

THE SIN AND THE GLORY OF THE STUDENT-MINISTER

Senior Essay

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Divinity

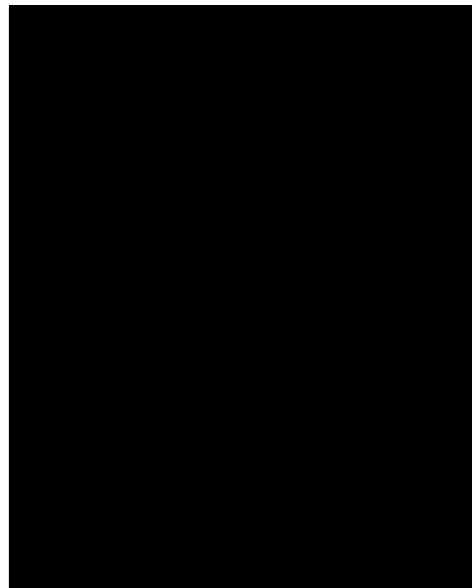
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INTRODUCTION

While searching through a maze of subjects in an effort to write this essay, I began to reflect upon my total three years here at the Interdenominational Theological Center. At a point in this reflection, I tried to weight what I had lost and what I had gained as a student during my seminary education.

Then I discovered that I could not limit my thinking to the role of a student, because I was also the minister of a church. This dual role, student-minister, has posed a multitude of problems, and it has offered many favorable opportunities.

My family, teachers, classmates, congregation, and other individuals questioned me over and over again as to how I could successfully work at both tasks. In an attempt to answer this question, the maze of subjects vanished. The weight of my lost and gain as a student-minister showed a balance between sin and glory. Thus the inspiration for this paper was born.

For the purpose of clarity, it might be wise at this point to give an explanation of the terms sin and glory.

Sin

We must admit that sin, like many other words, appears obscure, because it is impossible to adequately define. The Bible does not define sin any more than it defines God, and if a definition were attempted, it would be inordinate in terms of length.

Sin, for the purpose of this paper, means on the one hand, being involved in an experience that God has forbidden as well

as negligence in what God demands. On the other hand, sin means a broken fellowship or estrangement from God.

Glory

Also, glory, like sin, has a multitude of characteristics, and since a definition is useful to pin-point something, or to mark it out from other things of the same class, I shall use glory in a restricted sense in order to serve the purpose of this paper.

In an immediate sense glory means human joy as a result of helping others to become whole persons in Christ. In the ultimate sense, glory means to enjoy God now and forever. Now we shall consider the treatment of the subject.

I wish to discuss the sin and the glory of the student-minister from the viewpoint of the seminary, from the viewpoint of the congregation, from the viewpoint of the family, and the conclusion.

Finally, let us consider the objective of the paper. The purpose of this paper is not to say "yes" or "no" to a person who might seek to complete his formal education and pastor a church at the same time. The objective is not to say that the sin is so great that it is unforgiveable or that the glory is so lasting that one will not fall back into sin.

Rather, the purpose is to display the task as an open book that each inquirer might study for himself. That he might search himself and see if he has the courage, the strength, and the will to fight such a fight without impairing his health and constantly shaking his fist at God. When one will have read this paper, the verdict will still be his.

Since this paper comes out of my personal experience, the use of the personal pronoun I shall be used in the discussion concerning the congregation, family, and conclusion.

THE SIN AND THE GLORY OF THE STUDENT-MINISTER

The Seminary and the Student-minister

Economic Status

I entered seminary with a wife, four children, and one year of G. I. Bill eligibility at the rate of one hundred and sixty dollars per month. This was not enough to maintain my family in the food, clothing, and other necessities of life. As a result, I was forced to accept the call to pastor a church. The church is located approximately one hundred and sixty miles from the seminary, and when the roundtrip is completed half of the financial gift is used for transportation.

Our economic status was so low that we were constantly in financial difficulty. When sickness occurred, we were forced to make loans that we could not repay as scheduled. At times I could not help but think that we entered seminary on foolishness rather than faith. I was never at ease in my class in Christian Ethics and spent far too much time worrying about overdue accounts. This caused a great deal of tension, and there was no glory but only sin in light of our financial status.

Seminary Policy Concerning Work and Study Load

Seminary education is an intensely personal experience, because it is carried on in a community made up of students and teachers who live, study, and work together. It deals with a

man's growth in understanding God, man, and the Christian faith, and involves not simply the intellect but the whole man.

The seminary has a definite policy concerning the work and study load for all students. If a student is involved in secular or religious work over twenty-five hours per week, including travel time, his number of credit hours is automatically reduced to twelve. The administrative staff feels very strongly that a student cannot maintain his best health and grade average if he has to work. As a result, the policy concerning work and study load is rigidly enforced. This has to do with the health of the student.

Interest in Total Health of Student

As previously mentioned, the seminary is interested not simply in the intellect but in the whole person. The seminary considers the total health of each student as critically important. A physical examination is required before official entrance into the school, and each year thereafter until the student has completed his work.

In an effort to help the whole person, the seminary affords abundant facilities for book reviews, fellowship, recreation, discussion, and chapel worship.

Lack of Extra-Curricular Activities

The student-minister denies himself full participation in the life of the seminary. More than often he is forced to miss book reviews, fellowship meals, and programs in order to stay abreast in his class work and keep up his church duties. Several times

each year the seminary provides outdoor picnics and other forms of recreation, but the student-minister is seldom present. There are times when he would like to share in these activities, but when he decides to do so, he has an emergency call for a funeral or urgent meeting at his church.

It is certainly a sin not to take proper care of our bodies as well as our minds. All work and no play can lead to mental as well as physical ailments. Perhaps this is the most important reason why the seminary does not look favorably upon the involvement of a student supplying a church in an effort to remain in school.

Limited Education

Upon completion of his training, the seminary student should have more than a working knowledge of the subjects he has studied. He ought to have excellent health so that he can enter the full ministry mentally alert and with the necessary physical energy to do his job well.

Further, he should possess a well rounded knowledge not only of theology, but theologians. He should be clear on many of the well known theories in various subjects as well as truths. Unfortunately, his education is extremely limited. He does not have the time to read any of the works of Thiclicke, Barth, or Brunner unless their works are part of study assignments. Then there is more to seminary training than the study of the Bible and theology. The unusual inroads that sociology, psychology, and even the pure sciences are making in religion and life should be included in his education as extra reading.

Furthermore, student-minister has a guilt feeling when he tries to read for pleasure or extra knowledge knowing that this type of activity will get him behind in his classwork. As a result, the student-minister is forced to leave the seminary and become overburdened by trying to catch up on many of the issues of our world today.

Perhaps the seminary, as well as the student, considers this a grievous sin. The medical student does not attempt to practice medicine until he has completed his training, and the student of law does not attempt to try any court cases until he has completed his education; therefore, the seminary student, under normal conditions, should not attempt to pastor a church, because it limits his education.

The Congregation and the Student-Minister

Background of the Church

During the years immediately after the Civil War, some fifty families who lived in log cabins on a thirty acre farm found themselves "free" and homeless. The owner of the land needed the farm where the cabins were situated, and he gave the cabins to the former slaves, and with oxen they carried the cabins a few miles from the farm. One of these cabins became a combination school-church, and from this humble origin the Cumberland Presbyterian Church of this area began.

In 1896, it was decided that the church should be moved to town, Sweetwater, Tennessee, because many of the members had moved there to work. A tract of land was purchased for the erection of the church, and until this day the church remains on this lot.

With the exception of one high school graduate, the former ministers had little if any education. The usual requirements for the ministry were the call to preach and strong lungs. The services were always highly emotional with little regard for teaching.

The purpose of the church has been restricted or extremely limited. It has not been the aim of the church to go beyond "first aid," such as flowers for a funeral or a dollar for the sick, into the real mission of the church-save the world. Almost every phase of worship is centered around the sermon. For all

practical purposes the church could truthfully be referred to as a "preaching station". Let us turn now to four important facets in the life of the church.

Area of Preaching

In the area of preaching, the congregation is becoming more and more responsive in light of the teaching ministry. It is no longer essential, for most of the people, to be extremely loud and emotional in order to preach. The congregation responds more by listening with urgency to hear the next words, a few smiles and an occasional amen.

There is a marked difference in the Christian witness of the congregation as a result of the preaching service. Most of the people are more dedicated to the work of the church, and they now understand that living the Christian life is not just a Sunday responsibility, but an every day commitment. They also understand that they should act as followers of Christ on their jobs, in business involvements, political and social affairs, and in every facet of life.

Further, the preaching service has convicted, convinced, and shown persons the way to Christ in such a way that several have given their lives to Christ and joined the church each year.

This is not to infer that there are no complaints in regard to the preaching service. On the one hand, the sermons are occasionally too short but more often too long and boring. This is the result of my class assignments and family responsibilities. Too often the sermon preparation is delayed until Saturday night and not completed until approximately five or ten minutes before

the time of delivery.

On the other hand, there are times when I assert in a sermon that we are not to accept every word of the Bible literally, but I do not use these exact words. An illustration of this is Paul's assertion that if a woman wishes to know anything concerning the church she should ask her husband or keep silent. I explain that these words are not applicable to us today, because they display a clear case of taxation without representation. Women give their lives to Christ, and they are involved in every phase of the life of the church. As a result, they should be given the opportunity, not only to support the church financially, sing in the choir, and usher, but form governing and policy making bodies.

I further contend that, Paul, the same man stated, "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith...There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."¹

When a sermon includes this type of reasoning, there are smiles of approval from all of the members with the exception of a few older members. Their first reaction is that the seminary is teaching me against the Bible, and that if I continue to listen to my instructors, I will ruin myself and the church.

The congregation is deeply concerned about having a preaching service, at least twice each month, on Sunday night. This type of service would serve many worthwhile purposes. There is not a church in the community that has night service; it would give the young people an opportunity to become more involved with

¹The Holy Bible, Galatians 3:26-28.

the program of the church, and it would enable the people who work on Sunday morning to have a worship experience.

Unfortunately, night service would work too much of a hardship on me as a student. At this point, the congregation becomes disturbed about my dual responsibilities.

Looking back from experience at the whole area of preaching, it is certainly clear that the student-minister is involved in sin and glory. When sermons are half prepared, they are half delivered. This happens because the minister is trying to make up for what is not there in the beginning. When people have waited all week to hear the Word and replenish their spiritual strength, it is a sin for the minister not to be prepared. Then he must turn to God and ask forgiveness for a sin that he knows he is going to repeat. This always gives one the feeling of separation from God, estrangement.

In the prayer prior to the sermon, I sometimes say: We acknowledge our many sins and wickedness, which we have from time to time most grievously committed, by thought, word, and deed, against Thy Divine will. When I pray this prayer, I am never speaking academically, nor am I putting words into the mouths of the people. I am usually praying for myself and asking the congregation to join me.

Now the whole view is not one of sin, because there is a ray of glory shining forth in spite of the sin. When the lives of persons are visibly changed for Christ sake; when the sermon has helped others come out of the darkness into the saving light, when the Word enables men to see themselves as they are and motivate them to become what they believe God intends for them to

be, this brings joy into the life of the minister. Now let us examine another avenue of the congregation.

Pastoral Counseling and Visitation

Without any doubt this is the area of the church where the afflicted, for the most part, remains afflicted. Some members of the congregation are constantly complaining about my lack of time to share their problems. This is a common cry that is heard almost every week. "Oh! reverend, I wish you lived here." "I was so burdened the other day, but I did not have anyone with whom to share my problem." "I know you are in school. When will you graduate?"

There are times when I have the time to help people of the church through the medium of counseling. For the most part, I try to help them help themselves. I make a special effort to stay away from psychological labels such as "fixations" and "traumas." Just because things are not going well does not mean that a person needs a psychiatrist. Through my school experience, I have learned that worship is also a type of psychotherapy, and that some, never all, of the problems are solved by regular worship experiences.

Further, I never hesitate to refer persons to professional counselors when I cannot help their case. Further more, I make it a habit to visit the sick each time I am in the community, but I realize that I need to visit the persons who are not ill also.

There is a type of glory involved when through counseling persons are helped to accept conditions that they cannot change

or to equal or rise above the problems that they can change. It is also rewarding to see a teenager finding himself or a married couple in love again after a series of counseling sessions. There is joy in sharing the homes of older couples and listening to their many experiences. On the other hand, I feel the pains of sin again when I drive pass the hospital without seeing the sick in order to complete and hand in an assignment the following morning. Sometimes I am just too tired to stop.

With their money in my pocket, I suffer with the guilt feeling of estrangement and wonder if I am really going to enjoy God forever in Heaven, wherever it is. Now let us turn to the program of the church.

Program of the Church

As a result of seminary training, I have stopped trying to do everything in the church, because I have been spreading myself too thin. I have been trying to do too many things and not doing any of them well. Presently, I put forth every effort to get responsible members to carry out various functions of the church. Unfortunately, most of these activities are not carried out well even if completed. This is caused, in most instances, by my absence as pastoral director to supervise the members in their various roles.

The church music has suffered also because of my absence and lack of time to work out the total worship program. As a result, a majority of the people do not feel uplifted by the music nor that they are really praising God unless they hear one gospel song after another. For a long time there has been no continuously

active youth program, and the missionary department is a "first aid" club with little understanding of the meaning of mission as it relates to the total work of the church.

The church school is considered to be one of the best in East Tennessee. This will be discussed in more detail under the heading emergence of new forms. The men's club and usher board are doing an excellent job.

The total program of the church is not one that would guide the congregation progressively toward its true mission as a community of Christian believers. A few reasons for this are absence of the minister, a lack of time when the minister is present, not having church service every Sunday, and the educational status of the congregation. The results are the same, sin and glory.

I am a firm believer that the church was sent into the world to minister to and save the world; therefore, I am not only interested in the people coming to church on Sunday, but I am interested in the people serving and improving the total community.

A ray of glory has glimmered in our community as a result of our members coming out of the church building into the world to listen and minister to its needs. I have had meetings with the Mayor of the city in regards to industry and other job opportunities. I have also had meetings with other city officials in an effort to improve the physical aspects of the community. The members of the church are happy for me to look into these matters, but they are not yet willing to become involved as a congregation. I become involved in sin in this area

also because I am not able to attend all of the meetings with the city officials.

Emergence of New Forms

In my senior year, which is the most difficult, the congregation feels very strongly that the Cumberland Presbyterian Denomination can no longer serve as its governing body. Under this denomination the educational requirements for the ministry has not changed since 1810, and at that time not even a high school education was required. This in itself helped the congregation to become somewhat lazy. So little was required and so little was accomplished.

I decided along with the congregation to become involved in a denomination that would enable us to become a church that would be relevant in the present day world. As a result, we have joined the United Church of Christ. Shortly after this change was completed, some of the traditions began to fall.

This denomination supplements the minister's salary, and this enables the congregation to hold worship service every Sunday. The music of the church is changing to the use of hymnals over against all gospel music. We have also organized a glee club, department of evangelism, mission, and racial justice now. The church school is using the United Church of Christ church school curriculum, and has established a nursery and kindergarten department.

The traditional feeling of the church separating itself from the world is also crumbling. The church is rapidly becoming involved in the life of the community. We are involved in

bringing the anti-poverty program to our community, and we have an open door policy in regards to race or color. The people are getting more and they are giving more. For several years the members were taxed two dollars per Sunday. Now we ask the members to give according to the way they have been blessed. As a result, the finance has increased from an average of sixty dollars per Sunday to one hundred dollars per Sunday, and more than this, people are giving their lives to Christ and joining the church.

In light of these changes, we are looking ahead, because in the midst of these changes stands the minister with dual obligations, one to the seminary and one to the church. The congregation is looking forward to my graduation so that I can stop giving them half service, and I look forward to it in order to cut down on my sins and enhance the glory that belongs to the ministry now and in the age to come.

The preaching, visitation, counseling, church program, and community action are all involved in these emerging new forms that are not always completely understood or accepted by the church.

The congregation feels with much urgency that the church will not really become a church until I am out of seminary and can give them full time. On the other hand, they would rather have a minister who is completing his education over against a minister without any training.

The Family of the Student-Minister

Time of Decision

On the one hand, the student must understand that if he does not attend seminary, his ministry is doomed to mediocrity. In addition to this, he will mostlikely have to work at some secular concern. Then he will seldom have the time to study, prepare sermons, visit or spend any reasonable time in any functions of the ministry.

On the other hand, if he goes to seminary his family remains his responsibility and will be subject to unusual hardships. As a result, the student must make a decision to half answer the call to the ministry and be involved in sin or attend seminary with his family and also be involved in sin. The lesser of two evils in his choice.

While in college, I felt very strongly that a college education was enough formal training for the ministry. Having reached my senior year, I discovered that college training is only the foundation upon which a minister should build his education. Then I began to think with my family about attending seminary. Together we began to weight the great decision.

Under most conditions, God alone can tell what it is that motivates a man to go to seminary. Perhaps the whole point of Christianity is that men are willing to walk by faith. After long and serious study and discussion, we decided to come to seminary on faith.

Lack of Togetherness

It must be understood that a minister and his wife are not exempt from the normal human difficulties that hamper marriage. The fundamental problem for the marriage of a minister is the apparent divided loyalty. Here the word apparent is of critical importance. There is only one loyalty and that loyalty is to God. However, this loyalty to God is expressed and directed to the minister's wife and work, even though his wife may seldom understand it as such.

The student-minister is a human being and not a magician. It is utterly impossible to keep up with class assignments, minister a congregation, and adequately provide for a family at the same time. In order to do justice to the school and church the family must be neglected. To deal fairly with the family means neglect to the church and school. This is not willful neglect, but it is still sin, because a person should not assume more responsibility than he can handle.

Over and over again plans for some type of social life must be set aside to prepare for a book report, examination or some unexpected problem at the church. When a student-minister is involved in entertainment it is difficult for him to relax and enjoy himself, because he gets a guilty feeling about his lessons. The only real choice is to rotate the sin.

I ask myself over and over again, how can a student-minister be a good student in his school, a good husband to his wife, and a good father to his children. From Monday through Friday, I am

working on class work or a sermon for the church. I realize that the children are present, but seldom do I have the time to share their experiences. On Saturday we are on our way to the church in Tennessee, and I am busy with meetings, visits, counseling, and worship. After the service is over, we rush back to the seminary so tired that we are fit only for the bed.

Since the children did not have any choice about coming into the world, I certainly owe them proper care as their father. So I add another plus sign and number to my sins and accept the fact that this is a cross that I must carry until I complete my seminary education.

How painful it is to tell others that their lives will be enriched by family devotion and not have the same type of worship, regularly, in one's own home. Fortunately, when we do have this experience it draws us closer together and enables us to see that the journey of the student-minister is not one without end.

On the other hand, our togetherness is so seldom that our communication has been damaged. When I make some startling discovery in one of my classes, I usually discuss it with my wife. When she wishes to discuss some issue with me most of the time I am unable to listen to her with my whole being. This says to her that what she is saying is not important to me.

As I look back upon our stay here in the seminary I am inclined to believe that my wife is a progressive Christian rather than a mental case. She would have to be in one of the two categories to undergo such undue hardships. She has spent many lonely nights keeping the children in another room in order

that I might study, and she has played the role of father and mother to the children. She has been an errand girl as well as a budget balancer when there was a budget to balance. These years have certainly overflowed with strain, but through it all she has remained an uncrown queen.

To bring one's wife through this type of ordeal involves more than the desire to accomplish. It entails sin and more sin, because it is my Christian responsibility to provide adequately for my family.

Yet we have experienced some glory in our few moments of real togetherness. Sometimes we have shed tears of thanks for the blessing of coming to seminary, and we remember chapel experiences that shall long be remembered. We have had some real laughs during other social gatherings. Perhaps the laugh that we shall never forget is when our son told us that he wanted to be a preacher, a cop, and a crook when he grows up.

Gradually the sins of the past three years are receding, and as we glance back upon the total struggle we see as much glory as we see sin. We count it as passing through a period of comfortable suffering. Comfort, as just mentioned, does not mean a change of feeling, but it means God's mighty act of deliverance. It means something like the prophet Simeon meant when he was waiting for "the Comfort of Israel". Having seen Jesus, he was ready to depart this world in peace, because he has seen its salvation. We are ready to depart from the seminary, and we are eager to go out and share the glory of such an experience.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to show that the work of the student-minister involves sin and glory. Our evidence comes from three sources.

First, the seminary makes an effort to eliminate the sin by displaying policies which will discourage the student from the responsibilities of a church while he is completing his formal education. Also, the seminary is concerned with the health of the student as well as his learning experience. If a student is compelled to engage in the active ministry, it is possible for him to impair his health, and he will certainly graduate with a very limited education.

Secondly, the congregation that calls the student to the active ministry will receive very little of his service because of his responsibilities to his school work. The student will not have the time to develop a thorough program, and his counseling and visitation will be restricted to the week-end. His preaching cannot be geared toward any type evening service, and the regular Sunday morning service will not include the student's best preparation.

Thirdly, the family of the student-minister lives under unusual tension. His financial status is always at a low ebb, he breaks family plans, and he is a stranger to his children. The pressure from his school and church impairs the communication with his wife and children to the extent that his wife often plays the role of the father as well as the mother.

Finally, the whole picture adds up to a great deal of sin. Yet it is far from being all sin, because there is joy when a family is saved from the divorce court as a result of counseling sessions, and much glory is experienced when after hearing the preached word a soul is saved for Christ sake. Even-though the times were few, there were moments of laughter in the family circle, joyous tears of thanks for the blessings and hardships of each day, and the experience of seminary life that we shall always remember.

We look forward to becoming involved in the church and community with one purpose and one mission-to save the world. We entered the seminary on the word of faith, but now we know faith. We had heard about love, but now we know love. We know him who loved us all-Christ Jesus.

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