Mission to the Academic Community

How does a ministry to the academic community differ from a more traditional ministry? Our goals are identical—to win men to Christ and to send them forth to live as transformed individuals in society. Likewise, the inner needs of the “up and out” are just as present as in the less educated, no matter how cultured the man, or how thick the educational veneer may be. Our ministry differs in the means we use to achieve our common goals. Here, with Paul, we seek to become all things to all men, that by any means we might seek to win some for our Lord.

Curiously, the great majority of those who attend our secular universities have some religious heritage. How is it they so soon “lose their faith?” A more careful examination of what they have discarded indicates that they never had much “faith” to lose. They have been given a caricature of the real thing, a substitution of “culture religion” (often including knowledge of their creed or catechism) for a vital, personal relationship to Christ. Answers they were given to burning contemporary questions at best often have been superficial, at worst, false. They are resentful because their leaders often have taught them to retreat from the world of knowledge and culture into the womb of the institutional church. They feel a sense of relief in discarding the unreal, the superficial, the archaic—their experience and caricature of the church.

Our modern architectural forms can testify that we seek to be contemporary! But with the pulpit dominating the interior of our sanctuaries, we indicate that the traditional approach through preaching is still at the core of our assault upon the minds and hearts of men. Here we proclaim the Christ of the Bible, one who came to seek the lost, heal the sick, give sight to the blind, release the captive. Our goals are identical with any Reformed Church when we seek to confront men with Christ and to urge them to convert and acknowledge the Lordship of Christ in their lives.

The majority who attend are often unconvinced of need and therefore uncommitted to Christ. Therefore, we must awaken within them a sense of need by preaching the Law. Are there any better examples of the emptiness of sophisticated man than those illustrated by Hugh Hefner (builder of the “Playboy” empire), Albert Camus, Ernest Hemingway, Sigmund Freud, or Nietzsche? Can the example of Birmingham or Selma, of pre-war Germany, or Viet Nam be ignored? Can the monster man be entrusted with lethal weapons threatening international genocide, now available from a Pandora’s box opened by scientific discovery? To those fearful and estranged men alienated from their Creator, adrift on an uncharted sea, buffeted by destructive tides of relativism, and with no fixed point of reference, the freedom and direction Christ gives stand in welcome contrast.

How thrilling to see that the gospel is still relevant and still the power of God unto salvation! Many from Reformed and non-Reformed backgrounds commit their lives to Christ. These we seek to train and send back to penetrate their society as witnesses. Since the whole counsel of God is applicable in every situation, we seek to enable them to overcome the world (not retreat from it), and

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Redeemer to the person who sacrificed to a Greek or Roman god. Some of these terms are not understandable today to people of other cultures, but these people have terms which can and must be transformed and through which the gospel must be transmitted.

Creativity in this area knows no bounds. Men have scratched the surface and a beginning has been made. Christian theologians are preparing as diligently as they can for the time men of other faiths are as desirous to dialogue as are the Christians. When that time comes, there must be people able and willing to carry on the conversation.

JOHN H. PIET

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to bring knowledge and culture as trophies to him.

Converts won through preaching need instruction and encouragement to receive it. Preaching, to be effective, must be supplemented by dialogue. A more formal worship service demands the complement of smaller groups where what has been declared can be discussed. The hardest questions must be raised, faced squarely, and answered. Where personal problems cannot be solved, or even raised, in the smaller group, individual counselling is demanded.

In our ministry to the academic community our means may differ, but our goals are the same. Together we seek to make His praise glorious. Sola Gloria Dei.

CALVIN S. MALEFYT

THE CHURCH AND THE CAMPUS (Continued from page 19)

There should be room for healthy doubting and for a great deal of exploring together the “roadblocks” to effective communication of the gospel. There should be a significant process of biblical thinking taking root in this particular context. Christian witness will become genuine participation in the lives and situations of one’s fellow student or colleague. The professional minister becomes “one of us” who learns to be a catalyst, an advisor, helping with biblical tools, fostering initiative and strategy in group witness but never taking the reins of the fellowship. The church has yet to try on a large scale to challenge the people of God in the university to really take seriously their identity.

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