

Needs for Ministering to Faculty and Possible Areas of Positive and Negative Tensions Between Campus Ministry and Academia

By Pope A. Duncan

When I accepted this assignment, it was to speak on trends in higher education. It was not difficult to agree several months in advance to undertake such a topic. One thing a university president must do is to be aware of trends in higher education! Sometime later I received a letter from Skip Noble indicating that the topic had been refined to target the issue of ministering to faculty on the part of Baptist campus ministers. I probably should have withdrawn at that point, since I am certainly no authority in this matter. Then I learned that the full topic is "Needs for Ministering to Faculty and Possible Areas of Positive and Negative Tensions Between Campus Ministry and Academia." Finally, I read in our Baptist state paper that I am to address you on the needs for ministering to faculty and "possible future areas of positive and negative tension between the campus ministry and academia." As you notice there is a progression in these topics which makes it more and more difficult. Who can say what the future holds? I heard a person remark recently, "He who lives by the crystal ball is destined to eat glass."

I feel just a little bit like the guy who fell off a 1,000 foot cliff. As he was falling, he managed to catch hold of a twig growing out of the side of cliff. Hanging on precariously for dear life, he called up, "Anyone up there?"

The answer came back, "Yes!"

"Who?"

"God."

"Can't you help?"

"Yes; let go!"

"Let go?"

"Yes; have faith and let go."

"Is there anyone else up there?"

In spite of the formidable task the topic imposes and my sense of inadequacy to examine it in any depth and with any helpfulness, I am going to plunge in and give you what I can. When it is over you will probably think that I am no better than an economist. You remember the story of the two fellows who were in a balloon which became lost in the clouds. Finally they came down through the clouds to try to determine where they were. They spied a man on the ground. One of the passengers leaned over the side of the balloon and yelled down, "Where are we?" The answer came back, "In a balloon." The other man in the balloon said to his partner, "He's an economist."

"How do you know?"

"Everything he said is true, and all of it is completely useless."

For all practical purposes, my career in higher education began with a stint as director of religious activities at Mercer University. The title was high sounding, but the duties hardly merited the title of director. I was the first at Mercer to carry this title and to occupy a position of this type full-time.

Those were lean times, and President Dowell had not been able to employ a dean of men. I recall that on occasions when a person or a group would come to the campus, and the President felt the necessity of introducing someone as dean of men, I usually got that title as well.

Another and more relevant aspect of that job of mine was the fact that I had come under the assumption that I would be able to teach part-time in the Department of Religion. In fact, that had been part of our agreement. However, by the time I had arrived on campus shortly before the fall quarter was to open, President Dowell had determined that if I taught, the Sunday School Board would not pay its half of my salary. You can guess the result already; I did not teach!

This was quite disappointing to me. Not only because teaching was a vocational goal of mine, but because I saw my role as a part-time faculty member serving to open doors with faculty which would be valuable in discharging my role as director of religious activities.

The Lord came to my rescue, however. Shortly after the fall term opened, the only physics professor, who had just been employed, failed to show up in class one day, and, indeed, had simply "vamoosed". I do not think anyone ever heard directly from him after that. Those were desperate days to find physics professors, and it just so happened that I had taught physics for a year at the University of Georgia prior to going to seminary, and I held a masters degree in that subject. President Dowell knew of this and immediately recruited me to take over the physics classes. No question of the Sunday School Board's part of my salary was ever raised!

While my vocational goal by this time was not to teach physics but religion, I did find the fact that I could take over those classes and teach, if even for a brief time, gave me an entree with faculty which I otherwise might not have had. I also had the advantage of living in faculty apartments enabling me to get to know faculty on a social basis better than I could have predicted.

I believe that during my short period as director of religious activities, I was able to be of some influence among faculty members as well as among students. But, I must admit my situation was unusual, and I think generally it is far more difficult for a Baptist campus minister/BSU director type to engage the faculty influentially.

First of all, institutions are of such great variety that what can work in one may not be feasible at all in others.

I do not have to remind this group that institutions come in all sizes and types. The ministry on a public community college campus will likely vary greatly from that on a large public research university campus, as indeed it may from a state college campus. Public universities range from huge to small and from residential to commuter in nature. There are those in which religious values are acknowledged and campus ministers appreciated and others where there is, at best, a kind of tolerant attitude and, at worst, a real antagonism.

But it is not only in the public sector that there is great variety. The independent sector as well demonstrates institutions that range from very small to very large, from highly

selective to those that are simply looking for warm bodies, from the research university to the strictly liberal arts teaching unit, from the sophisticated, secular independent to the warm, Christian, denominational college.

It is no wonder that Baptist campus ministers should find no single pattern of influence possible.

Not only do institutions themselves vary greatly, but the definition of positions varies greatly. In some institutions, the Baptist campus minister is essentially the chaplain. On others, his or her role is almost entirely organizational, and someone else has the role of chaplain. In some, the position is in a rather central place in the order of things, and in others it represents a very isolated, even unattached position. No doubt campus ministers in Baptist colleges face a different set of circumstances vis-a-vis the faculty than those in other institutions. (Sometimes, I might add, it may not be as favorable a position.)

If we are to talk about the differences which you face, we ought also to speak of those things that you share. First, of all, whether on the large or small campus, the Baptist or the state campus, students must come first. This is without any doubt or reservation your first responsibility. No matter how much you may want to minister to faculty, if you let that aspect of your ministry become so time consuming or debilitating that you are not giving sufficient time and energy for the ministry to students, then your priorities are wrong. I can imagine in some cases there may be a great temptation to use a large amount of time under the guise of being helpful to faculty members to the disadvantage of students to whom the time should be given.

On the other hand, we are all aware that faculty members are also people and as such are full of human and personal needs. There are and can be opportunities for ministering to faculty, and these can be very rewarding. I think some of the best work I did as director of religious activities was counseling with faculty members around coffee in the soda shop. There was a sense in which I could do this more effectively than a fellow faculty member, because I was no threat to any of them. I did not have to maintain the semblance of scholar-

ship; I was not competing with them for a salary; I was not competing with them for recognition.

There are, however, serious obstacles in the way of the ministry of a campus minister to faculty. One, I have already mentioned—that of time. Most of you are probably overwhelmed by the innumerable duties and responsibilities which you have with respect to the organizations you are related to and the students with problems who come to you.

Another great obstacle is the fact that you are properly identified in the minds of others with student activities and students' interests. I hope you are, but this does tend to isolate you from the mainstream of faculty activities and faculty discussions.

Another obstacle is the lack of academic status. You are never going to be accepted fully into the faculty circle, except in the most unusual situations. On the other hand, this may be one of the strengths of your role, because you are not seen necessarily as carrying stories of problems to other faculty members. There is a sense in which faculty members can feel free to confide in you in a way that they cannot to some other. Perhaps the greatest obstacle of a lack of academic status may be in your own mind. Sometimes there is a sense of inferiority or resentment or of cynicism which is built up in the mind of the campus minister because he is not fully accepted in the academic community. It is your task to overcome that by recognizing the opportunity it gives.

Another obstacle is the natural prejudice which is carried by many in the academic community against religious institutions or religious groups. Since you very clearly represent an institutional entity and one, the Southern Baptist Convention, which is not always regarded very highly by many academic types, you may find difficulty in communicating with some parts of the faculty community. Here again, the obstacle becomes the occasion of a challenge. This is certainly no different from the kind of prejudice that is found in many places and which must be overcome by one's own willingness to give of oneself in love, sacrificing one's own pride.

A further obstacle is the fact that faculty themselves are so busy and are so tied to other institutions, including their

churches, that the opportunity to minister to them is very limited. Here again, this is not intrinsically bad. It simply makes the task somewhat tougher. It also points out that many faculty members are well-adjusted, fine Christian people, and really are not in great need of the ministry of the Baptist campus minister.

When all of this is said and done, it is still true that there are many faculty members who are in dire need of spiritual and emotional help, often unwilling to recognize this even to themselves. Some of them, at least, may very well be helped by the campus minister. They become your challenge.

Let me suggest a few things that you should do if you have this as an aim and goal. First of all, continue to improve your own mind and your academic credentials. Have a reading program, not just light fiction, but plough through some heavy current material which some faculty may well be reading. If you can possibly find the time, take a course occasionally, even put together a program which over a period of years would get you a masters degree in another field. What I am saying is, be academically alert. Be able to demonstrate to faculty that you have the mental acumen which faculty members admire.

Secondly, with the student contacts which you have, you will become aware of faculty members who are having difficulties in their lives. Some are having marital problems. Others are isolated and lonely. Others are agnostic and bitter. Choose two or three as your challenges. Get to know them by hook or by crook. Make yourself available to them. Be a friend to them. What I am really saying is this: Don't expect some big program to make it possible for you to minister to faculty members. You yourself simply begin a small ministry to two or three faculty members, even when they are unaware of the fact that that is what you are doing. I can assure you that if you do this in love—conscientiously, persistently, tactfully, and expertly—your ministry will begin to expand as others will put themselves in a position to accept your role as a friend and as a minister to them.

I shared with Dr. Thomas Turner, Provost at Stetson, my thoughts which I planned to bring to you, and he agreed that being a campus minister is one of the most difficult roles

which one can be assigned. There is a very real sense in which this minister has to outdo the pastor in terms of being a servant. You have to contend with the problem that the services which you offer are secondary in the minds of most students. They have come to college to get a higher education, and they look toward the campus minister to obtain a little help on the side. The faculty member also views the campus minister as being in a secondary role. And these things are true on almost any campus, whether large or small, denominational or public.

As a consequence, a campus minister has simply to reach out as a servant to both students and faculty alike. Perhaps as in no other position on the college campus, you have to prove yourself. You prove yourself by serving as an unselfish model for students and for faculty members as well.

Because the task is so difficult, a sense of call is especially important. Certainly, the campus ministry is not a place for persons who are simply trying to decide whether or not they would like to go into full-time, Christian vocational service and who like the idea of being around a college campus while they are making that decision. It is very easy to become discouraged, to feel that no one really cares, that your position is not one that will provide the prestige necessary to maintain your self-esteem. When times such as these arise, you must not only be in much prayer over your task, but you must also recognize the truth of Sister Teresa's statement when asked how she could go on in the midst of the vast problems and small evidences of success: "Oh," she said, "my job is not to succeed, but to be faithful to my mission."

When you come to the time that you wonder whether your ministry to faculty is worth it, you may want to view your ministry to faculty and students as a professor of science does his lab and his class. If one is going bad, maybe the other will be good.

One of the most memorable persons I have ever known is a missionary to Portugal named Ernie Harvey. Ernie was a student of mine at Stetson many, many years ago and even then he was an inspiration. A tall, rangy fellow, I remember his being in class on one Monday morning and trying to keep his eyes open. I found out later that he had preached near or in Ocala the Sunday night before and had his car break down on a lonely, desolate road on his return in the middle of the

night. He had walked fifteen miles to find a place to report his predicament. It was that kind of commitment and persistence that made Ernie a great soul and a great missionary.

Several years ago he was stricken in Portugal with a type of encephalitis. He was returned to this country, and there were few who thought Ernie would regain any significant use of his motor functions or his mind, but they calculated without the dedication and commitment of this man and of his patient, faithful, and dedicated wife. Though still handicapped, Ernie is back in Portugal ministering to the best of his ability in the name of Christ. During a visit to our campus following his tragic illness and before returning to Portugal, he told a story about a young man whom he brought to Christ and what this young man has been able to achieve in his ministry. Then he said that the Christian missionary in Portugal is not in a position to win thousands to Christ. He may win only one man to the Lord. And Ernie added, "Anybody can count the number of seeds in an apple, but only the Lord can count the number of apples in a seed."

Perhaps this best illustrates the significance of the campus minister's work with faculty. A faculty member who is won by a campus minister will in a very significant sense continue himself to serve as a campus minister for all of the years of his life. So do not be discouraged if the ministry to faculty does not take on huge dimensions, but know, too, that your role is that of a servant, and your job is to be faithful to your mission.