaid member by a specific church for that church only to a general ordination of an individual to whom a church paid a salary, Barnette writes:

Such changes created the necessity for recognizing the difference between "call" and "profession" in the ministry. Demand for a trained ministry and the establishment of theological seminaries ushered the ministry into the class of the professions. Dr. Householder points out that historically, no clear line can be drawn between minister and laity. Yet for practical purposes, "calling" must continue to be turned into "professions." The minister as "profession" came out of the demands of the ministry as "calling" and yet it is here that most problems arise. When the minister tended toward "profession," he tended to become separated from his people. A class inevitably grew up. The "call" then became the private possession of this class. Out of this grows one of the greatest danger: the loss of identity with the people.⁷

In a similar vein in his book *Profession: Minister*, James Glasse writes:

Daniel Calhoun in his fascinating historical study of professions in American history suggests four fears people have about professionals: (1) professionals are fee grabbers, hirelings, and self-servers; (2) they possess dangerous skills and powers—the surgeon can cut, the physician can poison, the priest can excommunicate, the lawyer can convict; (3) they possess dangerous knowledge both in the sense that they know too much and

know something about me; and (4) they have a monopoly on skill, knowledge, and power and won't turn it loose. Ogden Nash has put the sentiment sharply, and no less seriously, in a poem.

The doctor gets you when you're born,
The preacher, when you marry,
And the lawyer lurks with costly clerks
If too much on you carry.
Professional men, they have no cares;
Whatever happens, they get theirs . . .
Hard times for them contain no terrors;
Their income springs from human errors.

The minister who identifies himself as a professional runs the risk of incurring hostility and suspicion. Anti-professionalism expresses itself in the church as anti-clericalism not because church people have anything special against the clergy. It is simply that in the church the clergy are the professionals at hand.⁸

On the other hand, Glasse writes:

A professional career is essentially a *calling*, a life devoted to "good works." The term *calling* literally means a divine summons to undertake a course of action. Originally, it was employed to refer to religious activity. The Protestant Reformation widened its meaning to include economic activity as well . . . Presumably, then, any occupational choice may be a response to a divine summons. . . Professional work is never viewed solely as a means to an end; it is an end in itself . . . Devotion to the work itself imparts to professional activity . . . a total personal involvement. The work life invades the afterwork life . . . To the professional person his work becomes his life. Hence the act of embarking upon a professional career is similar in some respects to entering a religious order.⁹

In relation to campus ministry in particular, Kenneth Underwood wrote twenty years ago in his foreword to Phillip Hammond's *The Campus Clergyman*:

What the author, as a sociologist, see at once as the basic problem of the campus ministry is its inability to establish viable institutional alternatives to the traditional one which its most influential members have rejected and which are expressive of its deepest theological convictions. The crisis is particularly manifest in its ambiguous and confused professional expectations and the poverty of the churches' provision for its training and evaluation.

The need for objective, critical study of campus clergymen—the need to see what patterns of ministry have actually emerged and what factors and events influence their development—has increased in every denomination during the past decade. But the issues which this study raises with such rigor and particularly are also historic and central to the whole movement of Protestantism. For what has obviously not yet emerged for the Protestant movement is a theory of profession and calling which consciously opens up for the clergy the major, alternative types of social action in the modern world and how these are to be expressed and related in the varied careers of clergymen in their work with laity. The question of the nature of Christian vocation or calling, which became for the “founding fathers” of Protestantism the focus of its argument with Roman Catholicism, takes on new urgency and form in a study of campus ministers. How do various professional resources, theories, and skills become instruments of Christian faith, serviceable not only as the source of ultimate hope but also serviceable in meeting the needs of people in their particular situation?¹⁰

Rejection of the Dichotomy

I do not accept the dichotomy many see between calling and profession for ministers for the following reasons:

1. Many people in other professions feel just as called and still develop as professionals.
2. Our calling is no more important to God's kingdom than other professions.
3. Many ministers use their calling as a point of separation from people in general and other professions in particular because they see the ministry as more important.
4. Professional development can enhance the gifts and abilities of anyone who is called.
5. Not all ministers feel a special divine calling, but feel the same inner urging as many in other professions experience.
6. Professional standards would weed out more incapable ministers than only voicing a calling does.

Therefore, I support ministers in general, and campus ministers in particular, being seen as professionals and becoming more professional in their practice of their calling.

Ministry as Profession

Such a position is not easy to carry out. Glasse writes:

Is the Protestant ministry a profession? Some say no—and for two different reasons. First, the ministry is not a profession; it is holy business. The clergy are too good for the professions; to associate the ministry with the professions is to charge failure, disgrace, and dishonor. Second, the ministry is not a profession; it is amateur business. The clergy are not good enough for the professions. Van Harvey of Southern Methodist University has suggested that the trouble with the clergy “is not that it is professional but that it is not professional enough; that it is ingrown, mediocre, concerned with the wrong things, unwise in its allocation of resources and naive in its conception of the problems of modern man. In short, . . . it is amateur.”

Others say yes—and for the wrong reasons. They are eager to associate the ministry with the professions to claim honor, dignity, and privilege. In each case the question is put anxiously and answered emotionally. The question of whether or not the ministry is, in fact a profession need not produce more heat than light. It is a sensible question. It deserves a sensible answer.¹¹

People who study professions have a hard time agreeing on a definition. Most seem to use either a static or dynamic concept. In a static concept there are certain canons or criteria defining a profession against which an occupation is measured to verify its attainment of professional status. In a dynamic concept there are characteristics of a profession which members of an occupation need to be moving toward continually examining.

Static Definitions

Three static definition lists with their most important or overriding point are listed below. The first list is from Abraham Flexner; the second from A.M. Carr-Saunders and P.A. Wilson; and, the third from James Glasse.¹²

FLEXNER, 1915	CARR-SAUNDERS & WILSON, 1933	GLASSE 1968
1. Intellectual activity	Specialized intellectual training	Educated
2. Knowledge based	Acquired technique	Expert
3. Practical application	Specialized service rendered	Institutional
4. Teachable technique	Fixed remuneration	Responsible
5. Organized body	Sense of responsibility	Dedicated
6. Altruistic motivation	Built up association	
Professional Spirit	Possession of a Technique	Dedication to the Values of the Profession

Glasse then writes of the professional perspective as an illustration of his definition. It is as follows:

THE PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE—GLASSE, 1968¹³

Professional =	Educated +	Expert +	Institutional +	Responsible +	Dedicated
Name of Professional	Body of Knowledge	Cluster of Skills	Standard or Ethics	Institution in Society	Value or Purpose
Doctor	Medicine	Medicine	Oath	Hospital	Health
Lawyer	Law	Law	Canon	Court	Justice
Teacher	Education	Teaching	Certification	School	Learning
Clergyman	Divinity	Ministry	Vows	Church	Love of God and Neighbor

Dynamic Concept

Cyril Houle, in his book on *Continuing Learning and the Professions*, writes of a more fluid concept or definition of a profession. The appropriate characteristics are clustered in three categories as follows:

DYNAMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROFESSION— HOULE, 1980¹⁴

The Conceptual Characteristic

1. Concerned with clarifying its defining function

The Performance Characteristics

2. Mastery of theoretical knowledge
3. Capacity to solve problems
4. Use of practical knowledge
5. Self-enhancement

The Collective Identity Characteristics

6. Formal training
7. Credentialing
8. Creation of a sub-culture
9. Legal reinforcement
10. Public acceptance
11. Ethical practice
12. Penalties
13. Relations to other vocations
14. Relations to users of service

Comparing Ministry to the Various Definitions

Although most people would list the ministry as a profession, comparing it to either the static definitions or dynamic concept raise some serious questions about that opinion. In relation to the static definitions at least three problems arise. First of all, many denominations, but especially Southern Baptists, have no formal education or knowledge requirements for its ministers. Secondly, the technique in which a minister is expert is ill-defined or poorly focused, a reflection of the generalist nature of ministry and the diversity of types of ministerial positions. Thirdly, the organization of ministers into professional bodies is almost non-existent, especially across denominational lines. Furthermore, no real self-governing authority exists within or without denominational lines.

In relation to the dynamic concept problems seem to exist in all three categories of characteristics. Although many individual

ministers struggle with what their function is, many individual ministers seem to be sure of their function. Although various scholars may address the question, no organized, comprehensive, on-going effort is being made to clarify ministry's defining function. The performance and collective identity characteristics have the same problems mentioned with the static definitions on technique and organizing issues respectively, only more so since more characteristics are listed here. More importantly, I do not perceive any ground swell of desire among ministers to move toward these conceptual, performance and collective identity characteristics of a profession.

Internal Crisis

In addition to whatever definitional problems ministry as profession may have there are internal crises of identification and stress which both reflect the professional question and inhibit dealing with it. In 1970 T.E. Brown wrote an article on "Vocational Crises and Occupational Satisfaction among Ministers." Houle cites this article and lists Brown's finding of seven crises among ministers. They are:

BROWN, 1970:

1. The crisis of integrity, in which the minister no longer believes in the creeds of his church.
2. The crisis of power, in which the minister feels that neither he nor his church has significant community influence.
3. The crisis of capacity, in which the minister feels personally inadequate to deal with the situation in which he finds himself, either because of his own ineffectiveness or because he is caught in a social situation with which he cannot cope.
4. The crisis of failure, often felt by older ministers, in which the individual sees himself on a downward path that will lead to a sad termination of his career.
5. The crisis of destination, in which the minister does not know how to plan and advance his career.
6. The crisis of role, in which the minister cannot resolve satisfactorily his indecision about whether to be primarily spiritual leader, executive, shepherd of flock, ritualist, or the player of some other part in the drama of religion.

7. The crisis of meaning which, in a sense, pervades all the others because it suggests that the profession has no place in the modern world.¹⁵

Although each of these crises reflect professional ambiguity and inhibit dealing with the professional question, the crises of capacity, role and meaning are particularly devastating. Furthermore, they seem just as applicable today as in 1970.

Campus Ministry as Profession

Whatever problems exist with ministry as a profession seem even more acute for campus ministry as a profession or sub-profession, particularly among Southern Baptists. In the preface to *The Campus Clergyman* Phillip Hammond wrote:

Why should an occupation, after more than a half-century, still look like a new endeavor? Why, after several generations of practitioners and many generations of clients, should it be unable to define its task clearly or hold on to its recruits firmly? Add the fact that many persons wish there were less ambiguity in the occupation and that it had a lower personnel turnover, and we are confronted with a puzzle. That puzzle—its nature, causes, and consequences—is the subject of this book.¹⁶

Although written twenty years ago, the sentiments would seem to still be applicable, perhaps even more puzzling.

Southern Baptist Campus Ministry Compared to the Definitions

If one uses Glasse's static definition of a profession, campus ministry falls short at all points, especially as practiced by Southern Baptists. We have no universal education requirement or expectation. Even though the Master of Divinity is the most common degree held, specialized courses in campus ministry often are not a part of that education. Such specialized courses are often discounted, if not decried, by both campus ministers and those who hire campus ministers, the state directors. We have no defined cluster of skills or ethical standards. We are responsible to two institutions, church (denomination and one or more local churches) and university, and often feel caught between the two with support from neither. Although we hope all of us are dedicated to love of God and neighbor, how that value or purpose is lived out as a campus minister differs significantly among us. We would differ on our title (BSU Director,

Director of Student Ministries, Campus Minister, etc.), on our focus (students, faculty/staff, issues, church, university, etc.), on our purpose (evangelism, missions, community building, nurture, etc.) and on our style (discipler, enabler, administrator, counselor, worship leader, prophet, etc.). It hardly sounds like a profession, more like a hodgepodge or smorgasbord of endeavors.

If one uses Houle's dynamic concept, the problems also exist. Campus ministry compares to the conceptual, performance and collective identity characteristics almost as unfavorably as it does to Glasse's definition. Although some efforts have been made to move us in the direction of all three characteristics, results have been limited. These efforts have often been resisted from both within and without our ranks. The truth is we disagree significantly about who we are (conceptual), what we should do (performance) and how we should organize to do it (collective identity). Perhaps this should not be surprising in such a diverse denomination which is waging a serious debate about how diverse it should be, but it is extremely prohibitive to the forming or enhancing of a profession.

Campus Ministry in General Compared to the Definitions

Campus ministers from other denominations or religious faiths will have to decide where they differ from this Southern Baptist comparison to the definitions. Although campus ministry in other denominations and religious faiths may experience these comparison problems in varying degrees, I believe the problems exist across the board. Yet we experience little professional contact with each other beyond the local campus level. It is not clear we even desire it beyond that. All of this points out one of Hammond's main barriers to professionalization of campus ministry—denominationalism.¹⁷

What Has Been Written

Very little has been written about campus ministers at all, let alone about us as professionals. Phillip Hammond's *The Campus Clergyman* is the only major work. Kenneth Underwood, in the famous Danforth study, *The Church, The University and Social Policy*, wrote about our roles as priest, prophet, pastor

and king. Parker Palmer has written various articles. Yet, beyond these few the horizon is bare.

Perhaps various denominations have done in-house studies. Art Driscoll, retired from National Student Ministries, did some studies on educational preparation and skills needed by Southern Baptist campus ministers. Such denominational studies clearly are not widely circulated outside their denomination and perhaps not even within. So, their help is marginal in the development of the profession.

Hammond concluded two decades ago:

The campus ministry thus far has failed to institutionalize. For a period of six decades, Protestants have conducted a ministry to higher education, but they have not succeeded in establishing a pattern of activity to which persons can easily commit themselves for a lifetime career, and about which there is little ambiguity. However, since the cost of institutionalization includes some loss of flexibility and inventiveness, and since frequent responses to ambiguity are innovative thinking and ingenious adjustment, it may be that the sacrifice at these points is considered too costly for the return.

Moreover, the failure to institutionalize has been largely an "internal" failure wherein campus ministers—not others—have paid the larger price. With the possible exception of some chaplaincies, higher education certainly is little concerned about or made uncomfortable by the ambiguity and rapid turnover of campus clergy in its midst. True, higher education may feel benefited by sustained, established campus ministries, but it need not feel handicapped when those ministries lack continuity and establishment. And from the standpoint of whole denominations, just the *presence* of a campus ministry—irrespective of its turnover and ambiguity—serves a number of functions. It provides: (1) an additional device for recruiting clergymen, (2) a haven for clergymen too "radical" for the parish structure, (3) another means of alignment (along with seminaries) between church and intellectual centers, and (4) a means of routing innovation into the church via campus clergymen who return to the parish, students drawn into church life, and the leadership campus ministers can more readily give to "radical" causes, such as (in our day) civil-rights protests and the ecumenical movement.

But as we have seen in foregoing chapters, campus ministers themselves, by a great majority, desire less ambiguity in their occupation; and denominations are hopeful that turnover can be reduced. Also, though it has been clear from the beginning of this analysis that "effectiveness" of the campus ministry is not to

be equated with its institutionalization, we discovered a relationship between shared expectations and at least self-assigned effectiveness. It might be reasonable, then, to anticipate some improvement in the quality of ministries on campus should there be an increase in shared expectations and a reduction in turnover. Put in other words, though clearly an institutionalized role is not necessarily more effective, it is likely that some degree of institutionalization is a necessary precondition for effectiveness to be more than accidental. The instances of effective campus ministries, we are saying, have been accidents—the results of coincidental coming together of man, campus, and church.¹⁸

Other than updating for inclusive language the analysis seems to still hold.

In discussing the future of campus ministry Hammond wrote:

As members of the clergy, campus ministers already are professionals, of course, so by suggesting “professionalization” as a potential solution to the structural strains in their specialized occupation we do not mean to get embroiled in a logomachy. The definition of a profession is not uniform in the social sciences, and differences within the clergy or between the clergy and others are probably even less uniform. Nevertheless, two core characteristics seem to stand out: (1) specialized training in some abstract body of knowledge, and (2) a service, or altruistic, orientation toward practice. Professionalization of the campus ministry, beyond the degree to which it already shares these characteristics with the clergy generally, would involve, therefore, at least its *own* specialized training in its *own* abstract body of knowledge—apart from other clergy.

But more than this—professionalizing groups tend to take on some or all of the following characteristics:

- (1) determination of their own standards of training;
- (2) licensure requirement;
- (3) manning of licensing boards by members of the profession;
- (4) freedom from lay evaluation and control;
- (5) strong identification and affiliation by members with each other;
- (6) expectation that the profession is a terminal occupation.

Professionalization of the campus ministry, then not only means the development of special skills and special training, in some measure distinct from those of parish clergy, but also means that campus ministers will set their own standards, evaluate themselves, identify themselves as campus clergy, and view their

occupation as a lifelong career. Whether one wants to call the result a separate profession, or a subprofession, or a structurally differentiated segment of an existing profession, is immaterial. The fact is that a process involving some or all of the above characteristics could solve the campus ministry's problem of institutionalization. What is the prognosis?

Our discussion of borrowed and indigenous expectations and commitment in the campus ministry indicates the potentiality for professionalization. A sizable sector of present-day clergymen on campus have had specialized training and do have a differentiated conception of their role. They happen also to be more likely to conduct innovative (that is, differentiated) ministries. Moreover, they are more committed to the idea of a campus ministry. As incipient "professionals," therefore, they represent a core in the professionalization process. *This* aspect of the occupation need not change; it already has fastened onto theological changes going on around it. Problematic are *other* aspects: university and denominational acknowledgment. Since lack of acknowledgment now impedes institutionalization, but since acknowledgment is not amenable to manipulation, the question is whether the effects of its absence can be neutralized. Such neutralization is clearly one of the functions of professional associations.¹⁹

Hammond then lists factors favorable and unfavorable to such a professionalization. They are:²⁰

Unfavorable

1. Denominationalism—campus ministry's boundaries must take precedence over boundaries between denominations.
2. Meager proportion of campus ministers who recognize the structural importance to themselves of autonomy from church and college.
3. Nature of its present specialized training—minimal, meager in content, little sense of professional identity.
4. Minority of campus ministers desire to develop and articulate a theological basis for the campus ministry.
5. Minority of campus ministers desire to develop own personnel bureau.

Favorable

1. Momentum already built up.
2. Favorable sentiments of its present practitioners.
3. Significant approval of an ecumenical campus ministry by campus ministers.
4. Core campus ministers (ones most likely to remain) have strongest desires for professionalization.
5. Cooperative efforts among campus ministers on the local campus level.
6. Uniting professional efforts already in existence.

Hammond concluded by saying it was an open question whether professionalization would happen. Although much has happened in twenty years the question still seems open at best, and answered negatively at worst.

Conclusion

If we believe the question of professionalization is still open, we can try to encourage the process in two ways—individually and collegially. Individually we can expand our skills and knowledge through continuing education and advanced degree opportunities while encouraging other campus ministers to do likewise. My own dilemma is finding ways to make use of my current skills and knowledge, let alone deciding what additional training I need. As I look at other campus ministers I see no coherent pattern to their continuing or advanced education either.

We can try to encourage the process collegially. Within the denomination this can be done through ASBCM and training opportunities provided by NSM. Beyond Southern Baptists, organizations such as the National Campus Ministry Association (NCMA) and the now defunct National Institute of Campus Ministry (NICM) provide regional and national opportunities which are across denominational and religious faith lines. Among Southern Baptists, however, we did not support NICM in great numbers, few seem to even know of NCMA, ASBCM still has a membership composed of much less than half of our full time campus ministers and NSM, although making new promises about support of professional development for campus ministers, seems to be diluting its services by its ever broadening definition of who does campus ministry (student ministry, student work or BSU work, depending on the philosophy and nomenclature currently acceptable politically).

Prognosis

When I look at all this my prognosis is that campus ministry really is not a profession, or likely to become one in the near future, particularly among Southern Baptists. Yet I still believe I am a professional trying to be more so. So the dilemma continues.

For those of us who make campus ministry our career (occupation/calling/vocation) and wish for it to be a profession, maybe we should view our current status as the beginning stages of the professionalization process. From any other viewpoint we have experienced a miscarriage or abortion of a profession. Regardless, I imagine most of us, wisely or not, will keep on doing what we do as long as we believe it is worthwhile, for in the words of the Rev. Will B. Dunn, my favorite character of Doug Marlette's *Kudzu*, "Human relations is my . . . business . . . field . . . life."²¹

NOTES

1. From the writer's classroom experience as a student of George Buttrick.
2. *American Heritage Dictionary*, 1976, and *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1963.
3. Henlee Barnette, *Has God Called You?*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969), p. 128.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 119
5. *Ibid.*, p. 121
6. *Ibid.*, p. 124
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119
8. James D. Glasse, *Profession: Minister*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1968), pp. 78-79.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26
10. Phillip E. Hammond, *The Campus Clergyman*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966), pp. viii-ix.
11. Glasse, p. 31
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36, 38
13. *Ibid.*, p. 40
14. Cyril O. Houle, *Continuing Learning in the Professions*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980), pp. 35-71.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 109
16. Hammond, p. xiii
17. *Ibid.*, p. 143
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 143-149
20. *Ibid.*, 143-149
21. Doug Marlette, *Preacher*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), pp. 11, 52, 85.

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