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Mutual Task of Liberation

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# Campus Ministry and the University in the Mutual Task of Liberation

WAYNE SAFFEN

THE AUTHOR IS LUTHERAN CAMPUS PASTOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO. HE delivered this address at the dedication of a striking ecumenical center for worship and religious services on the Edwardsville campus of Southern Illinois University on Oct. 18, 1971. In the address he challenged both the church and the university to become agents of God's program of setting people free.

These are days when institutions are in trouble because they have become dysfunctional. This is true of all elements in American society. The whole church is undergoing the tensions of a new reformation and counter-reformation. Society is torn between the surge towards freedom and the call for law and order. Industry cannot supply enough jobs, with or without war. The economy is in crisis. Serious political analysts wonder if the country can hold together. Presidents entertain worries about national unity which never occurred to true believers in the American way of life. Medicine, as an institution, is under mounting attack because of increasing costs and diminished care. The military relaxes hairstyles for the new army and holds courts-martial for war crimes. The university is in a financial crisis. At heart in each of these crises is a loss of faith in institutions. None of them does what it was designed to do. The institutional crisis in every area is symptomatic of a breakdown in function. Conservative retrenchment sets in against the pressures to change to preserve the institutions at all costs.

Institutions come into being because something necessary or valuable has to be

done effectively in our common social life. An original purpose inspires a movement which becomes an institution. People need to gather for encouragement of spirit, so there is the church. People need to be educated to think and function intelligently, singly and together, so there is education. People need to function socially, so there is government. People get sick, so we need hospitals and physicians. People need goods and services, so there is industry. Nations need defense, so there are armies.

To facilitate such necessary activities, institutions are organized and maintained to facilitate their purposes. Human functions flow into buildings, facilities to help them happen. That is when the shift takes place from institutions to institutionalization of procedures, routinized. Another kind of logic takes over, different from the functional and purposeful logic which gave birth to the institutions. Churches which began as congregations end as buildings and organizations. Education becomes schools. Medicine becomes hospitals. Industry becomes factories. Commerce becomes office buildings. Money exchange becomes banks. Government becomes bureaucracy. Next comes the alienation of the people from the institutions built for

their service. Then must come reformation or revolution.

Two institutions come together this week to dedicate a facility which will likely become another institution. The "establishments" of church and state and university, even of architecture, are represented. One would think that such institutional presence would dictate that topic: "Church and university in the mutual task of institutional *preservation*." If all institutions are in crisis, then it would seem that all forces ought to rally to their defense.

Not so. The assignment given me is to talk about "Campus Ministry and the University in the Mutual Task of *Liberation*." That would seem to be an innate conflict of interest. Or is this just another example of the totalitarian society co-opting all good words under liberal auspices, as Marcuse contends? If so, let's have it out in the open. Let it be clear that we do not mean what we say and use words only for the effect they will have on people who still believe in them. For if we really mean to take on the task of "liberation," then we cannot do it on an institutional basis unless the institutions are themselves first liberated from their own Babylonian captivity to alien rulers, rules, and norms.

"Liberation" is a revolutionary word. It always has been. It always will be. It comes as a good word to oppressed peoples and raises armies to overthrow tyrants. Our own American experiment in government by the people was "conceived in liberty." The God of the Bible is a liberator. He liberated His people from Egypt. He did not just give the Jews a word to wish on. He sent Moses to deliver His captive people. The New Testament continues with the same message. "The people who

sat in darkness have seen a great light." Jesus came to liberate a whole world fallen captive to sin, death, and every form of hell. Again, the Gospel was no mere word. Men aren't crucified for mere words, then or now. Jesus was crucified because He represented a clear and present danger to the established order. If God's kingdom comes, the kingdoms of men cannot stand. Jesus brought the kingdom of God. The liberation movement flamed with Jesus, exciting followers. It had to be crushed. He was crucified by church and state because He presented the kind of liberation of God's people that neither Sanhedrin nor Rome could survive.

When Martin Luther rose in Germany to challenge pope and emperor with the radical liberation of the Gospel from "the Babylonian Captivity of the church" (as Luther called it), the continent shook and was sundered. That ancient quarrel flares in Ireland again today, the sides having changed in the meantime without either side really knowing it. Protestants like to call our movement "the Reformation," as if it were simply conservative. Roman Catholics knew better. They recognized it for what it was and called it "the Protestant Revolt." Luther himself staked out the movement on the term of "liberty." The reformation of the church was not an attempt to save an institution. It threatened to shatter the institution if the institution stood in the way of the liberty of the Christian people which the Gospel promises and delivers.

The modern era is no different in the names of saints and heroes we celebrate. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Father Delp, Simone Weil, and Martin Niemöller are hailed in the United States because they stood against

Hitler. But what shall we do, then, with Philip and Daniel Berrigan and many others who also stood against the military state which was destroying a whole people in Asia? The same liberation movement links Moses to Jesus to Luther to Bonhoeffer to Martin Luther King to the Berrigan brothers. This is the lineage of freedom fighters in the Christian church who have carried the torch for the liberation of mankind from all sinful oppression. We can't praise dead liberators and persecute living ones without joining the camp of the enemies of God. Liberation is the political result of the redemption of man by Jesus Christ. The business of the church is proclamation of the Gospel of liberation in Jesus Christ to the whole world. That message of liberation will come as good news to captives and as bad news to oppressors.

So, tell me again that the church and university are engaged in a mutual task of liberation. I am glad to hear it. I hope it is so. But it is an astounding claim in the face of repression in the church and university of dissenting elements. Building a building for church work on a university campus is an astounding fact if it is to truly serve as a liberation center. If it is not to be a liberation center, then let it be known simply as a way a kept church and a kept university try to keep young people with the institutions of society so they won't make waves.

If we catalog the history of liberation in the Bible and church history as God's liberation movement in the world for all people, the university also has its own history to read. The intellectual task is to liberate the mind. This is the liberal tradition in education. It is what the uni-

versity is supposed to be about. It is a child of the church and the "Enlightenment." The enemy of the university through the years has been the church, when the church was censorious and inquisitorial. The "Enlightenment" followed the "Dark Ages." So goes the myth. What made the Dark Ages dark was that the church ruled the mind of man with dogmas about everything, even about science. The university had to be liberated from the church. Even in American education, private colleges and universities which were begun by the church found their greatness by "liberating" themselves from denominational church direction. Science has been the great liberator in the modern world, giving us knowledge instead of faith. The university has become the institution of the liberation of the mind, just as the church became the institution for the liberation of the human spirit from alien rule.

The recent history of assault on the university from within and without leaves such a reputation for liberation tarnished. The university came to be seen by students not as a force for liberation in the world but as part of the combine of an imperialistic nation, a military-industrial-university state. Students knew when they went through the regimentation of registration that the university was not the free place it was supposed to be; no more than the institutional church is the free place it is supposed to be. Students sought to set up free zones in the university. They even set up counter institutions of free universities, free churches, free communities, free parks, free feeds, free clinics, and so forth. It is evident that freedom is on the mind of many young people. If this is

perceived as a problem to be brought under institutional control by the powers that be, I would suggest that such powers have no notion of freedom. When freedom is perceived as threat, tyrants rule.

It remained for Ivan Illich to declare what all of us should have known, that the university has become the church in the modern world. The priests of education sit atop the hierarchy which commands more money without delivering the goods than any institution except the army. Before the Reformation, the church sold salvation to people captive to its system of salvation. Now education is sold as salvation to those who want to get ahead in this world if not the next. Education is the totem of the modern world. Professors are the priests who hold the office of the keys to the better life through education. The whole people are not delivered from ignorance by education. In place of education, we have schooling. High school youths know they go to jail every day because they have to, without having ever committed any crime. That the society does not know it has turned its schools into prisons is remarkable. A free society would know it and do something about it. A captive people would not know its own chains. Look you and see how and where any radical faculty or students can be found in universities these days. Applicants are closely screened, tuition rises, even at state universities, to keep out the poor and keep whole peoples in economic bondage, while an elite flies around being important. Boards of trustees from industry run private universities, church hierarchies clamp down on church universities, and boards of regents run state universities. Public furor erupts over any person, let us say

Herbert Marcuse or Angela Davis, who is heretical in the prevailing political orthodoxy.

Now, tell me again that the university is about the task of liberation. I would like to believe it. I used to believe it. Students and professors used to believe it. Most people in the country still believe it. But they do not know. The university is in crisis because it has been compromised in its basic mission, politicized from the top invisibly long before it was politicized from within visibly. Government agents, spies, in the universities will testify in their hearts that this is true. What are they doing on campus, if the university is a zone of liberation?

Let us get to the business at hand: liberation. It is indeed the mutual task of Christian ministry and higher learning. Let us leave the institutional frame of reference for the moment, for these institutions exist only as facilities for this purpose. If they fail the purpose, then a free people will replace both church and university with movements which do what church and university are supposed to do but don't.

Let us begin with campus ministry. Christian ministry, as Lutherans understand it, at least, is the ministry of the Word of God. That is, a word will be spoken on this campus which is not captive to any of the political, educational, or even denominational orthodoxies. It is God's Word, not man's. It will be heard, one way or another. Ministry in this place will seek to speak it faithfully. That much I know of campus ministry in all denominations. We still differ denominationally and still have varying personal views. But I have yet to meet the campus minister of any

denomination who does not take seriously the call to preach God's Word. I have yet to meet one who knowingly tells an untruth. Some are abrasive in manner and some smoother, more establishment types; some conservative, some liberal, and some radical, but all are faithful to a Word given as they see it. This will mean that there will be conflict on this campus, and it will emanate from this building which you dedicate this week. If campus ministry is going to be done here, young people are going to "turn on to Jesus." There will be no end to the trouble that will engender. It may happen on this campus, as it has on others, that powers-that-be in church and university and state will try to remove outspoken campus ministers by fair means or foul. Let me here serve notice that if you wish to have God as your enemy, He will meet you on any field of your choosing if you try to suppress His Word. His basic Word is that His people shall be freed from every bondage of sin, death, and hell, under whatever guise those captivities are maintained. It is His work, not ours. He will do it, has done it in Jesus Christ, is doing it right now under your very noses. You will not get rid of God by getting rid of us. All you will do is to help God's liberation movement along. Persecution has always done that.

Do we have a mutual task, campus ministry and university education? That depends. It depends on whether we both mean it. Your campus ministers will have to stake out for you how they mean it. You will have to stake out for them how you mean it. You may find that you disagree. That's all right. Then get those disagreements on the table and deal with them. But you also may find you agree. If so,

you have a common task, and you can pursue the goal of liberation together.

I am sure there are followers of truth, wherever it leads, in your university today and in universities across the land. I also know that many of them are discouraged. But the light of liberty will not recede. Students will find that light in this university, if only because it may lie hidden in books, no matter what may be done to dim the light and frustrate their search. There are good teachers among you, in spite of the insane dictum to publish or perish, who will light fires in minds which can never be extinguished. More power to those people. Since it is the Holy Spirit who enlightens the mind and who leads us into all truth, just as the Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life, you will pardon me if I mention where this impulse for truth comes from and who the driving Spirit is in man's relentless search for truth. For we may not say that God is in the church and not in the university. He speaks to us out of a book of revelation. He speaks to you in what confronts you and what you try to understand. God is neither dead nor silent. But He is hidden. You will have to look for Him beyond the obvious.

We are tempted when speaking of church or university to think of content. We would like to trot out our doctrines and persuade you of them. You would like to trot us through your libraries and laboratories and display your resources. But ministry and teaching, as acts of liberation, deal with people. It is people who get liberated. In this case, young people. Universities will try to demythologize by making young people face the truth of history and science in many areas where

they have wrong notions. Hopefully, we will also become politically demythologized, since the political myths are the secular religion of our time, as political trials are the only heresy trials of our times. The university itself is also being demythologized as young people begin to see the lineaments of an apparatus which is, after all, constructed and put together one way and not another. If this process goes on, idolatry is in for a bad time. All the idols, including those of education, will fail and be seen as no gods at all. We have sacrificed a great deal of time and money to the idol of education. We have sacrificed human life to the idols of war and cold war. We have sacrificed truth to expediency to maintain a peace at home; we have shot down dissenting students on campus. Let us face the horror of it, admit it, and repent. Idols are not only no gods. They are false gods. They must be smashed. If some radical youths say: "Smash the state," they are saying, "Down with idols, including the idol of the national state." It is very hard to see the institutions we build with our own hands, in which we have invested so much, under mounting attack as idols. But look at it this way. They are, after all, only human constructions. They are idols. They could be symbols and servants and facilities for their purposes. When they fail in their purposes, they become idols. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The exchange of worship of idols for acknowledging the true God, the Lord the Spirit, is the beginning of human liberation in all walks of life. We think idols are statues made by foreign folks. Luther taught us better. Whatever we fear, love, and trust above everything else is our God.

If what we hold most important is not God but one of our own creations, we worship idols. It is as simple as that. Do not expect your idols to remain inviolate when God is loose in the world with His Word and Spirit.

We do not dedicate a facility here so that church or university, religion or learning may be worshiped. We dedicate a building for the liberation of people from every form of idolatry, every form of captivity and bondage. We seek to mark off and dedicate a zone of truth. The student coffee shop on our campus calls itself "a free store in a company town." That is what we dedicate this week: a free store in a company town. In its own way, that is also what a real university is, a liberated zone, a free store of learning in a company state. Winds of liberated young people can be sent out from here as liberators to communities across the land, knowing their calling as freed people of God in Jesus Christ to be enabled to serve others.

Communism seeks to create a new man: socialist man. Socialist man is cooperative, not competitive, altruistic, not selfish. It sounds utopian. But the utopian ideal has created freedom fighters the world around to bring about that kind of world.

Communism is not radical enough. For the free man is what both church and university say they wish to produce. We did, until getting a job replaced having a calling, until the rewards of higher education bought us off from our pursuit of truth. The free thinker was once the ideal of the enlightened man. Can you honestly say that your professors are free thinkers? I put that question to you to place on the agenda the next time somebody you disagree with comes up for tenure. I also put it to you

administrators to place on the agenda the next time you go to the legislature asking for money. I also put it to campus ministers to place on the agenda the next time they ask their churches to fund them again for another year.

Let me share with you the ideal vision of the liberated human being as Luther saw it. He wrote a treatise on the liberty of the Christian man. His paradoxical vision of such a man, freed from sin and guilt by the redemption of Christ on the cross, was this:

"The Christian man is perfectly free,  
lord of all things, subject to none.  
The Christian man is perfectly slave,  
subject to all."

Only free people can truly be servant. A servant class kept in bondage must first be freed from all that binds them. In our society the servant class is the black, the migrant, the Spanish-American, the American Indian, the poor of all colors and races. They must be freed from every real bondage and know it inside. They must be able to say, "I am black and proud," instead of, "Want a shine, mister?" At the Milwaukee convention of our church last summer a young black boy—that is, he really was a boy and he was black—was shining shoes of our delegates in front of the hotel. One delegate was having his shoes shined, the boy working furiously. Another group of delegates came to the entrance and said: "That's working hard, boy." The boy betrayed a flash of anger, which they didn't see. But I had one of those moments when anger flashed almost uncontrollably. That only happened because I had become aware of what an insulting term that was for a young black

person seeking dignity and getting put down by whites. I said, rather sharply: "He is not a boy. He is a young man." The delegates looked bewildered. I'm sure they didn't know what that was about, meant no offense. But the young black man (boy) said: "Thanks. I'll give you a free shine as soon as I'm finished here." He knew what had happened. I don't want to come off a hero in this, because I wasn't. I was aware of my impotence. I was no liberator. I didn't say all the following things that needed to be said. All I knew was that this was an intolerable situation. All I know is that the white message to the black man cannot be, "Nigger, stay in your place." But I also know that nothing changes just because we whites say black instead of Negro or man instead of boy. Enough changes to lessen the insult. More must change to liberate and dignify.

So I don't come to you as an expert on this. I come as a student of Christian liberty, still trying to learn how. But that is our mutual task. Perhaps together we can learn how. The point is, the oppressed are not free until they have experienced liberty. Those who think they are free are not free until they have learned how to serve without feeling dehumanized. God gives us our humanity back in Jesus Christ, calls us His children and heirs of salvation. He gives us dignity and worth. That is what faith and learning are about in the world. Young people come to university to get a sense of dignity and worth by way of education and degree. The university confers degrees upon people, saying they are worthy. The church confers worth upon people by telling them that God loved them so much He sent His only Son



to die for them, that they are delivered from their sins and guilt, and are called to a high calling of God in Jesus Christ. This is the ennobling, redemptive, reconciling, dignity-conferring, liberating word which needs to be said to everybody. You earn your degrees at university. God gives us grace in Jesus Christ and frees us from every bondage, including the worst bondage of all, feeling not worthy, not good enough to count for anything.

Can we get together on this? It is hard, as an elitist institution which says by way of degree that some people are better than others, to proclaim that God holds all people equal under His law and confers His grace upon those He wills, not those who think they earn it. It is hard to acknowledge a God who is no respecter of persons, when we are in the business, really, of saying some people are more worthy of respect than others. It is hard in an achievement-oriented society to talk of grace, the undeserved kindness and goodness of God. It is even harder to make such grace clear and evident by our own belief in it and living out of it. But that is our task as campus ministry. Is it our mutual task as ministry and university? If so, how will the admissions office survive?

I haven't even begun to get radical yet. Jesus is much clearer about His mission in the world, and ours as His followers, than any of us have been up to now. Here is what he said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,  
because He has anointed Me to preach  
good news to the poor,  
He has sent Me to proclaim release to  
the captives and recovering of sight  
to the blind,

to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of the  
Lord.

Today this Scripture has been fulfilled  
in your hearing."

Luke 4:18, 21

People like to hear the Word of God in church. They may even tolerate it in the university. And in society. Provided you don't mean it, literally. It is when people take it seriously that trouble starts. Jesus read this text for the day in the synagog. People nodded in assent. Yes. It was true. Just as Isaiah said. Someday it would happen. Jesus was supposed to explain it. They would argue about it afterwards. But he did not explain it. It does not need explaining. It is perfectly clear. The only question is whether it happens or not. He dared to stand up and say that today it happens. He said the text was talking about him. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." Do you know what happened then? They threw Him out of church and picked up rocks to stone Him to death.

Now, do you realize the seriousness of dedicating a building in the midst of this university where that kind of thing can happen? I know you are all hoping it won't. But I am saying that it will. You can't stop it. The Word will go forth from this place that Jesus Christ is the Liberator of mankind, and people will follow Him in His mission of liberation in the whole world.

We are not that far from the genocide at Attica prison to fail to understand the clear import of these words. We are so used to body count from Vietnam and the killing of conscience by mass unconscionable scientific murder that all we may remember from Attica is body count: 43 or

44 at last count. That is high enough to be important. It was also unnecessary. Who read the demands of the prisoners? The basic demand was that they be treated as "human beings" rather than "inmates." The newspapers called the guards they held captive, exchanging roles, "hostages." The prisoners developed the discipline of calling their hostages "human beings." After the carnage there were no human beings, only dead bodies, discriminated against even after death. Guards had names; inmates only had numbers. This happened in a civilized country where states maintain universities like this all over the land. Yet we do not know that people who are in jail are human beings. Can you explain how that is possible with all this education? That is what we will have to change if you and we are serious about a mutual task of liberation. It is going to have to mean that people who are in jail are going to get out, that they are going to hear good news when they are there, that they will be treated as human beings while they are there and after they get out. Nothing less than that is acceptable religion or education.

We shall have to start by seeing to it that people go to universities instead of jails. We shall have to see that our schools are not turned into jails. We shall have to understand that students are human beings. The protest began at Berkeley, when students said to the mega-university: "I am a human being: do not fold, spindle, or mutilate." Less than a decade later the same word comes from convicts at Attica: "We are human beings." Who is educating whom? The oppressed are telling the oppressors to get off their backs, to know who they are, human beings worthy of

dignity and respect. If you will not listen to them, by God, you will listen to God. He will have His own way of telling you if you will not listen to plain words. We really do seem to be a stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in hearts and ears. We have before us an almost insuperable job of preaching and education if liberation is to happen peacefully, without the bloodshed and carnage it usually costs. Ignorance in these matters is not bliss. It is the pause before disaster.

Let me ask one more time: Are we really together in this? Are we agreed that we have a mutual ministry of liberation? Let us not just be nice and stroke each other's egos. There are times and places for that, and it does feel very good. But this is neither the time nor the place if we are talking seriously about liberation. We have prisons to empty in our country, people to redeem and confer dignity upon, people to educate and inspire, ghettos to transform into communities, universities to come alive with the love of learning, hope to radiate, good news to bring, a gospel of liberation in Jesus Christ to proclaim. People who sit in darkness need to see a great light. Hope needs to be revived after the massacres at Kent State, Jackson State, Vietnam, Attica, and elsewhere.

"When the Lord sends the Word, great is the company of preachers." Let the Word of the Lord go forth from this place that liberation is on its way, in the name of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, in the hearts and minds of the people, turning those in high places and low to the hearing of the Word of the Lord:

**"LET MY PEOPLE GO!"**

When you let the people of God free, watch them go. If you try to bind the

people of God, dig in for a long struggle. You are not only contending with people with freedom on their minds, which you are not about to change. You think you can tame God and harness His winds of freedom. We are not together in that. That is not your proper vocation, yours or ours.

Our calling is to liberate the hearts and minds and souls and spirits of man that earth may be a fair place and God may dwell among us as our God among His people. We are not born free. That is a myth of enlightenment we shall have to divest ourselves of, God and B. F. Skinner helping us. We are born captive into a scheme of things and a stratified society in which we seek to find our places. Liberation is an act of God which enters history and changes it by freeing captive peoples and overthrowing tyranny. Each of us does his part as an agent of God acting in history, only dimly aware (if aware at all) of his part in the cosmic process. We are certainly not in control of the outcome.

God unlocks the mind to see the truth and act upon it. The university can be servant of this process. It cannot control it. God unlocks the heart to love instead of hate in retaliation for all the injustice experienced in life. Each of us knows about that. To learn that hatred is destructive and rights no wrongs, to learn to forgive because we have been forgiven, to know that we need to be forgiven, that not only have we been wronged but that we have also wronged others: all this transforms self-understanding and liberates man from vindictive and self-justifying action in the world to redemptive actions which become a sign of hope to others still caught in their despair. To become sensitized to the

common net of humanity and to learn to love is a great gift by which God redeems and transforms the world. For love does not seek its own. Love seeks the good of others. That is easy to say. It is a gift of the Spirit of God that some people do it. We need to pray God for such gifts, for ourselves first. Radiation begins at a source. We must become radiated sources of love and hope and faith. These are gifts of God, gifts of the Spirit. You neither have courses in these disciplines nor do you award such degrees at your universities. They shall have to be asked for in prayer and cultivated at such places as this that your university may be blessed by God and not only cursed by students at this place. You shall need God's blessings and help if you are to be a university; you may not know it; you may think you are self-sufficient. But even your students know that is not true. You shall have to learn to pray again, even the most secular among you. For gifts cannot be requisitioned. The bursar cannot buy for you what you need the most: good spirit, hope, faith, and love. You will look in vain to your boards of directors for those gifts. You will be sustained by the prayers of the faithful, though you may not know it or acknowledge it. God knows. That is enough.

Campus ministry and the university in the mutual task of liberation? The very idea boggles the mind. But who knows? It is just daring enough, just impossible enough to become true. It is a challenge worthy of the delight of God to create something new on the face of the earth. Could it happen at Edwardsville, Illinois? Never can tell. Whoever heard of Bethlehem? When people tried to account for

Jesus, they couldn't. He didn't fit accustomed categories. All they could say was: "What good can come out of Nazareth?" That tells us a great deal about Nazareth. It tells us nothing at all about Jesus. The only thing we know about Nazareth is that Jesus came from there. So we could say about Southern Illinois: What good could come out of Southern Illinois University? The idea of geography changes when names are attached to places. Buckminster Fuller from Southern Illinois University?

Those names do not seem to go together. But there they are. And here is a building he designed. And here we are talking about "Campus Ministry and University in the Mutual Task of Liberation."

Campus ministry? SIU? Edwardsville? Mutual task? Liberation? Do we dare finish the text as Jesus did? "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Without stones?

Chicago, Ill.