

What Historic Forms Are of Continuing Relevance in Relationship to the
to the Church's Mission in the University?

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More than ten years ago, when I was undergoing the agony of transition from a suburban pastoral charge to a university chaplaincy, I read a rash of literature produced by task forces on the question of the crisis in the university and the church's strategy for meeting this need. I took a small part in many such strategy meetings, exploring ways and means for the church to help the university be the university. That was a long time ago. The material makes quaint reading now. I can't imagine the thing happening in quite the same way today.

What I'm after in the above paragraph is a parable that will help name the time. Because it's the kind of time it is, I find myself having much more to say around the topic assigned than I have to say to it. Because I find it a time for the continuing finding-out-on-the-job what the church's mission to the university is, I find the choice between the forms the mission takes to be less significant than the way the church goes about it.

CONCERNS CALLING THE CHURCH TO MISSION

Regarding the concerns calling the church to mission in the university, I find myself agreeing with the analyses reported in the record of the meeting of the national Committee on Relations of Church and State in Higher Education, September 30, 1969. I am repeating these along with a few observations because this seems to be part of the round-about comment I need to create the kind of space in which my remarks will have meaning.

There are hurting people on the campus. As enrolment mushrooms loneliness increases. Other depersonalizing forces are at work. The need for every kind of device for the creation of meaningful, small communities becomes more and more vital. The objection of a few years ago to the church running a ghetto on the campus, has come to have a hollow sound. It sounds

a little too fussy for our frightening times. Where can a girl go to have a cry? Where can anyone go for sanctuary short of hospitalization? There is simply not enough of this kind of physical space around.

People are hurting for more reasons than loneliness. I hardly know anyone on the campus that is getting affirmed. Administrators, senior educations, middle-year climbers are under constant threat. Student and every other kind of unrest is rampant because of alienation in its many forms. A sure and growing effect of this unrest is a state of growing threat to a vocation that has had little experience of this in the past. It is happening to an increasing number of people who have very few resources for coping with alienation and betrayal.

The campi of North America are the supreme place where western culture is experiencing the fact that ours is an age of Revolution. This matter deserves a paper of its own, for I find myself more and more convinced that if the church has no Word for revolution, it soon won't have a word for much. Every year more people on the campus are driven to the decision that our ills are profoundly deep and our access to remedial action enormously remote. More people are facing the terrible bind of having to choose between cheap drop-out or pointless rage. A strange feeling I often get about the revolutionary left on our campus is "Hey you...could you use a chaplain?" There is no doubt in my mind that the revolution needs to be redeemed, it needs a theology, a Word, an eschatology.

Many things have conspired to set an anit-intellectual movement going in higher education. And I think Paul Goodman is right when he points out that today's youth culture is religious without much critical concern. Any trip is as good as any other.

Movements are also taking place to counteract the isolation into specializations and some of the objectivity purported necessary to higher education. There is a student organization on our campus pushing for interdisciplinary education for the serving professions. It grew out of the Vancouver Inner City Service Project which for three summers now has

placed students from a variety of disciplines into the urban scene for a summer of in-service training.

The question of the relation between value and education is being raised in various quarters at U.B.C. and Simon Fraser. Higher education is being called upon to concern itself with the Good as well as the True and Beautiful. Our Philosophy Department now looks upon itself as the enterprise responsible for the creation of moral man in today's world.

The search for interdisciplinary encounter rises out of more than a desire to share training facilities between related professions. It stems from the need to consult together in order to rediscover the meaning of vocation. What is Architecture? What is Medicine? What is Law? What is Ministry? The head of our school of Architecture said to me, "What I find people calling for, is that we confront each other, not with our knowledge, but with our commitments."

At our university there are some slight beginnings of a movement to take the university to the community. The formation of task forces to approach personal and social issues is on the increase.

All of these are concerns that call for the church's presence. But what I think makes the difference between ten years ago and now is that the church recognizes herself as being in as deep trouble on these matters as is the university. We too find it hard to create community across much distance in life-styles. Our resources for handling alienation and betrayal are none too adequate. The anti-thinking kick is not very helpfully met by a hold-the-line retrenchment. What is required is better thinking, and our own history of thinking hasn't had that much to offer lately. Much as I know that the revolution needs a ministry, I haven't any idea how to go about it and most of the churchmanship I exercise or observe carries on like there wasn't a revolution. We too are in trouble with our vocation.

There is no way the church can have a mission in higher education as it talks function and strategy to itself and then comes with its goodies

to the campus. The need is great - even dire. But it seems to me that the only way of serving it is for the church to join the university, where it can, in a mutual pilgrimage. We haven't many goodies. We might know where some are. If they are that good perhaps we will be able to partake of them together.

HISTORIC FORMS

Church Related College

Anyone who, like myself, has a church related college for an alma mater can never deal with this question without strong feeling. I have believed in this form of the church's presence in the university for so long I am not sure I can make a proper evaluation of it. However, I do think that the interest of so many educators in the creation of colleges within the university system is testimony to the value of such an institution. While admitting that there is no guarantee that such will avoid becoming a bear garden also, many are looking on the creation of similar kinds of institutions as one contribution to the solution of the university problem.

At the same time I am sure, that money being where and what it is, there is not much chance of our increasing our institutions of this kind. Nor do I see it as necessary. For while there is doubtless some difference between the Church-related College and these colleges within the university, this difference is hardly enough to justify the outlay of funds upon which other serious calls are being made.

Seminaries

Perhaps, because these are what we have most of, we are least able to evaluate them. All official theory, local, national, international, declares the necessity of placing our seminaries in an ecumenical setting at a university center, for purposes of mutual benefit. At the same time our seminaries are forever feeling that they are irrelevant to the rest of the campus. Nonetheless we will continue to locate seminaries in this fashion.

The situation at Montreal, where the seminarians are automatically participants in the student government of the whole university seems enviable. In our area the most promising development is the Inter-Professional Education student movement among theologues, social workers and students in the various medical professional schools.

Residential Colleges

These appear to me to be a commendable form. They provide the physical space to make possible the creation of community. Granted this is a long way from the actualizing of such. Residence life is of great service in the early years of a student's career. While welcome at the start, I hear a general complaint that residence life is superficial and intrusive. My guess is that programming these institutions will become more and more difficult and will require more and more patience and imagination. For example, chapel attendance at Union College averages about three persons per service. There are over ninety in residence. However, if we are going to be up to a ministry at all, in the university, here is where we are most likely to have it.

I do feel the need to add one comment. I think there is no point of residential colleges as the church's form of mission on the campus, unless they are co-educational.

Student Groups, Denominational

I take it that no one is interested in the formation of United Church clubs on the campus. This may not be so. Just because I have not found anyone interested, either locally or in other universities may not mean that there is no interest.

Student groups, Interdenominational

An enormous amount of my energy has gone into the violent and troubled history of the S.C.M. on our campus. This has not been without blessing. I can't help but read this movement as a following of its own into the wilderness, and therefore as a kind of frontier of the church and the university. It seems to me that whatever happens to the S.C.M., happens

to the church sooner or later. In this regard we will never be able to stop the S.C.M. from being the agency of the churches in the university.

There are other groups, more self-consciously identified with the Christian label. Some, like the V.C.F., are undergoing their own kind of groaning, like the church-student group tension, like the pushy scalp-hunting vs. genuine-concern conflict; mass evangelism vs. friendship-evangelism conflict; mass meeting vs. small group conflict; like never getting a speaker who is quite free of questionable features, like the frightening intrusion of a political concern. At the same time the group is relatively large and includes bright, likesome people.

There are the groups so self-consciously identified with the Christian label that they claim to own it. These can gather crowds and do have their converts, drop-outs and turn-offs. Being new and created out of a recent charisma, they have no questions yet, and charge ahead on a crusade to confront every living soul with Christ.

Both groups are relevant to some and not to others. They are not the whole mission of the church and I find no call for our church to be in the business of creating such.

The more significant comment here, it seems to me, is that what is needed is the fostering of an ecumenical movement between campus Christian groups.

University Parish

Ever since I heard that Terry Anderson and Murdith McLean were undertaking an Ecumenical University Parish at Edmonton I was fascinated with the possibilities. These two came to the conclusion, at a most unlikely time, to make as the basis of their Chaplaincy at the University of Alberta, a community of people who were concerned with the rediscovery of authentic worship. The parish included a study program as well. This model commends itself highly.

I gather from a recent visit to Edmonton that it too is in trouble. But it has blessed a great many people.

However, I want to declare that any resistance I felt in the past, lest such a thing be a threat to the doctrine of the church, is now completely gone. I had some fear that a university parish would corrupt the churchmanship of the campus member who ought to be active in some established congregation. No More. Now I am worried that we are going to end up with a proper doctrine of the church and no bodies. There are too many unchurched, concerned people looking for some kind of redemptive community to forgo experimentation in the name of any kind of orthodoxy. This doesn't mean that I think we can stop worrying about whether our forms are a distortion of the gospel or not. It rather means that I think we no longer have reason to believe we know what forms will prevent our distortion of the gospel.

Chaplaincy

The group for whom this paper was prepared has access to an extended attempt on the part of the Board of Colleges to evaluate our university chaplaincies. This paper can only add a smattering of private comments.

Two things are true to say.

1. It's a NO job. Nodbody asked you, Nobody wants you. Recently, whenever I pick up a hitch-hiker and he finds out I am a chaplain... Nothing! A large program for Sex Education is planned for the campus using authorities from various disciplines. No chaplain is asked to take part.

2. After more than ten years I approach the close of my chaplaincy trembling with grief and gratifude. Of a life, that I think underwent a lot of formation over the years, these last ten have been the most formative by far. And why all this grief over a NO job?..as having nothing and yet possessing everything?

While I am sure that for at least some time to come an official church spokesman will be thought of as having less and less to say, the reality

of any chaplain's ministry rests on the fact that he is the church's man there. That's the mystery. It is true that the ministry on the campus is conducted by the Christian members of the university. But there is something about the presence of a vocation on campus, that would absolutely disappear if there were no Christian Ministry, which does something for the ministry of all the other saints who have this ministry alongside their vocation.

Christian Members of the University

The question here, of course, is the discovery of the way to gather these for the mutual discernment, support and execution of ministry in the university. Any and all of the historic forms of the church's mission on the campus are to be find ways of doing this.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the paper, I am sure, I have been evidencing my conviction that there is a much more fundamental question than the choice between the forms of the church's mission to higher education. On the one hand, local factors will have much more bearing on the situation than general considerations. On the other hand, changes are taking place so rapidly, that over-all policy on these matters will probably be out of date by the time it is decided. More significantly, the choice of form won't make anything like as much difference as the way we go about it, whatever the form.

It will require the elimination of the last vestige of imperialism that, however it was disavowed, now appears to be still evident in the strategy talks of ten years ago. It will require getting used to being thought of as having nothing to say, because what we have said and thought has been shallow and facile of late. It will require learning on the spot to be open to the grace to live with alienation, rage and betrayal. It will take learning how to become a broken fellow pilgrim doing his modest learning along with the rest.

There is no point in our coming on at all, with any of the historic forms, if (to paraphrase Freud) we are unable to learn afresh how to love and think.

On this continent, the campus is one key place where the new world is happening. If the church can't be there, it really can't be anywhere. If it can find no Word for the campus, if it proves incapable of declaring it there, it will soon have no Word for anyone.