

# **Preliminary Considerations For A Theological Rationale For Southern Baptist Campus Ministry**

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This paper attempts to offer in brief outline form some basic considerations which I believe are essential for the development of a balanced, theologically-grounded approach to Southern Baptist campus ministry in the contemporary situation. Obviously there is much room for debate and honest differences between Christian professionals when one tries to relate the Christian faith to a concrete but diverse context like that of American higher education. Each campus minister must develop his or her own working theology of ministry, which takes into account one's own training and gifts and is appropriate to the situation in which one serves. Many of the following issues, however, are inherent in the nature of our evangelical Christian faith as Southern Baptists, while others repeatedly arise from the contemporary contexts in which we minister. It is my hope that the matters considered in this paper will serve as stepping stones towards the development of a more clearly articulated Biblical and theological rationale on the part of the members of the Association of Southern Baptist Campus Ministers.

## **I. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF A THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE FOR MINISTRY**

A theological rationale for ministry attempts to link Biblical and theological beliefs and understandings with analysis of the needs for ministry and reflection upon ministry experience. Utilizing the discipline of pastoral (or practical) theology, the minister tries to integrate the concepts of the classical disciplines of theological education (Biblical study, church history, theology, ethics, etc.), the tools of the applied disciplines (pastoral counseling, educational theory and methodology, preaching and

other communications skills, social work and community organizing, etc.) and his or her own concrete experience of ministering on a professional basis.

The purpose of such an effort is to develop a ministry that is Biblically and theologically grounded, well-balanced, and relevant to the specific situation in which one is ministering. Since the situation is constantly in flux, developing a theological rationale for one's ministry is an ongoing enterprise rather than a final achievement. The minister who is able to develop his or her own working theological rationale for ministry will avoid basing the ministry upon whatever happens to be "in the wind" at the moment, whether the "wind" is from the campus (this term's big concern or fad) or the denomination (this year's program emphasis).

## **II. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BELIEFS AND UNDERSTANDINGS (CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE)**

Campus ministry draws heavily upon certain selected Biblical and theological themes, which are correlated with the major areas of Christian doctrine (i.e., the traditional "loci" of Protestant dogmatics).

### **A. God and the search for truth**

Since God is the source of all truth, the Christian can affirm truth wherever it is found. One's faith should seek understanding (Anselm) without fear or hesitation, knowing that Jesus Christ the Lord is "the truth" (cf. John 14:6). This theme is drawn from and correlated with the doctrines of God and of revelation.

### **B. Personhood and sin**

All persons are created in the image of God, but each person has chosen a self-centered separation from God. This theme is drawn from and correlated with the doctrines of creation and anthropology.

### **C. The gospel of Jesus Christ**

The "good news" of the person and work of Jesus Christ affirms God's grace, as persons experience God's forgiveness and receive the gift of salvation. This central theme embraces the doctrines of Christology and soteriology.

#### **D. The church's mission in the world**

The following topics involve aspects of the doctrines of ecclesiology and eschatology.

1. The Christian mission in a pluralist world develops in response to the call to reach out with the gospel to people wherever they are. This involves the discipline of missiology.

2. Evangelism entails sharing the truth of the Christian faith in pluralistic and secular settings. This approach to evangelism utilizes the discipline of apologetics.

3. Particular institutional settings in modern society point to the need for specialized ministry. This topic raises the question of new orders and forms of ministry.

### **III. THE CONCRETE SITUATION OF MINISTRY**

Ministry in a particular context involves both individuals and institutions, as well as wider social concerns.

#### **A. The students**

1. The church has a particular interest in specialized and intensive ministry to college and university students, since they will become the future leaders of our nation and world, as well as future church leaders. This situation also warrants a special concern for international students.

2. A knowledge of and concern for the processes of student development is foundational for ministry to students. Developmental theory constitutes the psychological base from which the campus minister develops programming that "meets the needs of students." This approach entails familiarity with various aspects of a student's personal development, including the following:

- a. Intellectual development (Perry, Newcomb)
- b. Moral and ethical development (Kohlberg, Perry)
- c. Social and relational development (Erikson, Levenson)
- d. Faith development (Fowler, Westerhoff)

#### **B. The faculty**

Building an effective ministry to faculty requires the development of authentic collegiality and the offering of genuine pastoral support.

### **C. The administration**

The campus minister must first develop professional credibility with the administrative leadership of the college or university which he or she serves. Such credibility provides the foundation for the raising of issues of moral concern, which derive from the campus minister's pastoral role with students and faculty. In addition to this "prophetic function," the campus minister should strive to create a pastoral ministry on a personal level with administrators and staff.

### **D. Other persons of faith on campus**

Given the historic Baptist understanding of soul competency and freedom of conscience, the beliefs of others should always be treated with the greatest respect. In a secular environment opportunities to make "common cause" with other persons of faith are to be welcomed. Cooperation without sacrifice of religious integrity constitutes an effective norm for joint activity. Ministry should take into account the differences between the following five types of religious groups:

1. Other Christian denominations and their ministries
2. Parachurch evangelical groups
3. Jewish religious groups
4. Adherents to other world religions
5. Religious cults.

### **E. The local Baptist churches**

The campus minister must develop and maintain collegiality with the local church leadership, especially the pastors. Cooperative planning and effective local church programming for students ("church ministry to students") should be facilitated by the campus minister. Where there is a high concentration of commuter students such cooperation is particularly necessary.

### **F. The denomination**

Accountability issues characterize the relationships between the campus minister and the denomination at various levels. Effective communication and mutual responsibility are essential at each of the following levels:

1. Associational level
2. State convention level
3. The larger "Student Ministries family" (e.g., National

Student Ministries, Home Mission Board and Foreign Mission Board involvements, Student Ministries Advisory Group.)

### **G. Wider social issues**

Though an endless array of specific issues could be enumerated here, at least three categories lay special claim to attention from campus ministry:

1. The role of higher education in American society and in world leadership
2. Biblically-mandated issues of ministry to human suffering (*e.g.*, world hunger, disaster relief)
3. Ethical issues of twentieth-century technology (*e.g.*, nuclear war, biomedical issues).

## **IV. TOWARDS AN INTEGRATION OF BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BELIEFS AND UNDERSTANDINGS WITH THE CONCRETE SITUATION OF MINISTRY**

Two perspectives are needed for effective integration. The first focuses upon the professional roles of the campus minister ("the campus minister as . . ."); the second focuses upon the content categories of the ministry itself.

### **A. Focus on the campus minister as professional**

This perspective utilizes the images and roles of the campus minister to unite Christian doctrine and professional practice.

1. The campus minister is a community-maker, who helps to build communities of Christian faith on campus. This role is fundamental in the establishment and development of a Baptist Student Union/Baptist Campus Ministry organization.

2. The campus minister is a pastoral theologian, who links the truth claims of Christian faith with the quest for truth which underlies academic life.

3. The campus minister is a teacher, who expounds and applies Christian doctrine in a way which communicates with the academic community where he or she ministers.

4. The campus minister is a friend and counselor to students, who is guided by a wholistic concern for their total development.

5. The campus minister is a colleague to faculty and

administration, who cares authentically for and works cooperatively with other professionals on campus.

6. The campus minister is a denominational representative, who interprets Baptist perspectives, polity, and programs to members of the academic community.

7. The campus minister is an advocate of moral and ethical issues, who enables others to be empowered to act to express their concerns in a manner consonant with Christian values.

### **B. Focus on the categories of ministry**

One can evaluate campus ministry, especially assessing its degree of balance, by utilizing a theologically-grounded, comprehensive set of content categories. The following categories of ministry have been modified for Southern Baptists from the list proposed by Karl Barth in *Church Dogmatics*<sup>1</sup>:

1. Praise of God (worship)
2. Explicit proclamation of the gospel in the Christian community
3. Teaching
4. Evangelism
5. Missions and Christian social ministries
6. Biblical and theological reflection
7. Prayer
8. Pastoral care
9. Modeling the Christian life
10. Christian social action
11. Christian community-building (fellowship).

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. Vol. IV, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Part 3, Second Half. Trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1962), pp. 865-901.