

# The Campus Minister as Teacher

By Richard A. Spencer  
Bible Teacher, Baptist Student Center  
University of Texas at Austin

“Those who can—do  
Those who can’t—teach.  
And those who can’t teach—teach teachers.”  
or “Those who can’t teach—become deans”<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of how the above maxim is stated, it expresses an extremely unflattering view of the teaching role, suggesting that teachers are those who are unable to function effectively in other more productive capacities. Since the campus minister **can** do many things (at least the job offers many opportunities and challenges), teaching may be down at the bottom of one’s priority list.

But is teaching really an incidental activity for underachievers?

Like the typical campus minister, Jesus “wore many hats.” He seemed to be equally comfortable serving an individual or speaking to the multitudes. For those who knew him best he was a “man for all seasons.” Yet, Jesus was preeminently a teacher. Within the span of the four gospels, Jesus is described as a teacher more than fifty times. William Barclay notes: “Even if Jesus had no other claim to be remembered, he would be remembered as one of the world’s masters of the technique of teaching.”<sup>2</sup>

The effective campus minister, like Jesus, will be a teacher. He will teach to educate, to inspire, to change behavior and attitudes; and, like Jesus, the minister must teach in a variety of settings.

There is many a man quite at home on the rostrum of class room but quite unable to make his message intelligible to the ordinary man and woman. There are men whom the crowds will gladly hear but who would be lost in the more rarified atmosphere of the academic world. There have been very few teachers who were equally at home and equally effective with any kind of audience—but Jesus was.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the typical campus minister has multiple opportunities at formal and informal communication and most of the principles of effective teaching apply to both settings.

Conference and counseling sessions afford the minister

the opportunity to communicate in one-to-one relationships. Much of the effectiveness and growth of BSU Council members is directly related to the regular conference with his/her campus minister. If the minister perceives this meeting as prime learning time, it will be reflected in the preparation and objectives of the meeting. Rather than merely rehashing "what's going on," the conference would have an agenda designed to help the council member with BSU responsibilities and personal development.

Informal group discussion can be another important setting for learning. Several years ago on a mission trip to Morelia, Mexico, a group of students spontaneously began to talk about the ingredients of successful marriages. As students posed questions, a missionary and campus minister openly shared from personal experience some of their illusions and frustrations, along with victories, in their respective marriages. Although the spontaneity of the occasion was far removed from much formal teaching, this late-night dialogue served as a very effective "pre-marriage/dating seminar."

Apart from campus activities, many teaching opportunities are available in the local church. The average campus minister is better informed than most church members and will often have expertise in areas which are not specialties of the ministerial staff. Knowledge in these areas brings a responsibility for the campus minister to be involved in helping others become better informed.

The campus minister's familiarity with students, in itself, is a valuable resource. Many adults and some church staff members are intimidated by college students. Providing something as simple as a student profile or characterization may be an invaluable service in helping church leaders better understand and more effectively program to reach and help students.

The campus minister's training and experience probably have given him/her exposure to world religions and religious trends which are unfamiliar to most church members. Campus ministers can often provide information and first-hand experiences concerning local cults and sects which church members are otherwise ill-prepared to meet.

Since sex, dating and marriage are issues of vital interest to students, the campus minister, by necessity, will become a

quasi-authority in these matters. Probably few individuals in the local church are better prepared to lead a seminar on dating than the campus minister.

There are numerous other subjects on which campus ministers are uniquely qualified to teach; and, in addition to the local church, there are other settings where that expertise could be disseminated and appreciated. The local association of Baptist churches and secular community are two possibilities. While the advertisement of one's credentials in these areas may present certain difficulties, there are many program chairpersons who would be delighted to locate a qualified speaker. Most associational programs are so diversified that an extra teaching resource probably would be welcomed.

In a variety of ways and settings, the campus minister is a teacher. In order to perform this role more efficiently, certain elements of teaching must be incorporated or refined. Effective teaching must involve the participants in dialogue and discovery.

#### **Guide vs. Guru**

The best teacher will function as a guide to learning and avoid the temptation to become a guru. As a guide the campus minister will facilitate the learning process. He/she may find it more important to ask the right questions than to give the right answers. The guide will provide directions which help students develop survival skills. Only in extreme emergencies would the guide allow a hiker to "get on his back" to be carried. While the guide gives direction, the guru gives answers—his answers—the right answers.

In balancing the authority of the teaching role, the campus minister may find it healthy to occasionally say, "I don't know" or "I was wrong." In fact, the minister's example of honesty may be one of the most essential elements of teaching and learning.

#### **Openness vs. Objectivity**

A further challenge for the campus minister will be to balance openness or transparency with objectivity. Few things are more frustrating to students than an evasive answer which seems to avoid commitment. The minister must be willing to take a stand and reveal his/her opinions and values to others. Yet the timing of the teacher's openness is crucial. Since in-

dividual discovery is so important to learning and establishing values, the wise teacher will avoid pre-empting the learning process by prematurely exposing values which may inhibit further discussion or examination of all alternatives. "It may be wise for the teacher to conceal many of his viewpoints until such time as students realize that they will be expected to find their own values and not to mimic the positions of other, even the teacher."<sup>4</sup>

In the words of Paul Tillich, "The passion of truth is silenced by answers which have the weight of undisputed authority. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes the educational process can be short-circuited by presenting conclusions before the supporting data has been adequately understood and assimilated. Gordon Allport states,

Much of the intellectual apathy we complain about is due to our fault of presenting conclusions in lieu of first-hand experience. To us, our well-chiseled conclusion, summing up a long intellectual struggle with a problem of knowledge or of value, seems like a beautiful sonnet. To the student, it may be gibberish.<sup>6</sup>

### **Monologue vs. Dialogue**

The contemporary teacher must adjust to a rapidly developing technological and informational society. Marie Wirsing, an education specialist, says, "I believe that **any** medium which simply conveys data in a monologue fashion will be tuned out by today's young people."<sup>7</sup>

People only hear about sixty percent to eighty percent of any sustained communication and retain only a small portion of that information after 72 hours. As a medium of one-way communication the television out-performs the typical teacher. A generation which has been over-exposed to the exaggeration and hype of television will rate most monologues as inferior substitutes.

Therefore, the campus minister's style of teaching must take advantage of techniques and possibilities which television or other communication media do not afford. The dialogic method offers immediate feedback and active involvement from students in the learning process.

### **Information vs. Meaning**

With the proliferation of knowledge and the inundation of facts, it becomes crucial that teachers stress meaning and

value rather than details. Arthur Combs extends the challenge in these words:

The computer can do a beautiful job of storing information. I suggest that we let them store it and get about the business of doing the things that make us human. It's stupid for us to compete with the computers or to make computers out of students. What we need is to stress the thing that computers can't do—we need to stress our humanism. We need to understand that there is a vast difference between knowing and behaving. Knowing is simply a matter of having some information, but behaving requires the discovery of the meaning of information and is a "people" problem, and the important aspect of the problem has to do with the discovery of meaning.<sup>8</sup>

Effective teaching is also characterized by empathy and identification. In a recent classroom setting at the University of Texas in Austin, one young man seemed to be especially uninterested. He was inconsistent in attendance and distracted when he came. He frequently had difficulty staying awake. When the first major exam was given, I took pleasure in grading and returning his paper. His low score confirmed my suspicion that he was reaping what he had sown. Afterwards, the young man came by my office to apologize for the inferior work he was doing in class. He explained that he had been driving back and forth to class from a city one hundred miles away where his mother was dying of cancer. Most of his evenings and some nights were spent in the hospital with her. His failing grade no longer gave me pleasure. Although there were no major changes in my teaching style, my understanding of his unique situation helped create an attitude and atmosphere which was more conducive to learning.

Speaking to the importance of empathy and identification, Sidney Harris said,

Knowledge is not enough. Technique is not enough. Mere experience is not enough. This is the mystery at the heart of the teaching process; and the same mystery is at the heart of the healing process. Both are an art, more than a science or a skill—and the art is at bottom the ability to "tune in to the other's wavelength."

And this ability is not possessed by those who have failed to come to terms with their own individuated person, no matter what other talents they possess. Until they have liberated themselves (not completely, but mostly) from what is artificial

and unauthentic within themselves, they cannot communicate with, counsel, or control others.

The few teachers who meant the most to me in my school life were not necessarily those who knew the most, but those who gave out of the fullness of themselves; who confronted me face to face, as it were, with a humanhood that awoke and lured my own small and trembling soul and called me to take hold of my own existence with my two hands.<sup>9</sup>

In his famous description of a preacher, the Methodist Church leader Bishop Quayle said the task of the preacher was "the amassing of a great soul so as to have something worth while to give—the sermon is the preacher up to date."<sup>10</sup> The same could be said of a teacher. Nothing is more essential to communication and formation of values than a life which exemplifies and authenticates the ideas which are taught.

Because teaching is an unavoidable privilege and responsibility of every campus minister, perhaps the proverbial statement needs revision.

Those who can—do, and much of it is  
accomplished by teaching others  
Those who can't—can usually learn how  
And those who can't teach—really do,  
they just don't call it that.

### FOOTNOTES

1. Paul Dickson, *The Official Rules* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1978), p. 113.
2. William Barclay, *The Mind of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 89.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
4. Louis E. Rath, Merrill Harmon, and Sidney Simon, *Values and Teaching* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1966), p. 109.
5. Paul Tillich, *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 65.
6. Gordon W. Allport, "Values and Our Youth," *Teachers College Record* (December 1961), p. 218.
7. Marie Wirsing, *Teaching and Philosophy: A Synthesis* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), p. 94.
8. From an Address by Arthur W. Combs before the annual conference of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Dallas, Texas, March 1967. Quoted from *Teaching and Philosophy*, pp. 96-97.
9. Sidney J. Harris, "Authentic Teachers," *Chicago Daily News*, February 4, 1964. Quoted in *Philosophy and Teaching*, pp. 180-181.
10. William Barclay, *Fishers of Men* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 37.