

A Theological Basis of Student Work

Ron Wells, director, Texas A&M BSU

Bonnie Ernst, assistant director, Texas A&M BSU

Background and Resources

The understanding of a theology of student work must begin with the examination of its foundations. Much of the following theology had its beginnings as reactions—reactions to beliefs never experientially applied, reactions to “conventional Christianity,” reactions to the sterility and stagnation sometimes found within the Christian community. Students who undergo a “typical Bible Belt Southern Baptist church background” (if such a generalization can be made here) relate some of the following experiences:

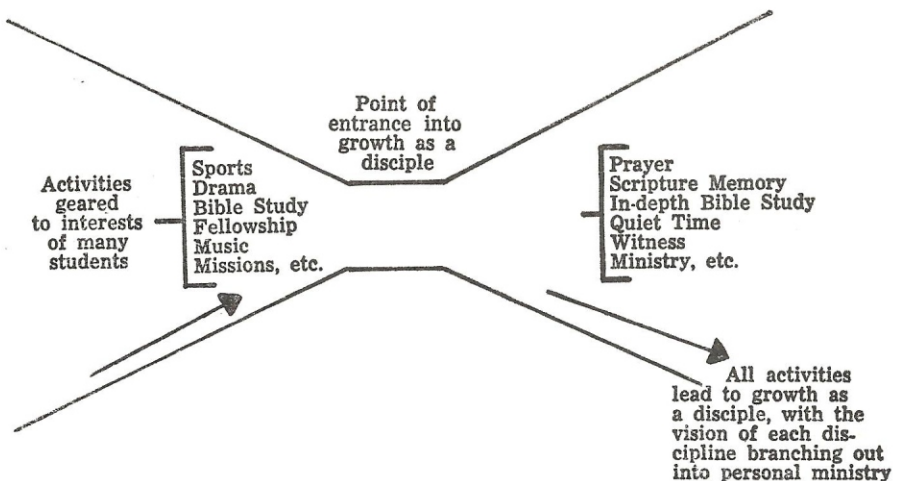
Although a personal salvation experience is distinct and vital, a church experience can be more emotional at times than consistently meaningful. Although the Bible is visibly and audibly revered, it does not often find its place as a vital tool for growth personally. Teaching can be a sermon or lesson that is delivered, but not received as principles to be lived out in the laboratory of life. Evangelism is at times encouraged by a motivation of guilt and “oughtness”, but not taught in the warmth of co-participation. Many years can pass without a Christian being exposed to the “how to’s” of growth as a disciple. The concept of the Holy Spirit’s work in and through a believer’s life can remain virtually unknown. The cost of commitment is rarely stressed, thus producing Christians that only know to give God their “trash time”—that time which is left over after other activities are planned. The church can be interpreted as an “organizational machine” that produces programs, instead of a living organism that shares a vital relationship with a loving God.

Out of these reactions have grown the search for a much needed “practical theology” that can apply to students’ lives, not only while they are in college, but on a permanent basis. Generally, the college

student is at a point in his pilgrimage that he is formulating values, searching for purpose, and responding to challenge. This particular theology of student ministry is formulated in an attempt to meet the needs of the Christian college student, with a vision of reaching the world for Jesus Christ.

In addition to examining the background development of a theology, one must be aware of the resources which greatly affect that particular theology. "To whom much is given, much shall be required" (Luke 12:48). It is realized that having many resources carries much responsibility, and that each situation of ministry is unique in this aspect. Being located in the "Bible Belt" impacts the ministry in terms of numbers of Christian students (particularly Baptist), numbers of churches (supporting the ministry both financially and directionally), and numbers of staff personnel who work in full-time student ministry. In this light, let us examine the resources which help determine the direction of the BSU program.

This particular BSU fellowship is a large one, and hopefully an ever-deepening one. If all 30,000 students at Texas A&M could be reached and involved, it would be highly satisfying. Reaching as many students as possible, in as many ways as are possible, to bring them to the point of deeply growing in the likeness of Christ is the goal of the ministry. This diagram expresses the basic student work motif of the Texas A&M BSU:



The BSU Center itself is adequate, with room to relax, participate in recreation, or have group meetings. It is constructed in such a way that it has no semblance of being a church. It is a building to facilitate the reaching out of the local church onto the campus, and not to replace the local congregation.

Because the BSU is denominationally supported, it is responsible to a centralized human authority. Local churches, associations, the Texas Baptist Convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention comprise this authority. Centralization of authority in the state student work program can particularly aid in keeping strong guidelines (set up by the churches in the state convention), keeping inner agency co-operation at a maximum, aiding financially as churches pool their resources, as well as allowing for a total co-operative enterprise of ministry together in the Kingdom. Receiving direction from the state office frees a director to have time for students. Local associational level input lets the director stay close to what the local churches want from and for the program.

The staff of the Baptist Student Union at Texas A&M is composed of six persons. Each member of the staff has specific supervisory assignments with the twenty-seven student leaders on the executive council. The executive council members in turn work with a freshman counterpart who assists in leadership. Each chairman and freshman counterpart has from three to fifteen committee members.

Fellowship

Paul encouraged the Philippian church to "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Phil. 2: 1-2). The beginning point of a BSU program is the development of "family," otherwise known as koinonia fellowship. Although the word fellowship sometimes denotes a function with cookies, punch, and games, this is a misnomer. Wherever there is a healthy awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence in individual lives, true fellowship begins to take place among Christians. Many times the emphasis is placed on the techniques of organizing parties and not on the common spirit that is shared. The greatest need in promoting Christian fellowship is encouragement and adequate time to share what God is already doing in individual lives. As this takes place, a tremendous strength is exchanged. Thus, the foundation is laid for growth and ministry in combined efforts.

When the scripture encourages "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25), it was not presented as option, but as a necessity. The need for strong fellowship is especially evident as a student goes away from his home environment and begins to experience decision-making in the midst of all that competes for his attention.

Acts 2:42-47 exemplifies the many facets of true fellowship. One basic principle here is that as Christians' needs are met within the fellowship, they are motivated to reach out. A BSU that is a warm, growing family will be drawing others into the fellowship. Growth in numbers, however, does not necessarily mean sacrificing growth in depth of the students. As the early church shared fellowship in different ways, a BSU can share fellowship in both large and small groups. One of the keys to the building of fellowship is the formation of small groups for the purpose of growth and ministry together. Committees, mission teams, fine arts teams, and growth groups are all created and sustained as small "families" within the larger family of the total BSU.

Because a BSU is a part of the whole Body of Christ, as well as a particular Christian denomination, non-Baptist Christians should feel an openness to share and serve in the BSU fellowship. On the other hand, there is no need to apologize for the title of Southern Baptist in the organization. Paul exemplified openness as he wrote several different letters to churches. The church at Philippi had a distinctively different makeup from the Corinthian church. His letters do not seem to encourage the churches to be alike, although they do encourage unity of following Christ.

Reaching Out

Every person on campus should have the opportunity to say "yes" or "no" to Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19-20 speaks clearly of articulating the gospel of reaching out. This is a mass evangelism principle carried out by one person sharing boldly and lovingly with another person as a part of his daily lifestyle. A BSU fellowship that is not sharing openly with its campus is probably not experiencing much growth or freshness. For every person to be able to personally hear the gospel, evangelism training and participation must be carried out. Special seminars, evangelism thrusts, and continuing share groups are methods of carrying out evangelism. However, relating the attitude of constant openness in sharing is not something that can be "programmed." It must be learned through encouragement and experience. Without the element of evangelism

in student work, the ministry is not truly New Testament. If the theology and relationship of Christ is well learned, it will be articulated well and bathed in much love. In Thessalonians 2:8, Paul states that he not only shared the gospel, but his very life as well.

Another vital aspect of allowing students the opportunity to respond is found as they are offered involvement opportunities and a place to find and use the varied gifts that God has given them (Romans 12:6). This involves outreach to those students who are Baptist but have not become involved in the BSU fellowship. It also involves allowing Christians of other denominations the freedom of fellowship and service.

Spiritual Growth and Discipleship

Many Christians have had little or no training in Christian discipleship. Student work presents a perfect opportunity to train bright young Christians in principles of spiritual growth. II Timothy is a manual in instruction from Paul to Timothy, his younger brother in the faith. Paul deals with every subject from morals to social wholeness (ie., how to treat women, relationships to elders, etc.) as well as how to relate to scripture and prayer. In II Timothy 2, Paul illustrates discipleship using a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. All of these are intensive vocations. Discipleship, in its most simple form, is passing on to others the teachings we have learned in scripture and through experience. They, in turn, pass them on to others. The warmth of God's love working through a person opens hearts to receive the teaching.

In-depth discipleship does not necessarily mean strictly one-to-one relationships. In II Timothy 2:2, "many witnesses" refers to a Christian not just being taught by just one person, but perhaps many people at one time. Discipleship, much like fellowship, occurs whenever growing Christians share, even when they are not in a planned discipleship program. It is ingrained in all areas of a balanced BSU program. Most of the discipleship in the BSU happens in the committee structure, although there are other discipleship groups and one-to-one relationships formed outside this structure. The BSU must be producing strong "whole" Christians or it is failing. There is always the possibility of producing only "good BSUers" who, after graduation, fall away outside the incubator of the BSU fellowship. Teaching life principles and helping students set life goals are important ways of spending time in growth with students. Jesus discipled men as He lived with them, walked with them through crises and questions, and continually brought them into a

deeper understanding of Himself. Student work, perhaps more than any other ministry, offers the opportunity of discipling in His pattern.

Centrality of the Bible

“Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (I Peter 2:2). It is not possible to develop strong Christians in the process of vital growth apart from their personal handling of the Word of God. “Handling” means deep study, meditation, memorization, etc. The longest chapter in the Bible (Psalm 119) deals with the intimate relationship of a believer to the Word of God. Psalm 1:2-3 promises prosperity in the life of the one who delights and meditates in Scripture.

Therefore, no equipping ministry is even remotely possible without emphatic practical training in the Bible. The Word of God should be the literature that is most central to the BSU program. II Timothy 2:15 states much of the goal of our particular BSU—to develop workmen in the scripture who will never have to be ashamed concerning their practical grasp of the Word for everyday living. Noon Bible Studies are the largest continual feature of this BSU program, and they offer students the daily opportunity for fellowship and learning. Small group Bible studies take place in dorm rooms and apartment complexes, for the purpose of outreach and growth. Special topical studies are led by pastors and other speakers as special needs occur. Students are strongly encouraged to spend consistent personal time in God’s Word, allowing Him to teach and apply truths to their individual needs.

Prayer

Prayer is the language of the people of God. It ushers in a right relationship with a Father who is willing to give to His children, and who is able to cause things to happen within them and outside their reach. Ephesians 3:20 states that “Christ is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.” Most Christians have been taught that praying is a nice thing to do, but has no serious role in the work of the Kingdom. A large ministry of student work is to reteach Christians that prayer is the essence of turning God loose in their lives. Structure of a ministry has no lasting effect unless God is allowed to move freely in that structure. Christian college students who have been taught to pray boldly and expect results are rare to find. Hebrews 10:19-22 speaks of drawing near in full assurance to have communication with the Father through our high priest, Jesus. The

real power of the Church is in the knee and heart, not in the mind, mouth, or any other external feature. Only the student who is taught to pray and actually *does* it will be able to conquer the world in the name of Christ.

In this particular BSU program, prayer is a vital ministry, with a special committee to lead out in prayer functions. Weekly prayer breakfasts (with at least 45 full minutes of prayer) encourage "family" communication with God. Prayer chains and continuing prayer groups are other means of activating a prayer ministry. BSU plans and goals are immersed in prayer from the beginning stages, in order to seek the Father's will and power even before plans are publicized and activated.

Giving

Our society has become a "convenience society." As with all cultural problems, this has quickly become a problem of the church as well as the society. Luke 6:38 states a simple principle that most Christians have not grasped: "Give, and it will be given to you." The "giving if we expect to receive" principle applies to money, but even more so to time, physical energy and love.

First, let us deal with the giving away of ourselves. "Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it" (Luke 9:24). We must not only teach students, but also give them practical opportunities to give themselves away. Jesus commands that we "feed His sheep" (John 21:15-17) and not just express our love for Him through words. Locally, there are as many expressions for giving oneself away in ministry as there are people. As we move from "Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), we must consider the opportunities within the state, country and world. Beginning with our "Jerusalem," community missions (on and off campus) are vital expressions of love. Ministry with Internationals brings foreign missions to us, and is a tremendous opportunity to change the world in Christ's name. A student ministry program that does not give opportunity for giving oneself away is grossly hurting the students as well as the people who desperately need their ministry. The American college campus is the largest and best equipped personnel pool in the world; thus a campus with growing Christians can begin to supply the world's needs for ministry if an adequate principle of giving is taught and expressed. Supplying the needs of area churches through singing groups, preachers, etc., is a vital "giving" ministry. Also, challenging and sending students out

through summer missions, Journeyman, and US-2 programs are just a few of the provisions Southern Baptists have for giving service.

If the whole life is being given (Romans 12: 1-2), then the giving of money is no real problem. A student should be trained to give away that which really belongs to God in the first place. The direction of the tithe (first ten percent) should be to the "storehouse" — the church (Malachi 3:10). Although a student's "salary" may not seem enormous, when compared to the rest of the world, his financial resources are sizeable. They respond to the challenge of sacrificially giving to other areas of need (such as summer missions or World Hunger Relief), with a portion of the remaining ninety percent. The goal of \$8,000 for World Hunger was met strictly through sacrificial giving of students at Texas A&M in 1976-77. In a similar way, using special projects and sacrificial giving, a goal of \$21,000 was met to send out summer missionaries in 1976-77. The challenge of totally giving oneself away gives vision and acts as a strong motivational force for a BSU fellowship.

"Go ye therefore"

Paul calls the Philippian Christians "yokefellows," which denotes that they worked together in the same yoke. Certainly a retreat for a week-end is effective, but more extended mission trips are essential, not only in building of fellowship, but also in applying the human resource of the people involved in BSU. For instance, last year, two hundred Texas A&M students paid from \$35 to \$350 to travel to needy areas of the world (Caribbean and Mexico) to build mission buildings and share Christ's love with hundreds of people. An enormous amount of work was accomplished in those mission areas. One orphanage in Mexico has been built largely due to BSU groups applying periods of time between semesters, and many persons have accepted Christ as a result.

Much growth has also been built into the lives of students on these trips. A few students go for humanitarian reasons, simply to use their skills to help other humans; often these students accept Christ as a result of the trip. Many begin to realize the challenge of the Christian life, and begin to grow in discipleship. The development of fellowship is extremely important. On a ten-day trip, there are 240 hours in which to work together, study the scripture, sing, and share lives with each other. This is true discipleship in a family setting, while applying in a practical way what is being learned.

Other more extenuating results are that students begin to experience missions; as a result, many go into summer missions (this

past summer, about sixty-five Texas A&M BSU students served in various places all over the world); some of them go into two-year missions programs; some are called to missions as a vocation. In addition, the mission trips aid greatly in the development and discovery of leadership within the BSU.

James 2:14 expresses the fact that words mean very little unless actions follow spiritual conviction. Opportunities for *doing* is the missing element in many ministries. Some students express that they are "sick of being inspired"—they are ready to do something for the Creator and His creation. Missions trips help to establish a "Here am I, send me" attitude among the students as they become aware of needs of our world, as well as gifts within themselves to help meet those needs.

Wholeness

"Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). As Jesus' life exhibited a true sense of balance, a definite part of the student work ministry is to help students find balance and wholeness. Although this is encouraged through a well-balanced BSU program, wholeness is most likely achieved through individual contact with students. The counselling ministry is a key here, walking with each person through particular needs, providing support for him, or making referrals to Christian counselling services when needed. Perhaps social relationship seminars are necessary to allow students' growth in their understanding of honesty, friendships, dating, marriage, and sex—very real concerns. Helping students to achieve self-acceptance is a key at this point in their lives. "Speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) can be interpreted as having the freedom and responsibility to lovingly confront a student if this is necessary—this could possibly be a breakthrough in his total growth.

Wholeness, of course, overlaps into all areas of ministry and discipleship with students. Encouraging students to be aware of their physical well-being as a means of stewardship is a basic principle of wholeness (I Cor. 3:16). Challenging them to exemplify Christian witness through the discipline in studies is another vital (and sometimes overlooked) principle. With the students' increased awareness of himself and God's plan for his total life, comes the awareness of social and political issues. Paul encourages wholeness as he writes the Thessalonian church: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:23).

Church

Ephesians 4:4-6 expresses the unity of all believers in the Body of Christ. However, all healthy Christians will find a local expression of the church, beyond that of the universal church. Each Christian has a deep need for growth, fellowship, and service; the local church supplies these needs.

The BSU program, as an extension of the church, continually encourages students to find a local church home. As the church supports the BSU, so also the BSU gives support to the churches in special ways, such as providing students for special programs, etc. But even in a much deeper sense, the BSU seeks to implant a vision of the church in the hearts of students, of the "growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:16). Baptist Student Union would not exist without the church. This is a major strength of BSU as compared to many other Christian campus organizations. A BSU program is able to build lasting principles into students that can be applied not only while they are in college, because the principles are based on the local church, but can be utilized after graduation. BSU serves the church as a vital arm that reaches out to the university "mission field."

Development of Leadership

Jesus' manner of selecting leaders is not always the pattern that most readily comes into mind when considering the student leadership of a BSU program. However, to Peter Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). In the same light, when students possess the qualities of spiritual openness and willingness, along with other basic character qualities, they can be trained into leaders who effectively use the gifts that God has given them. Some of the most effective leaders in a program are not necessarily the "sharpest" personalities, but are those who are teachable and willing to commit themselves to service.

The desire to serve and lead others develops out of a healthy growth that the student has experienced. As they grow, they have a desire to challenge others to grow and find a place of service. A "contract commitment" is required from the leaders of the A&M BSU so that they will know and agree to what is expected of them. At least three days of intense leadership training and "family" time together are essential as the Executive Council leadership begins its term. There is continuous support throughout the year as the staff works with the council member in personal growth as well as organizational planning. Moses exemplified this principle in handling

justice among the existing Jews from Egypt (Exodus 18:15-27). God wanted order, but it was impossible without a chain of authority. This "authority" is primarily one of responsibility and not simply privilege.

In council leadership, it is essential that spiritual growth takes place. Individual discipleship takes place weekly between staff and council members. The council members naturally disciple each other as they spend time together. Committees become "families" that experience growth together. In council meetings, as well as committee meetings, one-half of the entire meeting time is spent in Bible study and growth.

The council is also responsible for displaying highly developed managerial principles, from leading a weekly committee Bible study and meeting, to the semester event of preparing food, entertainment, and spiritual challenge for over 1,000 people at a Back-to-School party. A poorly organized leadership cannot possibly do this. As Jesus performed an enormous miracle at the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:40), He had them sit down in orderly groups of fifty and one hundred, and used twelve men to serve the entire crowd. If world conquest is made by the Kingdom of God, principles of managerial organization of the highest order must be displayed. Leadership is trained with a goal of becoming capable of managing any situation that occurs, with as much precision as a football team.

In the twenty-seven different areas of ministry, the Executive Council is given "directed freedom." They are encouraged to brainstorm, dream big, and pray even bigger; committees set goals for their areas of ministry and begin to initiate plans toward meeting those goals. Enabling the council members to get a vision of their ministry is most important, so that they can, in turn, challenge their committee members. Committed student leadership of today will become the leadership of the church in the very near future. Direction and support are essential as they begin to implement leadership principles that will impact the church and the world.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most prominent word for this particular theology of student ministry is "vision." If a student worker can look into the faces of individual students and grasp a vision of God's potential in their lives, he can then challenge them toward that vision. As students begin to realize the work that God is already doing in their individual lives, they begin to realize that He also has a plan for the world around them. They then become swept up in the overriding

vision of Christ's power working through them to win their campus to Jesus Christ.

What can one student mean to the needs of the billions? How deeply can one unified, growing BSU fellowship touch a campus? What part can many Baptist Student Union groups together play in supplying God's resources to the needs of His world? "Without a vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18). If God is really able to do "exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20), then the barrier to ministry in our world is not in His power or willingness, but in our seeking. The Baptist Student ministry is a definite part of God's redemptive plan in the world, dependent only on the vision of those who are called to lead out. "Call to me, and I will answer you, and I will show you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jer. 33:3).

Response

How refreshing it is to read a learned paper from one in your own spiritual discipline expressing a sense of direction with which you can fully agree. He writes from a background of experience showing they have tried many of these ideas with Texas-style success. The scriptural basis for each of his areas of concern are excellent choices.

Ron has analyzed well the background from which students come, bringing to our BSUs a host of experiences and theologies. The outline of the Texas BSU system is helpful in understanding the remainder of the paper.

I like the emphasis on Christian Fellowship as being rather central in our program, as well as the mandate for a bold witness on campus. He seems to be able to work the committee system to a real advantage to help provide for some of the fellowship and Christian growth which I have never been able to do.

Baptists are people of the Book, but few want to put the necessary time into depth study to know what it can say to them. Class schedules and

other demands upon time leave almost no time for Bible study on my campus. The lack of mature students to lead Bible studies in the dorms has led to no studies at all.

I like that emphasis of prayer which says, "A large ministry of student work is to reteach Christians that prayer is the essence of turning God loose in their lives." The poverty of prayer knowledge and experience is appalling on most campuses.

In the remaining areas he discusses I continued to feel he was making an analysis of the BSU where I serve. This held before me a goal toward which to move in the years to come. It has helped me verbalize some of those problem areas found in our BSU, especially among the council.

This paper should be made required reading for every BSU council member and it could well become a great companion to our basic statement of Philosophy of BSU Work. I commend it very highly.

Elbert T. Williams
Baptist Campus Minister
in Troy, Alabama