

Mission Theology

for Campus Ministry II

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I have been asked to address this theme theologically and practically. To do so requires that some groundwork be laid toward understanding the context in which I minister. This seems prerequisite initially because this ministry occurs far from traditional Southern Baptist territory, for one reason; more importantly, however, is that, if so-called "Third World Theologies" have taught us anything, it is the indigenous nature of theological reflection; some basic introductory comments will set the stage.

I.

Geographically, Chicago is located in the Midwest, but there is little in common here with the endless miles of corn and wheatfields typical of the region. Our friends in the South ask us why we moved "up North." Though only one city in the state, metro-Chicago is said to contain 9 of the state's 11 million persons. There is a clear historical polarity between Chicago and "down state" which involves chiefly politics, as personified by the late Mayor Richard Daley. A recent Department of Parks and Recreation effort encouraged Chicagoans to avail themselves of facilities elsewhere in the state *via* a jingle: "just outside Chicago, there's a place called Illinois."

Immigration patterns assured the city of firmly entrenched Roman Catholicism. It is not at all uncommon for me to find campuses with 60-80% Catholic constituency. Already, fertile soil is prepared for problems of understanding with laymen or church/denominational leadership when the question is put to me (regarding a particular college): "How many Southern Baptists are there on that campus?" The thrust of the question is "How do you justify your time spent there?"

Historically, Southern Baptists are not new to Illinois. The State Association (Convention) was organized in 1907. Yet the Chicago

Association observed its 20th Anniversary in 1977. BSU in our area began officially in 1970 with an associate pastor being paid for one day/week for student ministry. Two US-2ers covered the years 1971-1975, and the first full-time staff came in 1976. With state funds for salary, the record operating budget from the local association totaled \$3,500/year.

The two-county area of our association includes (at last count) 44 senior colleges and universities, 22 junior and two year community colleges, 4 professional schools, and 15 graduate schools for a combined student population of 249,000 on 85 campuses.

Student ministries in our context has an associational base. An earlier *Collage* writer put it well: "I believe there is more unrealized potential at the level of the association than anywhere else in our denominational structure."¹ Not a point of great visibility in many parts of the South, the association here plays a vital role in our composite witness. As a resource center (or medium for procurement) and coordinating agent, our association has been referred to more than once as a "mini state convention."

Regarding SBC constituency, a significant percentage of our churches are made up of so-called "southern transplants." Church leadership and families are much more familiar with Carson-Newman, Baylor, Mercer, etc., than with nearby schools so there is a strong flow of students "back South." The uniqueness of our predominant population, commuters, is slighted, if not simply ignored, by many with the question put to me often, "How can we contact some students—when they come home for the summer?" I do not believe it to be melodramatic to say that, where our church life has not actively sought to indigenize its ministry, we are a "people in exile" or at least in sustained culture shock. Often, Southern Baptists who venture outside the "homeland" have chosen a defensive posture to provide and sustain an identity.

Such exigencies confront the campus ministry task as well. Coming from Georgia, I had as a model "1 campus/1 BSU Director" where "the program" was "directed" for our Baptist students "at 'x' campus." That model persists in many places and, where it is functional, I do not critique it. My colleagues from SBC and other denominations long to "get back" to that kind of situation and for understandable reasons; directors in an "area" approach live in a painful tension between "too many miles to travel, too many different situations to think about."

All of us are reeling from the changes occurring in higher education. Couple that with the variety of philosophies and approaches at work among Southern Baptists who title their departments Ministry at the Campus, Student Work, or Ministry in Higher Education. The Lutheran statement is perhaps most interesting: Ministry in a Learning Society.² The point is simply that there are in campus ministry, even in SBC ranks, few "givens." In a place like Chicago, diversity can be expected to be the order of the day.

II.

Against that backdrop, theological reflections about missions take on greater meaning. We Southern Baptists pride ourselves on being "mission minded," yet I believe we are often presumptuous in our approach. Consider the language: "Our church is starting another mission," or "that church was one of our missions." Our concept has been one of missions, by which we mean a little building on the "other" side of town/of the railroad tracks which we have refurbished for Sunday services or for clothing and food distribution; it could just as easily be temporary space in the community center of a new suburban housing development.

My own concept grows out of a sense of "mission" which gives rise to particular expressions or "missions." There is a world of difference theologically. The former approach tempts the church to think that its mission is self-determined; the latter affirms that the church is, from the outset, about the mission of God on this planet. The church's *raison d'etre* is not self-determined but has been given it by another.

The Scriptures abound with examples of this emphasis. Paul's great "body of Christ" metaphor of I Corinthians 12 comes to a simple and brilliant climax in verse 27. II Corinthians 5: 18-19 displays the "friendship" initiative as emerging from God Himself. Colossians 1:27 shifts the figure to God's plan of a "rich and glorious secret." The grandiose intent of this plan is revealed in Ephesians 1:10. The words of Jesus Himself are awesomely clear in John 14:12.

What then determines the form of mission endeavor in its concrete and particular expressions? That is the same question as "What resources equip a church for ministry which fulfills the mission of God?" William Pinson, citing the comments of Findley Edge, urges us to see that "the call to be a part of God's people and the call to ministry are one and the same."³ A church, as it welcomes new be-

lievers into the family of God, is "tooling up" at that same moment for its unique tasks.

Ephesians 4:7ff beautifully affirms this arrangement and attests that the configuration of gifts present in a church determines its agenda for mission. It seems we Baptists have ignored these "grace endowments"⁴ and have allowed talk of spiritual gifts to become divisive; obviously, there is all-too-much evidence to substantiate that. But to recoil as we do and squelch discussion completely is to hobble ourselves. I believe much of our overemphasis on clergy professionalism/specialization and the demise and relegation of the laity to "untrained/unqualified" can be shown to be, if not directly causative of, at least strongly associated with it. We must come directly to the issue of gifts for campus (and other types of) ministry because therein is found the stability and maturity of the Body which is so foundational to mission.

The task of the church then is to "call out" these gifts—to confront believers with their giftedness—to enhance these gifts via training, and to facilitate their implementation through service involvement. The sheer joy of the process builds as believers name one another's gifts. "The Christian Church comes into being as we come to know our own gifts and help others to know theirs."⁵ A minister of such a church is then a facilitator of this process, a manager of the equipment room upon which believers are dependent for mission outfitting.

III.

This theological undergirding is necessary to any mission endeavor, campus ministry especially. And especially is this true in Chicago where resources dictate that BSU be heavily allied with the ministry of the local church (For you BSU history buffs, that is not at all to say we are simply perpetuating the "link" philosophy!) There are no "BSU centers," vans or other hallmarks of "localized" BSU activity. There is only the paid staff person, and my office is in the Associational Center—not on a campus. Hence, the comments about gifts at the (local) church level because I have been asked to show the relationship between what I do as a campus minister and my concept of missions.

Basic assumptions I make then follow.

(1) Even though it does not sit well with our Baptist individuality, the spiritual gifts are the endowment of the Church universal,

the Body of Christ. Local gatherings can be expected to manifest these endowments in varying degrees. I as an associationally-based minister should be about the business of calling out (and helping individual churches to call out) the gifts of God which are in some way pertinent to ministry with persons in the academic community.

(2) "Campus Ministry" is part and parcel of the ministry of the Church. My endeavors with a particular college or university BSU are not to set up a "substitute church" of some kind; BSU is indeed *being* the church—focused in that circumstance, doing what *needs* to be done there. The stated philosophy in the BSU Guidebook says it well: ". . . This witness is an integral part of the nature and mission of the church. The role of the churches is indispensable to the maturing spiritual, moral, and intellectual lives of student and faculty members."⁶

Among other characteristics of college students is their mobility. Hectic schedules prevail on residential campuses like the University of Chicago, Wheaton College, and Northwestern University, to name some of our more notable campuses, but ours is clearly and predominantly the challenge of the commuting student. This mobility can be either bemoaned as a liability or grappled with as an integral part of the ministry strategy.

I perceive our approach essentially as mission endeavor with the academic community being the "mission field." The BSU effort (varying from traditional Bible study groups to involvement in tutoring to "field education" efforts to place a student in a church ministry position, sometimes for hire) is then seen as a "mission force" of equally mobile, and therefore conversant, persons. The thrust of the ministry is then to provide training (calling forth of gifts, service avenues, etc.) to equip the mission force to more effectively reach their mission field.

The personnel area is another dimension wherein I take seriously the concept of stewardship of gifts. After the associational Baptist Student Ministries Committee and I have targeted certain campus situations as priority, we engage in a search among the area churches for persons whom I can train to be volunteer directors. These persons may also be faculty or administrators from the college and, in some cases, will serve as both the real anchor of the ministry (the volunteer) as well as faculty advisor. I also seek both a pastor advisor and a "supporting church."

At the conclusion of an initial six hour orientation and training session, I ask each new volunteer to form with me a "time contract"—

a specified amount of time he/she will invest in the ministry in an "average week." I then discuss with each a Reflection Guide I have devised, a copy of which I ask each to respond to concerning the development of the ministry during the past month. Each one then mails the Guide to me. Our volunteer staff now includes a housewife/veterinarian's assistant, a banker, a chemistry professor, a speech pathologist, and a philosophy professor.

I want to move this arrangement closer to the point where the volunteer's church will see him/her as a "missionary" of that church in particular and (through interaction with me) the association as a whole. I foresee "commissioning services" in that church which will publicly name that brother/sister's gift and hold him/her responsible for the use of it in ministry in a particular sphere; the church would then be pledging itself to support this new mission endeavor in prayer, transportation, facility use, budget assistance, subscriptions to *The Student*, or other needs.

Mission theology—the handmaiden of a ministry to persons of metro-Chicago's academic communities.

Footnotes

- 1 Barry Vincent, *Collage*, (Nashville: The Sunday School Board, SBC) Autumn, 1977.
- 2 *Ministry in a Learning Society*, Lutheran Council in the USA, Chicago.
- 3 William Pinson, *The Will of God*, (Nashville: The Sunday School Board SBC, 1974), p. 7
- 4 My own translation of "charismata."
- 5 Elizabeth O'connor, *Eighth Day of Creation: Gifts and Creativity*, (Waco: Word Books, 1977), p. 20.
- 6 *Ibid*, p. 9.

Response

I am glad to hear from Frank Cofer. I have long been intrigued with his work though awed by his responsibility.

Frank reveals an important insight regarding all Southern Baptist work in "newer territories"; namely, in order for Southern Baptists to become firmly established, there must be a conscious effort to indigenize its ministry. It would be disastrous for a department store to close its doors

on sale day and sell only to its employees.

The same principle must be applied to campus ministry which should be available to any person simply because he/she is made in the image of God, regardless of external factors, e.g. denominational tags. The failure to do this insures our reliance on the few "transplants" available and results in the fatal *incurvatus in se*, turning inward upon oneself and "selling to ourselves."

The Author also makes a crucial distinction between **mission** and **missions**. Rightly understood, our sense of **MISSION** demands that our **missionS** strategy be one of "inclusive responsibility rather than exclusive privilege." However, I wish Frank had used the more appropriate term, "Reconciliation" rather than "friendship" (TEV's rendering of *katallages*). In fact, it seems to me that the New Testament understanding of **reconciliation** is the agenda for **mission**.

Frank is absolutely correct in his assumption that the "calling out" and utilization of "giftness" is a major task of the minister, wherever his assignment. He is also correct in assuming that, while a BSU is not a "substitute church," it is at the same time, the church within the academic setting simply because the church is *laos theou*, the people of God—and where God's people are, the church exists.

The Strategy the author employs in attempting to meet the awesome needs of his assignment (and thereby "justify his existence" there) is superbly devised. He has/is playing well the hand dealt him. I would like to know more about how priorities are set, the "time contract" and orientation sessions, Reflection Guide, etc. Moreover, I believe the notion of a commissioning service in local churches would benefit both the church and the campus ministry.

Frank Cofer and others with similar assignments have overwhelming tasks in trying to tame the urban campus ministry monster. And I find myself uttering prayers for them that they won't internalize the discouragement they inevitably must experience. At the same time I can't help but feel that they may occupy the most creative position for authentic ministry. At least they are not "harried foundation directors who are kept busy attending conferences, coordinating their work with other foundation directors, counseling for hours on end, keeping a roof on a \$150,000 building, and explaining to denominational officials why only 9% of the Baptist preference students participate in the programs." (Paraphrase of Harvey Cox in *The Secular City*, p. 223)

The author did a good job with his assignment. However, I believe that a more adequate way of looking at the theological concept for the task of ministry is to see it as a part of a major issue of the relationship between faith and culture. If the campus is a microcosm of the world, then the relationship between Christ and culture becomes a highly significant expression of the problem the church faces in higher education. I believe a professional journal should speak to that issue rather than use a glorified *Collage* approach.

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