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# The Role of the Lutheran Church on the Campuses of America

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## *The New Frontier*

**A**CTUALLY the topic as assigned is not big enough, for our Church has a role not only on United States campuses but also on campuses in Canada, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, India, and to the ends of the earth. The Church is under divine order to address her message to the churched, the dechurched, and the unchurched on the campuses; to the informed, the uninformed and the misinformed. The Church must be where people are at all crucial and decisive times and places. The crucial and decisive time is now. And the strategic place is the college and university, whatever its location.

The Church has not always been as fully aware of her responsibilities in higher education as is the case today. Today our Church believes that there is a Christian ministry which should be present in all institutions—those of mercy and also those of higher learning.

The 1962 Cleveland Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on the basis of its fruitful ministry on the campuses in North America adopted the recommendation of its Commission on College and University Work that campus work be extended and established or intensified in universities in the heart of Synod's overseas mission fields and that the Church provide facilities adjacent to those universities where the university and the Church can meet.

The Church's campus ministry is faced today with an opportunity that is both vast and challenging by reason of the tremendous increase in the number of students, faculty, and administrators, and there is every indication that short of catastrophe there will be an expanding enrollment for several years to come. As the enrollment grows so also grows the work to be done through the campus ministry.

The colleges and universities of America and the rest of the world can and should be viewed as the Church's new and strategic frontier.

### *The Importance and Task of Campus Work*

The Church's task in higher education is the same as its task within the world. Its purpose for gathering together the community of believers is the same. Its message is the same. Its service proceeds from the same motivation. And yet there is a difference. The urgency and importance of the campus ministry can best be seen when we note that in the university the Church is working with an institution in which the patterns of culture are being influenced and which may become determinative for the culture at large in the years that lie ahead. It is of utmost importance, therefore, that the Church take seriously its present opportunity on the campuses.

Like American life in general, the intellectual life today is tragically confused as to ultimate ends. Students and professors are busy going somewhere in academic pursuits and laboratory research. But they do not know where they are going. On the campus one speaks of goals, but too many do not know where the goal posts are. The common attitude, as Sir Moberly put it in *The Crisis in the University*, is self-centered and utilitarian; and the common motto is "The shorter the learning the sooner the earning." The Church must courageously, yet evangelically point out that in Jesus Christ men have the divinely ordained center of existence into which all academic pursuits and activities can be meaningfully integrated. The Christian faith does not restrict life; it does not lead to intellectual fear and frustration nor to a pessimistic view of life. In and through Christ one learns that every occupation is under God a divine ministry and that student, professor, scientist, and philosopher have the task of doing all things for God's glory and to serve God and man. The scientist is not merely uncovering facts to satisfy his curiosity or to gain academic prestige or a Nobel prize. It is his task to unveil God's mysterious nature and to provide God's human creatures with more time and better instruments for service to one another.

The campus pastor, as representative of his Lord and church body, is a pastor to the total campus community. He is one to whom people come to share their deepest doubts and extreme joys. He is a counselor who listens to the difficulties of students, faculty, and administrators and seeks to help them find a way of dealing with their problems and difficulties. Many major decisions are made by students while they are in college. Those decisions affect the direction of their lives. As a counselor the campus pastor must be ready to assist at any time so that the decisions of those whom he has been called upon to influence might be for the individual and common good and in keeping with the will of God.

Counseling is a matter of urgent necessity. Everyone has problems, everyone is in need of specialized help. Students are living in a bewildered world. The campus pastor is not expected to be a

babysitter on the campus, but he is expected to listen carefully and sympathetically to problems of students, which, though they may no longer seem serious to him who has gone through the gamut scores of times year after year, are grave problems in the mind of the student. The campus pastor must *assist* the student in making decisions; he must not issue directives.

If the campus pastor does not or cannot offer competent pastoral counseling to students, then the academic and administrative officers of the university will take over the work which really belongs within the scope of the pastor's functions. Both students and administrative personnel will regard religion as completely irrelevant even though the Law and Gospel may be basic to the problem under consideration.

The campus pastor is a teacher engaged in the business of helping students and faculty to interpret the Christian faith and to see it in proper relationship to the several disciplines.

The campus pastor is also an administrator who coordinates the activities of various committees which function under his supervision and he consults with university administrators and with various boards and agencies of the Church.

He is also a preacher called upon to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who live within the campus community.

And his preaching must be relevant. That is of paramount importance in the business of nurturing and developing faith and in bringing others to full commitment of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The truth of Christ must become relevant to academic disciplines, to education as a whole and to every aspect of life. The uncommitted who come to church once are under no impelling or compelling force to return for a second administration of irrelevant preaching.

The task of the campus ministry is big enough to humble a man and to challenge his best service; and because it is a specialized ministry within the general ministry of the Church, good academic and professional training as well as a keen intellect are of utmost importance if the academic community is to be served respectably and intelligently—as becomes a competent and qualified ambassador of Jesus Christ. Piety alone will not do, nor will scholarship alone suffice. The two belong together.

The campus pastor must have essentially the same qualifications as any other effective minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He must have a commitment to Jesus Christ as the center of his life; a commitment to the Church of Jesus Christ and its confessions; and genuine love and concern for people—the loved—the loveless—and the unloved. He must have the ability to communicate with people where they are; the ability to equip Christians committed to his care to represent Jesus Christ effectively in the university community; and an alertness and creativity in adjusting his ministry to existing needs. Obviously a B.A. or B.S. degree from an accredited institution and a B.D. degree from a theological seminary must be

regarded as academic minimums for the campus ministry. Certainly, continuing graduate study enabling the campus pastor to minister and relate more adequately to the academic community must be viewed as a normal expectation.

Bernard Iddings Bell suggested that "the pastor to university people be mature, rarely forty, preferably in his fifties, and that he should have submitted himself to the rigorous sort of scholarly discipline which normally goes into preparation for the doctorate, although the Ph.D. itself is not a necessity. Otherwise he is apt to be regarded as an amateur by both faculty and students. While he cannot be a specialist in every branch of learning and should not pretend that he is, he ought to be sufficiently informed in the main flow of knowledge to be able intelligently to listen to scholars and to ask questions which are not hopelessly naive." To go on with Bell: The campus pastor should be a competent theologian. He needs to be versed and trained in modern psychology. He needs to know epistemology, be able to explain the place of religion in our culture and its relation to science and art. And he needs an understanding that our culture is in a period of danger and possibly dissolution and why this is so. And he should know also why Christianity seems irrelevant and even preposterous to many round about him. Good intentions, Bell says, do not make up for an almost complete ignorance of what the job involves. Otherwise campus folk will be polite to him but they will regard him and his ministry as wholly irrelevant.

In a speech before the annual meeting of the Detroit Council of Religious Education, Dean Whitehouse of the Liberal Arts College of Wayne University stated: "Never were we under such an obligation to give our young people a philosophy of moorings, some valid ideals and purposes to which they might anchor their desires and needs. Never did the church face a greater challenge in such a malleable world."

In 1940 a mere 15% of America's high school seniors went to college. In 1960 approximately 40% sought a college education. By 1990 a college education will be as common as a high school education is today. And it has been prophesied that 90% of high school seniors will want to go to college when 1990 comes into view.

College trained people do not necessarily possess more talents than non-college folk. They do, however, possess more developed talents.

Educators, scientists, jurists, journalists, authors (Hemingway and Truman Capote are notable exceptions) and other college trained specialists are the molders of public opinion. Ought not the Church, therefore, invade the established state colleges and universities, contribute toward the reconstruction of college folk, and provide Christian motivation for a God-pleasing use of God-given developed talents? The question becomes extremely serious in view of the absence of church colleges owned and operated by our Church.

Most students go to college with fixed middle class values. They are materialists and conformists, wholly preoccupied with self. Happiness and success are their great goals in life. Universities are criticized because they contribute nothing toward a change in students' values. Students remain and emerge gloriously contented. Some go on into graduate study because of their enjoyment of their state of glorious contentment with its freedom from responsibility. The universities themselves are unhappy with the status quo. They describe a student as lopsided if he is developed physically, socially, and mentally, and in these three areas only. They are concerned about the total development of the student as a person. They are even fearful of their own products. Their concern finds expression in the question: Who or what controls the person, i.e., the student—the graduating senior—who has tremendous capacity for handling matter and who is capable of using it for destructive purposes even to the extent of blowing up the universe?

The Church should not expect the university to do the Church's work. The universities, moreover, look to the churches to provide meaning and direction to living and the means for the reconstruction of the student and his reorientation in life.

Students majoring in fields ranging from humanities to technologies come into possession of vast bodies of facts. Facts, however, are not enough. What is needed is a philosophy of life, a faith if you please, by which to live.

There must be a frank acceptance of the fact that the prevailing forces at work on the campus are precisely those which predominate in our society as a whole and that these forces are secular, materialistic, and non-Christian. The Church must invade the campus and see to it that Christian truth is taught—or it will not be taught.

The universities are also market places of faiths. Everyone on the campus believes something but what many believe is sheer nonsense. There is no absence of faiths. Scientific positivism, determinism, humanism, pragmatism, objectivism—these are among the common faiths represented and voiced on the campus, and it is the Church's obligation to bring into the university the redemptive gospel of Jesus Christ so that the truth of Christ becomes relevant to education as a whole and to every aspect of life. The Christian faith must be brought into collision with the other faiths.

Students are expected to examine facts and ideas. The ideas which a professor propounds constitute his beliefs. They are his interpretation of what appears to be so from where he views the matter. What he teaches is doctrine. The conflicts that arise are never conflicts between faith and the absence of faith but encounters between divergent beliefs, essentially between Christian faith and alternative faiths. Since decisions and actions always stem from beliefs it matters tremendously what a person believes. Faith enters every area of life and no apologies are necessary for holding the self-attesting, satisfying, indispensable, and transforming faith.

### *The Aim of the Church*

The primary function of the Church on the campus is the confrontation of sons and potential sons of God with the eternal Son of God and His vicarious atonement.

The specific aims of the Church can be described explicitly by means of the various prepositions. It is the desire of the Church to do something *to* campus personnel so that things will happen *through* them. The Church goes to the university and operates within it by seeking out first of all its own constituents. It ministers to them for the purpose of keeping them *with* Jesus Christ and with their Church. The word for that activity is conservation. But this very relevant question immediately arises: Conservation for what? Is it to be a mere holding process?

A second objective involves the restoration of campus personnel *to* Jesus Christ and the Church. Many students—Lutherans among them—have abandoned their faith prior to matriculation. Their abandonment, however, only became manifest subsequent to their matriculation, at which time they gave expression to the freedom from the restraints of home and the church from which they had long sought deliverance. They came as nominal Lutherans. They should leave as Lutheran Christians.

A third point pertains to the winning of campus personnel *for* Jesus Christ, an exciting activity to which the Holy Spirit has attached extraordinary blessings as reflected in the statistics and reports of the Commission on College and University Work.

The opportunities in the area of campus evangelism and the results of aggressive person to person encounter on the part of the committed Lutheran student versus the uncommitted are such that the academic community can and must be recognized as America's foremost mission field.

A new service opportunity in the area of campus evangelism was happily thrust upon us as a church with the advent of the international student. Not a few students who come to America from Asiatic lands express amazement when Americans manifest a greater interest in hearing about their Buddha than in setting forth the Christ of Christianity. International students have at least an academic interest in the Christian religion. They are more interested in the Church's dogma than in hot dogs served in the Church's student center. They have come to America to learn. Included in the learning process are week-end visitations of international students in the homes of American Christian students where they can be exposed to Christianity as it finds expression in all its parts including Christian family devotion and family participation in worship and Bible study on Sunday morning.

A fourth and important objective is the business of training Christ-committed campus personnel of our faith in the service *of* Jesus Christ.

Living in the campus world demands the possession of strong convictions rooted in the word of God. Students are taught *how* to



think. Under the guidance of campus pastors they are taught *what* to think, especially what to believe concerning Jesus Christ. They must be trained to evaluate the utterances of man and to resist pronouncements that conflict with God's word of truth. They must be trained to become molders of public opinion.

In the campus ministry one deals with the habitual but falsely motivated churchgoer, with the ecclesiastical organization man, with the member of the traditional introverted institutionalized religious establishment, with the Lutheran who identifies shallow church activism with Christianity. Through the application of Law and Gospel things are expected to happen to such Lutherans so that their religious knowledge will become a dynamic faith.

The Church, in the words of Dr. O. H. Pannkoke, a competent spokesman for the Church in higher education, must help the student toward a living faith. It must help the student realize a tested faith because he lives in an environment in which his faith is challenged. It must help the student live in active faith which is at work in the daily renewal of penitence and faith, and in a life of self-denying love. It must enable the student to participate in the fellowship of faith. It must help him fulfill his Christian mission in the world in restraining evil and in fulfilling and giving power to the commandment of love. It must train students to perform their larger responsibility in life which devolves on them because of their developed talents.

In emphasizing churchmanship in all its ramifications the Church must help students and faculty members fulfill their Christian vocation as Christians *now* and where they *are*.

Lutheran students should never be regarded as a field to be worked but as a task force to be developed for service in the Church and world today, beginning with the campus. Their Christian service projects ought not to be directed primarily toward the campus. Personal involvement should be the primary concern of those who have been called from the world, who have been transformed and are then sent back into the world, beginning with the campus, for the purpose of cleaning up the mess by attracting and directing their fellows to the heart-transforming Christ. In an ongoing way every Lutheran student should face up to the question as submitted by an alumnus of a major university: What can I do for my Lord that I am not doing now?

When campus pastors preach in church-provided college chapels, when church-sponsored instructors teach courses on religion in the classrooms, when the Christian faculty members do their teaching within the context of their faith, and when students make their Christian testimony by word and example, the Church is *in* the university.

With regard to credit-courses in religion, the Church must meet its opportunity also in this area through qualified campus pastors or very preferably through full-time instructors in religion. It is no longer a question of *whether* religion can be taught at the state

university but simply a matter of *how* it can and should be taught. To meet its opportunity the Church must first help create conditions which are conducive to church-sponsored religion courses. The Church must, therefore, contribute toward the recognition and implementation of the American principle of religious pluralism whereby the denominations are enabled to teach religion intelligently, honestly, and in loyalty to their confessions and without compromise. Anything less than that must be viewed as an affront to the Church's Lord. It must be regarded as dealing shabbily with Christian instruction.

A new development in our program of religion in higher education is the introduction of theological courses in our major student centers. At the moment, the movement is largely in the conversation stage although the idea is finding a measure of expression in our student center at the University of California in Berkeley. It is one intent of this venture to deepen the theological moorings of future Ph.D.'s, who will one day teach in the prestige colleges and universities. These courses would also encourage intelligent dialogue which ought to be going on between the Christian faith and other disciplines in the university. Theology, so Robert McAfee Brown tells us in his book, *Significance Of The Church*, is not an irrelevant pastime of seminary professors. It is the occupation of every Christian, the moment he begins to think about, or talk about, or communicate, his Christian faith. The injunction to love God with all his mind, necessarily involves the layman in theology. He can never avoid theology; if he refuses to think through his faith, he simply settles for an inferior theology.

A second and very important function pertains to the preparation of ministry-minded students for one or the other of the Synod's seminaries. As matters now stand the preparation would be directed largely toward the Springfield seminary whose leadership and policies have been very sympathetic to state university students whose image of the ministry and of the men in it is based on the campus ministry. Campus pastors have inspired and induced a considerable number of the students to consider the ministry as a career.

It should be stated at this time that the purpose of the House of Studies requires more than our Commission's enthusiastic interest. It demands the sponsorship of another well-known agency within the synodical organization, namely the Board for Higher Education. The latter has agreed to explore this avenue of seminary entrance. The Cleveland Convention authorized a joint study of the exciting proposal. That study is currently under way. It is not beyond the realm of reasonable expectation that an awakened synodical constituency may reconsider the costly authorized junior college expansion program and pay desired heed to the proposed House of Studies plan at selected and strategically located major universities and thus usher in a preparatory ministerial training program which follows the American educational pattern and which also incorporates certain economic advantages.

### *The Church's Means*

The Church goes to the university with worship, pastoral care, and instruction. Worship and Bible study receive primary consideration. It is the Church which goes to the University. And it is the Church as Church. More students are attending church today than ever before. Not only campus pastors but our religion instructors report that students hunger for the word of God. Worship with Holy Communion is an essential part, not a sideline to campus Christian work in which the student is encouraged merely to participate. It is, as Parker Rossman put it in his evaluation of our campus ministry with its student congregations in student chapels, "an experience generating much of the high voltage power which is required in the university. It is the banquet which nourishes and strengthens the new man, a spiritual experience which equips students for the key Christian role in the technological frontier which the university represents." In the Lutheran type of campus ministry the Communion cup rather than the coffee cup receives emphasis.

As an aid in the campus ministry the Missouri Synod also sponsors Gamma Delta, the international association of Lutheran students, which provides for campus personnel a program with Scripture study, worship and Christian fellowship features. The Reformation emphases—grace alone, faith alone, and the Scriptures alone—are basic, as students also make critical inquiry and participate in frank discussion of Christian doctrines and practices, with the outcome that the student's faith can expand and mature along with his intellectual and social growth.

At the moment there is a manifest decrease of interest in church-sponsored social activities and mass meetings of general interest. This is not a disturbing fact. Students are experiencing greater competition in the classroom where the academic standards have been raised. Students are growing more serious in their approach to higher education. With the advent of junior colleges, major universities are becoming senior colleges and graduate schools. Students have time only for that which has relevance for them. The Commission on College and University Work has taken cognizance of the changes which are taking place within the university. It has been saying that being a student is a vocation, and even the Church should not waste a student's time! It has, therefore, structured a new type of programming, wherein Christianity is related to areas of specific student interest and concern, and it has provided relevant discussion materials for the numerous special interest groups. Through the use of these materials, students are enabled to suffuse their vocational interests with the Christian religion. God and religion are no longer cooped up in church on Sunday. They have relevance for the student's life and life calling. This type of programming has also brought into focus opportunities for full-time church careers and induced not a few to transfer to schools where necessary preparatory training is available.

### *Preparation for College*

Both the universities and the Church are concerned about the product which not only leaves the university—but which enters the university.

When Church and university work together and release persons who not only have been equipped to function with skill in specific careers but who will also serve as Christians in their professions, then the ultimate has been achieved in total development, both for this life and for the life to come.

It ought to be the campus pastor's pleasant task to set about the task of developing a student's faith when the student arrives on the campus and at once begin the movement toward the release of a totally and properly developed person.

The task, however, is complicated when students enter the university with false motivations; when they go to college for wrong reasons; when the Church must look *them* up; when they do not regard the assembly of God's people around Word and Sacrament as the normal expectation of Lutheran freshmen.

One must be both sympathetic and charitable with our pastors in the matter of counseling the college-bound youth. Few of our pastors, up to the present, have come from the university experience.

The Commission on College and University Work is, therefore, working assiduously on every level with youth agencies and youth leaders, with college students and graduates toward the enrollment of freshmen who have been properly prepared for college, who know that *they* belong to Jesus Christ and that their *talents* belong to Him and that it is their privilege to develop their God-given talents for His purposes and that their chief mission in life is to "matter," and that while they are on the campus—and in the world—it is their ongoing responsibility as Christians to make the Christian faith intelligible, visible, and irresistible.

In varying degree the doors of the universities are open to the Church to give battle to secularism, the practical exclusion of God from human thinking and living, which is at the root of the world's travail today. With secularism on the rampage, the doors may not be open long.