

# Ministry In Higher Education: A Presbyterian Theological Perspective

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*The heavens proclaim God's righteousness;  
and all the peoples behold God's glory.  
All worshippers of images are put to shame  
who make their boast in worthless idols;  
all gods bow down before God.  
Zion hears and is glad,  
and the daughters of Judah rejoice,  
because of thy judgments, O God.  
For thou, O Lord, art most high over all the earth;  
thou art exalted far above all gods.*

*Psalm 97:6-7*

*I have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, neither messenger of Heaven nor monarch of earth, neither what happens today nor what may happen tomorrow, neither a power from on high nor a power from below, nor anything else in God's whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!*

*Romans 8:38-39 (Phillips)*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since its beginnings in the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, the Presbyterian Church has been deeply involved in the world of higher education. But as the Church and the University are both living, changing institutions, the nature of that involvement never remains static. If we, as Presbyterians sent by our Church into the world of higher education, are to remain both faithful and effective in our witness, we must seek constantly to reappropriate our own theological traditions in the light of our changing world.

We minister within our universities and colleges because of our conviction that God's loving concern encompasses the whole world: all persons, all institutions, all areas of human activity. Yet we discover that all of us, Church and University, individuals and communities, live our lives in a climate of fear more than of confidence. We place our trust not in the God who stands at the beginning and the end of the universe, but in a multiplicity of lesser gods, idols which we erect as the foundations of our security and our identity. Our lives and activities, as persons, as institutions, as nations, are rent by tensions among our conflicting loyalties to all our little gods. The current fragmentation of our own culture, and the growing power of "interest group politics," are just two clear results of this tendency.

## II. THE WORLD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

As Presbyterians we affirm our special responsibility as witnesses to the sovereignty of the God whose grace is at work in all the world, including the world of higher education. So more particularly in our colleges and universities. We must seek to *understand* these idols and their devotees, not simply to condemn them, for we, all of us, stand among them.

We find ourselves in a world where *privatism* is a major object of commitment. Many students, especially those of traditional college age, enter the world of higher education with little sense of purpose or direction, with considerable doubt about their own identity as persons, and little hope for their own future. Many see college study as a way of getting ahead individually: getting a better job, a bigger income or higher social status. Feeling powerless in a complex and interdependent world, they see education as a way to gain power, at least over their own lives, and perhaps over other persons as well. Cer-

tainly a major task of higher education is the empowerment of persons, yet that new power should be accompanied by a growing sense of commitment to other persons, to service and participation in the wider human community.

We find ourselves in a world of *heightened tribalisms*. This reflects in part an awareness of the authentic human need for a positive sense of ethnic and racial identity. Yet this sense of identity is often sought by a denial of the worth of other groups and an exclusive allegiance to our own race from our concern. Higher education does aim to lead us into deeper appreciation of our loyalties to various groups, but this must become a critical awareness which also leads us to wider loyalties beyond the exclusivity of those narrow "tribal" commitments.

We find ourselves in a world where *nationalism* appears as the dominant form of "tribal" idolatry. While movements for liberation are often linked to nationalism, those who hold power, both in the dominant and in the developing nations, use that power to suppress any opposition to their narrowly defined self-interest. Military force is seen as the solution to conflicts, even at the risk of nuclear holocaust. Higher education is in large part harnessed to research which assists the military forms of power, while students and faculty are becoming uncritically "patriotic" in their nationalism, and little attention is given to the moral dimensions of the uses of national power. More than half of our national scientific research is now war-related, and this affects the range of teaching and research that is available to students, especially at the graduate level.

We find ourselves in a world where *technique* has become a new god, offering the hope that all problems can be solved by scientific and technological means. This technological orientation leads to an assumption that there are no moral limits to human power, that what *can* be done, *should* be done, with little regard for long-term consequences. Questions of value and of meaning become secondary even in our universities, especially when the liberal arts begin to fade from the curriculum.

In such a world, our universities have moved increasingly toward providing a *specialized, utilitarian education* which expands our personal and technical power while leaving us largely ignorant of other cultures, of the delicate balances of the biosphere, and of the religious and moral traditions that have provided the foundations of our own culture. Smaller liberal-

arts colleges, such as most of those related to the Presbyterian Church, feel increasing pressure to compete in the marketplace for students who seek "job-training" rather than some understanding of what it means to live as responsible persons in the "global village."

One additional factor must be mentioned which has profound effects on our task, even though it does not reflect a problem of idolatry as do those mentioned above. Higher education is dealing today with a *new constituency*. One hundred years ago there were fewer than 90,000 college students. Just fifty years ago most students lived away from home, in residential colleges. Now 11,000,000 students, 75% of them commuters, attend some 3,000 colleges and universities. And the average age of students has risen, as older persons enter and re-enter higher education. These students, young and old, come with a wide range of academic ability and preparation, to which our colleges and universities must respond creatively. At the same time, the growing competition for enrollment among public and private colleges and universities threatens to make institutional survival into a new idol, undermining any recent gains in racial, ethnic, gender and economic inclusiveness.

This analysis of the idolatries of our society, as they are reflected in our colleges and universities, may seem excessively negative. Certainly many good things go on today in these institutions. Many students *are* led to deeper understanding of true personal fulfillment. Many people *do* grow beyond their narrow loyalties to a more global sense of responsibility. Limited technical and utilitarian concerns *are* transcended as teachers and students wrestle with questions of value and meaning. All of this must be affirmed, without losing the realistic sense which is so strong in the Reformed traditions, that sin in its multiplicity of forms must be named and opposed, if the gifts of a loving God are to be given room to take root in human life.

Thus we take seriously the ways in which our colleges and universities seem caught in the fears and anxieties of our time. They turn, like all of us, to our favorite gods, seeking through them both security and meaning. Can we, as ambassadors of the Christ, offer any hope of liberation from this bondage to our idols? We can only do this if we are prepared to articulate the Biblical and theological heritage which is the basis of our own hope, seeking there the sources of freedom and justice not only

for ourselves, but also for our "world" of higher education, and for the wider world beyond the ivy-covered walls.

### III. BEING FAITHFUL IN THE WORLD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

As agents of the Christ and servants of the People of God in the midst of our institutions of higher education, we must seek new understanding of our own roots. We undertake that quest with full awareness that the challenge of idolatry is not simply a problem "out there"; the false gods of our time attract us as individuals and as a church, as much as they do our universities and our society. So our quest begins with our own struggle, moves to a new awareness of our heritage, and then seeks the implications of that heritage for ourselves and for our world.

#### A. The Gods, and the One God

We acknowledge that the idols of our time are the enemies of *shalom*, which is the peace and justice and well-being that God intends for all people and nations.

Yet our faith leads us to affirm that there is One God, who alone can give authentic peace. We recognize that the command, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3), lies at the very heart of our faith. That call to trust in and to be loyal to the One God leads us to speak and act against the false gods of our age, both within ourselves and in our world, including the world of higher education.

Therefore our first and fundamental task in the colleges and universities is to challenge the gods which seem to reign within that world. But this critical challenge must be accompanied by a proclamation of *hope*: that the God of the Exodus and of the Resurrection does lead God's people into freedom, even freedom from the power of the gods. We must seek new words and new styles of living and acting, which will embody this hope within the world of higher education. The feminist movement and its affirmation of new styles of life will play a major role in this effort.

#### B. The Misuse of Power, and the Power of God

We acknowledge that our faith in idols is an expression of our own anxious grasping for power. We are anxious as we are

confronted by threats of pain and loss and limitation, and above all because we are afraid of death, which seems to hold ultimate power over us and our world. We therefore seek power primarily as a means to defend ourselves against these threats, and we seek knowledge as a means to gain power for ourselves, rather than for the improvement of our world as a whole.

Yet our faith affirms that the power of God is shown in God's care for the People of Israel, and in Christ's triumph over the death-dealing powers of his time. God's sovereign power is the power of love, a self-limiting power which seeks the fulfillment of the beloved in freedom, rather than the control of the beloved by some form of domination. God's power dares to "let go" of the one who is loved, because God's power is ultimately victorious, and can risk the temporary "defeats" which come with the freedom of the beloved. But God's power is exercised also in judgment against our idols, and against our own actions of oppression and injustice.

Therefore we must remind ourselves and our educational institutions that all other powers are penultimate, temporary, tentative realities. We must cry out against their constant claims to ultimacy, and must work for institutional patterns that will limit the powers of any one individual or institution. We affirm the power which is a creative expression of human activity, but we see that power, as it was shown by Jesus, as power for love and service rather than for a self-defensive control of others.

### **C. The Idolatry of the Individual, and God's Gift of Community**

We acknowledge that we share our culture's tendency to view the individual person as the ultimate reality, the center of value. We see this individualism in our churches, especially in the popular religion of our time. We see it in our universities, where students and teachers alike pursue private advancement, rather than the advancement of knowledge or of the common welfare. We see it in our nation, in which political choices and economic policies are based on the assumption that individual self-interest is the primary value. Certainly the formation of personal identity is a primary developmental task for young adults, but there is constant tension between that need for identity, and the dangers of excessive individualism.

Yet our faith affirms that God calls us into community, and that personal fulfillment is found only within a society where all

members enjoy some basic level of well-being. The Biblical vision of the reign of God is basic to our Presbyterian understanding of the relation of the Gospel to society. This vision holds out the promise of a society characterized by peace and justice, by compassion and respect for human dignity, by the rejection of exploitation and oppression of one group by another because of racial, gender, or economic differences.

Therefore we must seek to *embody* the promise of authentic community in our own ministries. We must seek ways of protesting against the supremacy of the private individual in our patterns of teaching and learning, even as we support the quest for identity. We must also challenge the academic systems of rewards and punishments which value individual achievements rather than contributions to the community as a whole. And more constructively, in our churches, our campus ministry groups, our church-related colleges, our style of working with one another, we must develop climates in which people can be open and free with one another, can care for one another, and can act together to achieve common goals. Only thus can we provide a context within which students may develop an authentic sense of personal identity within community, rather than in isolation from other people and from wider concerns.

#### **D. The Idols of Tribe and Nation, and God's Gift of Universal Loyalty**

We acknowledge that we often affirm our identity as churches, as racial and ethnic groups, as educational institutions, and as a nation, by excluding "outsiders" from our concern, or by identifying them as our enemies. We see this in our tendency to view "uneducated" persons as inferior, and to value education as the solution to all problems. We see it in the political realm, as narrow group interests (even of oppressed groups) become the motivation for struggles for power. We see it in the subordination of higher education to national self-interest through involvement in military and technological research.

Yet our faith affirms a God who stands above all our tribal loyalties, who called the little nation of Israel to be "a light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6), and whose Son was confessed by his followers to be "the light of the world" (John 8:12). This faith leads us toward freedom from our fear of powerlessness and of death, and so enables us to affirm the value of groups that are different from our own, even when they seem to threaten our

own interests. Further, the God whom we glimpse through the pilgrimage of the Hebrew people in the person of Jesus, shows special concern for the poor, the stranger, the oppressed, leading us toward a particular concern too, for groups that appear to us as "outsiders." Justice is thus a central aim of God's activity in the world, and hence becomes a central concern of our own ministries. The whole process of education is seen in this light as a process of "building justice."

Therefore we must guard against all our human tendencies toward exclusivism. Our churches and campus ministries must be open to persons, groups, and ideas that are different from our own. Within the world of higher education we must press toward greater access for those who tend to be excluded by reason of physical or economic limitations. We must persist in questioning the negative impact of teaching and research on the needs of the poor and oppressed. We must resist the exploitation of our universities to serve narrow nationalistic interests, and support programs which serve global interests through peace studies, environmental studies, and a healthy internationalization of education.

### **E. The Idol of Technique, and God's Gift of Meaning**

We acknowledge that we are, as persons and as institutions and as a society, tempted to hope that by *knowing* enough in technological terms, we can *do* enough to gain control of our lives and of our world. And yet we, too, worship at the shining altars of technique. In our churches we seek the right management techniques, the right methods of group work and of worship and even prayer. In our universities we trust that reason and science will solve our problems and those of the whole world.

Yet our faith reminds us that life is not a puzzle to be solved, but a mystery to be confronted with awe, to be plumbed with the trust that meaning will come only through faith in the One who stands at the beginning and at the end, who is above and beneath all that is. Thus we affirm that the highest purpose of education, though not the only one, is to lead people into confrontation with the mystery of life, and through that confrontation, into the struggle to discern, to create meaning. We affirm with the Reformers that "truth is in order to goodness," a means to enhance the whole human life, rather than an end in itself, or a means to exploitative power.



Therefore we must affirm the value of the search for understanding and for knowledge; we must support openness in that search, opposing all pressures to narrow the notion of "truth" to mere facts and abstractions. We affirm the process of education as an endless exploration of reality, leading toward new understanding and new capacities for decision-making. Because our knowing shapes our living, we must continue to lift the moral dimensions of supposedly objective teaching and research.

#### **F. The Idol of Self-Salvation, and the God of Grace**

We acknowledge that we are all members of a human race which, contrary to the Gospel vision, persists in seeking to save itself and to guarantee its own fulfillment, by its own efforts. In our churches as in our economic structures, we insist that one must "do something" in order to earn one's own happiness, rather than acting in grateful response to the gifts of life. In higher education every person is judged on some basis of "merit." While academic achievement is certainly important, this emphasis on merit leads to an assumption that education is to be achieved by the satisfaction of certain narrow requirements, rather than being a process in which one participates in school and out, for the world and not simply for one-self.

Yet our faith recalls us, time after time, to the recognition that we cannot finally guarantee our own happiness. It affirms that human fulfillment is a gift from God, which cannot be earned. This gift would free us from the anxious drive to control our lives and our world. It would free us even to live among the idols of our time, never completely free from their promises and demands, yet with the knowledge that our happiness does not rest in their power. So we are set free to love — to care for and to set free the people among whom we live and work; to care for and set free the institutions of higher education within which we would minister.

Therefore we must affirm that God's grace alone guarantees the worth of persons. Human value does not depend on intellectual or social standing, and so the university must in some way serve *all* people, including the poor and the powerless. We must bear witness against all those movements and ideologies and institutions that promise some kind of "salvation," some ultimate happiness to those who would follow them. We must, by word and act and quality of life, point to the God who says Yes to our lives, not because we have earned God's approval, but because God is gracious beyond all our imagining.

#### IV. THE CALL TO FAITHFUL WITNESS

We acknowledge that we participate in the idolatries of our time, as much as anyone else. Yet we affirm in faith that God has offered us liberation from the fear that drives people to the false security of their idols. So our basic question is: How can we live out our freedom, not simply enjoying it for ourselves, but sharing it with others? This is at one level the question of evangelism. At another level it is the question of liberation, and of our participation in movements for justice and freedom wherever they may arise.

As the community which affirms that God has set humanity free from the bondage of death and the fear which accompanies it, the Church must proclaim a distinctive message within the university: that we need no longer cling to our idols, but are invited to live in freedom and openness toward the whole of creation. This freedom is not license, but a call to *care* for that creation: to respect and study and perhaps, cautiously, to enhance the natural world within which we live. We thus call our colleges and universities both to *freedom* and to *stewardship*.

In calling these institutions to freedom, we must challenge their dependence on and commitment to the gods of our time. To do that with any hope of effectiveness (and remembering that the prophets, and even Jesus, were not very "effective") we must develop styles of living and working within our churches and campus ministries, and in our church-related colleges, that will reflect, in some partial way, the freedom that we affirm. These styles will reflect our awareness that for many peoples of the world liberation must involve profound social, political and economic changes, as well as the transformation of our false faiths and loyalties.

If we would call our colleges and universities to stewardship, we must resist the use of knowledge to exploit persons, groups, and the natural world. We must support all creative uses of knowledge and technology to enhance life rather than simply to control it, and to develop authentic personal identity rather than to confirm privatistic individualism.

One specific way in which we may affirm this vision of the purposes of higher education is through the strengthening of our Reformed commitment to liberal, humanistic education,

whether that is expressed through our church-related colleges or in other institutions. Here we will seek to embody a global perspective on the world, a deepening respect of the mystery of life, and an openness to God's call to all persons to serve others in response to the love of God.

Another particular need is for the development of new ways of enabling people, especially students, to find authentic foundations for their own sense of personal identity. We must provide communities in which personal growth can take place, and we must also help our students to see that living for others, rather than for oneself, is in the Christian view the only path to true self-fulfillment.

In all these attempts to bear faithful witness, we begin from a deep awareness that *no* way of life, no tradition, no institution — even our own — can claim to possess “the Truth.” And, while affirming clearly the truth of the Christian faith, we must be radically open to the truth which is offered by other religious traditions, by ideologies different from those of our own society, and by the institutions which we seek to address. We must speak and act in dialogue with all those who are willing to join us in the quest for understanding, for meaning, for *shalom*, in joyful response to the liberating love of God.

As women and men who are trying to follow Christ, our part in this dialogue will be threefold: We must *listen* to our companions on the quest, seeking to understand with our minds and to appreciate with our hearts the truths which they bring to us. We must *speak* of what we have seen, heard, experienced in the silence of our hearts and in our community of faith. This speaking may take the form of criticism of the gods of our age, and the institutionalized expressions of idolatry in our colleges and universities. It must also, and always, be a proclamation (however halting) of the liberating love of God which we have seen in Christ. Finally, and simultaneously, we must *act* with any person or group that will join us, to make *shalom* a reality (however imperfect) in our institutions and our society as a whole.

In all of this, we will affirm and support the vital, positive purposes of higher education in both public and private institutions: to provide a forum for the exposure and criticism of our idolatries in light of a broad understanding of the world and of God's intentions for it; to open up new perceptions of reality

which include the spiritual dimensions of human life, as students struggle with questions of personal identity, the value and purpose of life, choices of work and partners; to free people from narrow views of life to see the world in a global perspective; to enable students and others to define their own commitments in terms of service rather than self-protection. Thus we will offer our support to all those elements in higher education which promise some degree of liberation from the idols of our time; we will invite people into communities of faith where our authentic human identity can be explored and expressed.

## **A Southern Baptist Response To The Presbyterian Statement**

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### **I. What Can We Learn From The Presbyterians**

Do these people live in a different universe? That was my initial response to this statement. It was not that I did not recognize the world "out there" about which the Presbyterian campus ministers spoke, but that the internal world of language and assumptions within which these colleagues speak seems to be a very different atmosphere from the one I breathe in my denominational life. I disagree with very little that is said here; it is what is not said that is both refreshing and disconcerting.

I have compared this statement to "A Theological Basis of Student Work" by Ron Wells which appeared in the inaugural issue of this journal (1978) and to "Biblical/Theological Foundations for Student Ministry" in the *Student Ministry Base Design* (Coordinating Committee, Inter-Agency Council, SBC, 1985). There is no question that these are "apples and oranges." I don't think that the differences can be reduced to liberal vs. conservative or to Reformed vs. evangelical. There are three telling differences in basic approach:

(1) The Presbyterian campus ministers seem to be speaking more to themselves and to the world of higher education, while Southern Baptists tend to address their critics within the denomination. It is ironic that with our overwhelmingly larger program we should be the ones who sound defensive, but we still find it necessary to justify our existence. In order to do this, we speak "the language of Zion" rather than the language of the university.

(2) The Presbyterian statement takes into account trends in "the real world," while the Southern Baptist statements appear almost timeless (once we would have said "irrelevant") with the church and the individual spiritual life as primary referents rather than the society or the campus.

(3) The Southern Baptist statements assume an existing program of ministry and give it foundations, while the Presbyterian statement does not. This may be due to the fact that our Presbyterian colleagues have fewer and less uniform programs. Nevertheless, we must wonder whether our theological foundations might not take a different shape if they did not have to be inserted under an existing structure.

Surely we can learn something from this statement's analysis of the idolatries of our age. Most of us have no doubt recognized these idolatries but we have not always addressed them in our campus ministries. The introductory section describes the world in which we find ourselves in terms of four major idolatries: privatism, tribalism, nationalism, and the worship of technique. Does our campus ministry speak or act against these?

(1) **Privatism** — Doesn't our version of Christian spirituality contribute to privatism and radical individualism rather than confronting it? Our ministries need to help students move beyond "me and Jesus" ways of thinking to thinking about the larger body of Christ and God's purposes in the world and in history. Our discipleship programs in particular have been unbalanced in failing to teach corporate ways of thinking and in simply reinforcing the narrow frame of reference most students bring to discipleship. Our ministries must also challenge the selfish motives behind most participation in higher education today, calling students to be serious about following Jesus in a life of self-sacrifice and compassion.

(2) **Tribalism** — Most of us have dealt with the more obvious forms of racism, but what about other forms of “us vs. them” thinking? Are regionalism and denominationalism forms of idolatrous tribalism? What about the feelings we engender of BSU-as-tribe? Any time we define our group over against others — be it Greeks, fundamentalists, secular humanists, whatever — we exclude people from our love and ministry.

(3) **Nationalism** — In the Reagan era it has been difficult for us to be critical of fanatical nationalism without being accused of being unpatriotic and even leftist. I come to this issue as an M.K. (missionary kid) from Japan. For a Christian with a sense of loyalty to more than one country — and certainly for our international students — church and campus programs seem filled with gratuitous references to “the greatest country in the world,” “Christian country,” and “this blessed nation.” Or there is the assumption that I should care more about the textile worker in North Carolina than the one in Korea and therefore buy American. Then we expect students to give their lives to minister to these foreigners? Our ministries need to be fostering a truly global awareness which will include concern for world missions and socio-political issues as well.

(4) **Technique as god** — While many of us as campus ministers privately bemoan the decline of the liberal arts education, how many of us make this an issue on campus and in our ministries? How many are willing to raise these issues with students in the schools of engineering and business? I do not see us as a denomination addressing the questions facing our universities regarding the ethical uses of technology, much less the ethical uses of education. Even within the churches and agencies, technique is the emphasis in religious life; if it works, it must be of God. We are pressured to provide techniques for prayer, evangelism, discipleship, and campus ministry itself without asking the deeper questions of meaning and purpose. Surely we are called to resist such pressure rather than to ride the wave of popular techniques.

## II. SOME BAPTIST BALANCES TO THE STATEMENT

There are several points at which the Presbyterian statement seems rather weak from a Southern Baptist perspective. I do not mean to search for errors or omissions in a statement not intended as a full creed. What this Southern Baptist seeks to do

is to suggest some counterbalancing emphases he would like to see in a theology of campus ministry.

(1) **Christological emphasis** — While a few references to Christ are scattered through the statement, this is not a document with the person of Christ as its center. I do not think this lack is characteristic of Presbyterians as a whole. My guess is that these campus ministers work in a realm where language has been shaped by the concerns of Jewish-Christian dialogue and by the effort to avoid exclusive (sexist) references to deity. What emerges is a grammar awfully heavy on "God" with few references to the specificity of Jesus. It is probably true that the Presbyterians, with their emphasis on covenant, take the Old Testament more seriously than many of us. This is no reason to be reticent on the subject of Jesus. Calvary, not Sinai, must be the starting point for any Christian theology.

Perhaps what we see is a reaction to the simple-minded "Jesus is the answer" talk of many evangelicals on campus. That "Jesus" is often virtually void of content and challenge. However, if we are to challenge the idols of our culture, we must challenge them with the God revealed in Jesus Christ. We must be clear in our purpose in campus ministry to bring persons into relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We say with Paul, "All I want is to know Christ" (Phil. 3:10 TEV).

(2) **Emphasis on students** — Southern Baptists have placed a priority on ministry with students rather than with the university as an institution. The Presbyterian statement is not clear on priority, but does speak repeatedly of our role in the institution of higher education. My observation has been that ministry focusing on faculty, administrators, and "system problems" is a temptation which faces more mature campus ministers and status-conscious youngsters in particular. Surely this ministry can be valid, but it must not be a way of escaping the students. The minister who sees him/herself as conscience to the university will operate very differently from one understood to be the shepherd to a flock of students. I cannot be the only campus minister to see colleagues appear ludicrous by their presumption in speaking "to the university." We Southern Baptists may err on the sectarian side of remaining aloof from the concerns of the university, but our emphases on students and student leadership have been our strengths.

(3) **Personal decision and spirituality** — While I appre-

ciate a concern for corporate issues, I also value our Baptist heritage of calling persons to individual choice. No doubt this individualism and voluntarism have been carried too far by some, but we lose something essential to who we are if we become shy about calling persons to make decisions about Christ and about lifestyle. This emphasis is notably missing in the Presbyterian document; I suspect the underlying metaphors for ministry are prophecy, salt, yeast, influence, rather than choice and invitation. Also missing is a discussion of the development of spirituality among students, which I take to be near the top of our agenda in campus ministry. We do not want to be locked into the techniques of spirituality, but the nurture of young adults as they make their faith their own and find ways to develop that faith is a joyous part of our task.

(4) **Missions and direct ministry** — For decades Southern Baptist student ministry has included opportunities for mission involvement, first during the summers and in conferences, now in programs all through the year. Mission work has done more than prophetic stands to break down the barriers of tribe and nation. The missionary purpose is basic to our identity as Southern Baptists, so it ought to be basic to our campus ministries. This emphasis has been one thing differentiating us from most parachurch groups; the “journey outward” reached beyond the campus into the community and into the world.

The Presbyterian statement reflects a view of ministry which favors words such as “exposure and criticism,” “new perceptions of reality,” “define their own commitments,” and “authentic human identity” (all from the closing paragraph). Such language is both cerebral and basically passive. It is, I admit, the language of the university. We must connect with that language as campus ministers, but I believe it is possible to speak the language of action and mission in a way which complements the contemplative task of the university. Frankly, students do not want campus ministry to be “one more class.” Neither do I, for lives are not transformed so much by hearing the Word as by doing the Word. Bringing students into personal contact with needy persons and needs around the world produces more change than abstract analysis of issues. The practice of ministry in the “real world” also enlivens and informs intellectual analysis. Universities are discovering this and strengthening “hands-on” learning and volunteer programs. They are doing in secular fashion what we have been doing with missions and ministry for many years.



### III. SOME PERSONAL THEOLOGICAL "HANDLES"

By way of a more positive response, I want to suggest several theological handles on campus ministry which have been useful to me. This is neither an exhaustive list nor a formal theology of campus ministry. It is merely suggestive. These statements could be made about all Christian ministry, for they are based on the idea that we participate in God's work in the world. Whatever God is about in the world, that is what God's servants must be about.

(1) **Ours is an incarnational ministry.** As the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, so we incarnate Christ on the campus. Who we are speaks more powerfully than what we say. We communicate the gospel by making it flesh and blood rather than by speaking about the gospel as theory or fact. Christ is embodied both in the individual believer and in communities of believers as they seek to be faithful to Christ and are guided by his Spirit.

(2) **Ours is a reconciling ministry.** Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 5:18 that God has given us a ministry of reconciliation. We are God's ambassadors pleading with God's former enemies to accept friendship. On the campus we seek to reconcile persons to God and to one another. Our ministry does not emphasize separation and division. To those alienated from God and the church we become God's diplomatic agents conveying an offer of peace. Our presence on "enemy territory" is a statement of our purpose of reconciliation.

(3) **Ours is a community-building ministry.** From the beginning God has been working to create human community. In both Israel and the church we find servant communities called out for worship and witness. Students need true community to help shape their faith, to meet emotional needs, and to challenge the many false communities based on exclusion. While our ministry is not mere club-organizing, we are not bashful about the value of a community-based ministry as opposed to a one-on-one approach or one focused on one-shot events or special issues.

(4) **Ours is a growth-producing ministry.** The Scriptures often use growth as a metaphor for spiritual development. An important part of our task in ministry is to create a climate which favors growth rather than stagnation or regression.

Sometimes this calls for nudging those who seem stuck at one point in development; sometimes it calls for modeling a maturity which draws students into their own gracious futures. A ministry which is satisfied to preserve the faith of students in its freshman form does a disservice to the students and to the church.

(5) **Ours is a sending ministry.** Mission, or sending persons out for ministry and witness, is central to the life of the church. As God sent Christ, so Christ sends us into the world. Christian communities do not exist only for their own sake, but send their own into the world. In our student communities this means pushing students out of the cozy nest into a world in need; this happens through ministry in the towns and cities where we live, in short-term mission trips which increase awareness of other places, and in longer-term assignments of students to serve as missionaries around the world.