

# *Mission Theology*

## *for Campus Ministry I*

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I've never been one. A campus minister, that is. My wife was one. She served at Wichita State University. My role was that of being an adjunct. Somehow that role has typified most of my activities. Being in the Student Section of the Baptist Foreign Mission Board for nearly ten years has given me a lot of exposure to campus ministry. A lot of student summer missionaries, journeymen, and even career missionaries have been appointed for overseas student work. I like student work. I like campus ministers—they are my type of people. I believe in campus ministry, so talking about mission theology for campus ministry is a privilege.

A concept that has intrigued me is the similarity of a campus minister and a missionary in life style. Both are middle men without clear-cut role delineations. Both are bridge builders. Missionaries and student workers share in the same complexity of life and often exhibit some of the same symptoms of stress and for similar reasons. I believe this is not only true overseas but in the developing work here in the States as well. But alas, that is another area, and maybe I'll be invited to write again.

### **Mission Theology Brought To Campus**

It's because I like the story that I wish to begin with it. A student of Paul Clasper, missionary to China, tells about

An old Hindi priest who was teaching his son the ritual of worship so he could carry on after his death. The son was observing all the details. There was a small pussy cat who kept bothering the priest. So, before beginning his worship session, he would catch the cat and place it carefully under a bushel basket, then the worship would proceed. Eventually the son became the priest, and his first act of worship was placing the cat under the basket. This custom was carried on for a thousand years. When it became difficult to find cats, a special group was assigned the duty of raising cats to place under the baskets. (Clasper, *Christian Faith In Asia*, 1973)

Demythologizing is important. It is a job that has to be done. Somebody needs to discover why the cat is under the bushel. Regretfully, the task often falls to a campus minister.

My daughter was recently crowned a queen regent in our church's Acteens program. This was a high moment for our family. As a father I felt good. However, a funny thing happened on her way to becoming a queen. She had a disillusionment. She had studied and learned about home and foreign missionaries and the people who worked in the agencies headquarters. When she studied about the Student Section at the Foreign Mission Board and learned of my work, it was too much. I was only a daddy and didn't merit some of those feelings that she had about the mission personnel. Alas! Such demythologizing is needed for all. The campus minister often needs to demythologize the mission theology which the student brings to college. This must be done with tender loving care. If Solomon had 700 wives, a student minister needs 700 roles in which to do this demythologizing. Wise and harmless is the winning combination.

One of the people who can help understand the process of maturing in young adults is a funny-looking little man nearing 80. He is Swiss and with a Swiss independent lifestyle. Jean Piaget, examined how children thought and conformed to the concepts and rules around them. He played marbles with the children and entered into other street games. In response to his questions, they explained the rules or the lack of rules for the game in which they were involved. He noted various responses at various ages and summarized them. He came to the conclusion that there are two stages of moral development. These stages of moral development have an application to man's religious development.

The first stage, according to Piaget, is heteronomous morality. In this stage a child accepts the rules as given to him from authority. Before this time, each child would be a law unto himself and not really capable of corporate play. Piaget would ask the question, "Why are you doing this?" They would respond, "Because." Or, "I was told to do it this way."

The second stage is autonomous morality. Here the individual believes in modifying the rules to fit the situation. The children began to agree on their own rules for marble playing—keep your knuckles down, don't fudge, steelies aren't allowed. I never did like the guys who played with steelies.

Piaget's discovery concerning moral development parallels man's religious development. Religious development may be more complex but moves through similar stages.

Students often come to college with a heteronomous religion and mission theology. There must be a passage to autonomous thinking. In autonomous beliefs understandings are appropriate to life. There is a hammering out and a modifying of beliefs so they become vital. Helping a student during this pilgrimage is the particular and unique role of the campus minister. Be wise and harmless. Perhaps with 700 varied approaches. The mission theology many students bring to campus, must move from heteronomous to autonomous thought.

### **Mission Theology Being Reshaped**

Mission theology is too broad and encompassing an area. The concept must be narrowed down for this discussion. I would like to cover the area where mission theology touches the campus minister pragmatically. There are several aspects of mission theology that are applicable to semester, summer, and even vocational commitment to missions. These are the basic areas of understanding that I covet for students to have.

*One, the nature of God.* It seems to me that any thrust toward missions must begin with God's nature. To begin any other way is to move into legalism. In attempting to understand God, redemption is central. God is at work in our world. God is attempting to bring man to a posture of reconciliation and a fullness of life. God wills life and not death, hope not despair. God sent his son into the world. This event gives expression to the nature of God.

At all times God is actively working to accomplish his goals. St. Augustine said it this way, "God is at work at all times with all men." That statement reflects the foundational level of mission theology. Man is never asked to do anything that God is not already engaged in. God is his own best missionary.

Here theology always moves to an important corollary. God's activity includes his bidding for support and cooperation. To accomplish his work God needs redeemed men to labor with his labor.

*Two, motivation for missions.* In days gone by I read from books of prayer as part of my devotional expression. One prayer by H. E. Fosdick never left my consciousness. It goes like this.

We never understood the earth until we looked away to the sun, the moon, and the stars. We never understood ourselves until we looked to Thee.

Service is never a one-way street. In seeing others, we glimpse ourselves. In looking away we see clearly at hand. Often to the journeyman it is said, "You go with one hand full with a gift to give, and one hand empty for a gift to receive." In a theological tome I once read was this statement, "No theology is complete until the nations of the world have made their contribution to it." It is serving and being served that forms the fulcrum by which the world can be moved.

A missionary does not go just to minister. This week a letter came to my desk from a journeyman in Nigeria. She spoke of the joy she had in learning how willingly the nationals were to help her in her assignment. They were giving suggestions to preparing a handbook for cooking and nutrition. Their ministry to her is also a part of the gospel.

Here is a generalization. Every happy missionary I know will say, "I am receiving more than I am giving." One of the hard aspects of life is learning to let someone bathe your feet with perfume. It may be more blessed to give but it is more difficult to receive—and both are the gospel. Both giving and receiving are intertwined in missions.

The motivation for missions must move to that of camaraderie—sharing and receiving, teaching and learning, imparting and accepting, hurting and rejoicing, being and becoming.

*Three, ethnocentrism.* A great need of this day is to deal with an ugly thirteen letter word. There are a lot of ugly words—gangrene is an ugly word, so is Jaws II, and perhaps billious. But ethnocentrism is an ugly word. In ethnocentrism we meet the enemy and we are it. Ethnocentrism is contagious. It is deadening.

Look at the Jerusalem Council for a great example of ethnocentrism. They wrestled with and nearly concluded that Jewishness was essential to worship God. Had it not been for some Jewish missionaries who had worked with Gentiles, the gospel would not have been free in Jerusalem.

Ethnocentrism wants to see the world and see God through provincial eyes. That's bad. It limits the understanding of God's working. It limits God's freedom. I need an understanding of God's activity

in the world to remove my provincialism. In some places God addresses a person by saying "you all." In other places God addresses a person with "you guys" or Shalom.

I recently read about ethnocentrism in children. The experimenter placed sunglasses on some children and had them to describe the things that they were seeing. They all did so with the tint the sunglasses gave. He then removed the sunglasses from the children and put a pair of sunglasses on himself. He then asked the children to describe objects as he would see them. At a certain age children are unable to grasp anything other than their own perception. They would describe the articles without the tint that the sunglasses gave. One of the signs of maturing is the ability to put oneself in someone else's position and see through their eyes. This is extremely important as far as the gospel is concerned. How does the world look to the Shona people of Rhodesia or the Mountain people of Laos? How does the world look to a ghetto person from the Bronx? These are perspectives that are needed in Richmond and elsewhere. To be sensitive, one must look through someone else's eyes.

There is not a campus in the world that does not need the breath of wider dimension to sweep across it. Ethnocentrism is an ugly word and perhaps the reporting of mission experiences can give a universality to a provincial campus, and for that matter even to institutions like the Home and Foreign Mission Boards.

*Four, incarnation.* Joseph M. Smith stole my thunder in the winter '78 issue of the *Campus Minister*. He wrote, "To be incarnational in style implies . . . more than idea confronting idea, word addressing word." If God to share the gospel and learn of man's predicament, sent his Son, then we have a model for incarnation. Jesus took 30 years to learn to think Jewish, walk Jewish, spit, worship, and act like a Jew. Short-term missions have their place. Still, for the Gospel to be the gospel, incarnation is needed. One must go from an area or a culture to follow God's leadership to invest a life in another area or culture. This is the essence of incarnation. This process cannot be shortcut. This task cannot be lessened. The pain of losing some of one's cultural identity and becoming a new identity, is gospel. To live and learn, to die and be reborn. This is essence of incarnation and this is foundational in mission thought. Incarnation is mission.

*Five, missionary.* It's kind of late to define terms. But to say

some of these things earlier may have lost more readers than those who have already bailed out. This definition is important to me.

A term can only be bent so far before it becomes unrecognizable. Sometimes I don't recognize mission activities when I see them. When I look at church budgets and items listed under the mission part of the budget I really don't know what is mission activity. I remember sometime ago being asked to speak on the theme "Every student a missionary." I did and I didn't. I spoke on the theme but disagreed with it.

The Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention can't define a missionary. They have tried and have been unsuccessful. I don't want to enter into a biblical exegesis on the word missionary. Others have and so far it's been unprofitable. Missionary ends up being just about what anybody wants it to mean. If you don't believe that statement, look again at your church budget and what's listed under mission.

Missionary, however, can be defined organizationally. That's the method that I want to recommend. At least this is a method that can break a deadlock. Baptists have said in the way they work what a missionary is. One, a missionary is selected and set aside by a fellowship of believers. Two, a missionary is selected and set aside for a definite task. Three, a missionary is selected and set aside for a definite task and supported by finances and prayers. Sometimes the prayers have been more than the finances and other times it's been reversed.

Everybody is a witness. A witness and a missionary have similar ingredients in their roles, but they are not the same. Every man is a witness, but only some are missionaries. Every God-given opportunity is to be taken, but not every opportunity is a mission opportunity. Missions needs to be rescued from overuse by friends who intend well and want the blanket of "holy mission concern" spread over all of life. There can be too much of a good thing. Let's keep the definition clear. A car wash is not a mission activity even if it supports a mission cause. Okay? I hope this concept can have some wholesome debate.

*Six, some negative factors at play on mission theology.* I probably should not say some of these things but I'm going to forge ahead. Here's to letting it all hang out.

- A. Gothardism mitigates against maturing of an individual to "leave father and mother" and go to a land that God shows him.

- B. Immediacy makes the foolish hurry off too quickly with inadequate preparation. The wise take enough oil in their lamp to wait for the delayed return of the bridegroom.
- C. Decision making done privately and without community input is often disastrous. Acts 13 indicates the first missionaries were set apart after the church had sensed the Spirit's design. Corporateness in decision making needs to be regained.

Some time ago I was reading a BC cartoon and came across this story. BC came to Peter who was standing behind his rock which read "Peter's Delivery Service." BC said to Peter, "are there any restrictions on your services?" "None," said Peter, "you name it, . . . we deliver it." BC's response, "okay, deliver me from evil." I surely need to be delivered from any error of my ways. For me, mission theology generally needs to be demythologized, relate primarily to the nature of God, develop the motivational factor based on camaraderie, oppose ethnocentrism, be based on incarnational commitments, and be a far more precise term than is now in vogue.

## Response

In response to the excellent article on "Mission Theology for Campus Ministry" let me assure you of my appreciation for the keen insights presented and for the high regard I have for the author and how strongly this is re-inforced by the many Journeymen who have been helped, loved, strengthened and sent on to deeper, fuller life by him.

Let it be strongly said that demythologizing is imperative. Each of Nelson's other points needs to be emphasized in our programming and his three warnings need to be heeded by all of us. I would also plead for a balancing of the "nature of God" with the "nature of man," which is prior to the developing of the idea of incarnation.

The remainder of my response I want to direct to "Call" and "precision."

Years ago, in my study of 1st Pet-

er it became clear to me that the "call to be Christian" is prior to anything else. In trying to establish the sacredness of life there was developed, and I still hear it said occasionally, "that every Christian is called to his job i.e. teacher, doctor, nurse." Henlee Barnett<sup>1</sup> had to make more precise for me that Biblically, after the call to be Christian (vocation), "the call" is to function within the Christian Community. He pleads that this heightens the concept of secular life and restores biblical meaning, ". . . He called into being a new people for this mission . . ." Bowie in speaking of Columbia says "He converted them not only by the words he preached but by the life he lived."<sup>2</sup> This adds another needed dimension to the concept. I've been grateful for this precision.

Now as precision applies to Mission, Missions and missionaries—to me Mission is the purpose, pilgrimage,

and life style of the Christian individually and the church corporately. Missions is the activities, expressions of life, programs and creative extension of Mission by missionaries who are the sent ones, by God<sup>3</sup>, and the Church and its agencies to meet the needs of mankind and fulfill the will of God.

I see too many students with unrealistic or poor images of themselves. They have a guilt complex because they are on our campus and not some "x-campus", a fantasy either of their own making or laid on them by the home church. For instance, a senior said to me recently, "My home church still can't understand why I'm at ETSU and not xx." She has been a summer missionary or short term missionary for four years.

So I see a foundational interpretation of every Christian student on mission. Now they are not all missionaries. But you don't get more missionaries from mission volunteers, but from out of the lay student mass. The student who senses that as he/she is on mission, learns about, involves self, experiences giving in mis-

sions and if God wills, becomes a missionary by discipline of self, being confirmed by the church and the people to be served. The rest know they are still on Mission because they are doing God's Will for them.

Sorry, you warned me it couldn't be done. But after I'd been 15 years in Campus Ministry, a Danforth speaker said "you've been called to a task that can't be done." I still "see through a mirror darkly," but every once in a while "a beam of light breaks into the world and the darkness can't overcome it" and I become extremely aware of being a "clay vessel" and grateful for every expression of care and concern.

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#### FOOTNOTES

1. Henlee Barnett, *Christian Calling and Vocation*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House 1965) p. 18.
2. Walter Russell Bowie, *The Story of the Church*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press MC-MLV), p. 68.
3. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Intellectual*, (New York, Harper & Row 1965), p. 21.