

Four Models of Christian Presence in the University

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I propose to you tonight that to engage the *whole* university requires the mutual support, the interplay of 4 models of Christian ministry. We can think of these as 4 legs of a stool, as Dr. Femi Adeleye once put it.

- the pietistic
- the evangelistic
- the apologetic
- the dialogic.

It is the last of these—the dialogic—where many of us associated with the IFES Engaging the University network believe that university Christian movements need a new vision.

LEG ONE The Pietistic

In the pietistic model the principal orientation of IFES groups is towards the inner Christian life. This is vital and essential to campus ministry. Activities focus on Bible study, prayer, and possibly evangelism and outreach. The thematic emphasis is on living the Christian life.

Yet, by itself, we discover that this leg of the stool has severe limitations.

- Ministry is oriented to *students*, not faculty -- and usually under-graduates, not more mature students.
- Ministry usually does not engage the *minds* of students, the very reason they are at the university
- Ministry has a limited engagement with Christian faculty as *scholars*.
 No systematic effort is undertaken to catalog (a) who are Christian faculty, (b) how might they be mobilized on behalf of students, (c) how might their own gifts and scholarship be advanced for the kingdom of God in the university.
- Ministry lacks engagement with the great debates, struggles, research frontiers of the university
- Ministry is not engaged other religious or non-religious groups on campus, even if they share some goals in common

As a social phenomenon, this ministry too often stays away from the center of the university and exists at its margins. Essentially this kind of ministry reproduces inside the university what students should receive inside the local church.

Don't get me wrong: a development of the inner life is essential.

It is one of the 4 legs of the Christian stool through which we can engage the whole university. But it is *not* sufficient—if we are to engage the WHOLE university for Christ.

LEG TWO: The Evangelistic

The evangelistic leg involves proclamation of the gospel of Jesus to the campus. It may be quiet, in personal sharing of faith, or vocal, in large meetings and public events.

Its characteristics:

- the message of the Christian evangel – the good news of salvation
- an effort to reach the whole campus
- it intends to bring students (and perhaps faculty) to Christ

It is a fulfillment of the Great Commission – go into all the world and preach the gospel – and that includes the university.

Yet this powerful presence on the campus may not touch the heart of what the university does—what it thinks about it, what are its agendas, what it teaches—because the Christians make no connections between following Jesus and the teaching curriculum or the research agendas or the contributions of the university to public debate.

Further for every student won for Christ:

- How many bright, smart, intellectually capable students are *lost* from Christ?
- How many refuse to take the Christian faith seriously, because the Christian faith seems irrelevant to what they are studying?
- How many say the Christian faith is not for me any longer—it has nothing to do with what I study, nothing to do with the university, its teaching and research.

Surely we must *not only* be “winning students to the Lord” *but also* “Be keeping students in the Lord.” And that requires another leg of Christian ministry.

Don’t get me wrong. Spreading the Good News of Jesus is a living, breathing part of our presence on campus. But it is *not* sufficient if we are to engage the WHOLE university for Christ.

LEG THREE The Apologetic

The Apologetic leg recognizes that big issues universities debate can threaten Christians and their faith. The apologetic ministry engages the university where the university seems to threaten the faith.

Programming for apologetics proceeds something like:

- Identifying a source of intellectual threat
- Finding *either* faculty members, far or near, who have authority to understand and appraise the ideas, *or* equipping IV staff with books or materials that convey authoritative defenses
- Inviting faculty to mount a defense against the threat, by showing that the threat is misplaced, or the threat is rightly understood but can be rebutted, and so on.

The apologetic ministry has many merits. An effective apologetics on campus can also be a great encouragement to students, both those for whom the particular attack and defense is salient to their scholarship.

A thoughtful apologetics is integral to the faith. However, I have real concerns about it.

- The apologetic model has a defensive and reactive orientation, which reinforces the lingering evangelical suspicion that the university is a dangerous place.
- The apologetic model rarely if ever addresses issues that students or faculty are confronting at the leading edge of their disciplines.

- The apologetic model does not celebrate the wonder of God's work or elaborate the truth of biblical revelation as we find them in literature and history, nanotechnology or post-colonialism, ethnomusicology or institutional economics, comparative religion or optics.

Don't get me wrong: apologetics is vital. It is one of the 4 legs of the Christian stool through which we can engage the whole university.

But it is *not* sufficient if IFES and its national movements are to engage the **WHOLE** university for Christ.

LEG FOUR The Dialogic Model

I adapt this label from Dr. Vinoth Ramachandra who has written persuasively about the centrality of dialogue when engaging the university.

A dialogic ministry takes the university seriously on its own terms. It considers a university ministry to be *sui generis*. It does not simply do what the local church does.

It is a distinctive ministry in its own right.

It seeks to draw all Christians on campus into faith-infused conversations at the level of intellectual engagement that matches everyday teaching, research and writing in every discipline on those campuses.

In fact, it seeks to draw every person on campus into some kind of contact, some kind of engagement, some kind of exposure to Christians, Christian beliefs, Christian ideas, Christian virtues, Christian actions.

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