

Scope is Four Dimensional

-Draft-

Greg Ganssle Ph.D.

Rivendell Institute * gregory.ganssle@yale.edu

In the Campus Ministry, we have longed used the term “Scope” to designate one aspect of our mission. This use of the term has been helpful, for one reason, because it has helped us keep in mind the variety of audiences on a campus that we must try to engage with the Gospel.

When I came on staff in the late seventies, we thought that building a movement that consisted of about 2-3% of the student body would be sufficient to get the Gospel to all of the campus. Few of our campuses sustained that kind of involvement, but it made up part of how we defined our objectives. Since then, we have learned that this analysis is insufficient. The campus is made of a plurality of pockets of students and faculty. These pockets are more or less isolated from each other. A movement that succeeds in continually reaching some of the dominant pockets might not even touch other pockets. Today we think about Scope in terms of getting to every pocket of student and of faculty. This thinking is a great improvement over our previous thinking about reaching the campus. I do think, however, that we need to think even more deeply about Scope. Specifically, I want to make three points about Scope.

First, Scope is **two dimensional**. Think about a map of the world or of your campus. In your mind, spread the map across a table and stare at it awhile. Until the Gospel gets to every point on the map, our two-dimensional task is not done. Getting the Gospel to every point is part of what we mean by reaching the campus.

To talk about getting the Gospel to every point is both literal and metaphorical. It is literal in that we do need to get the Gospel to every place on campus and in the world. It is metaphorical in that the progress of the Gospel is not only geographical. We need, as we said, to get the Gospel into every pocket of people at every point on the map. As we have learned, there can be several pockets that occupy the same geographical point on the map.

Second, Scope is **three dimensional**. Now, think about a particular point on the map of the world or your campus (or a particular pocket of people). It is not enough to get the Gospel *into* that pocket. The Gospel must penetrate deeply into the lives of the people there. It must be brought to

bear on every aspect of their thoughts, their loves, their activities, and their aspirations. Until the Gospel penetrates everything and everyone deeply, our three dimensional task is not done.

The three dimensional task includes both evangelism and discipleship. We become more faithful followers of Jesus as the Gospel penetrates more deeply into our lives. As we bring the Gospel to bear on every aspect of human life and culture, we are sowing to evangelistic effectiveness.

Third, Scope is **four dimensional**. Now, think about those pockets and points and think about the next ten years, and the next fifty years, and the next two hundred years. Part of our task as believers is to work so the Gospel can gain a stronger foothold at every point and in every pocket for the next two hundred years.

This last claim might need both development and defense. Is it really part of our task to think about the next two hundred years? I think it is. My defense, in short, is that *every* aspect of the progress of the Gospel falls under our ministry scope. Whatever is part of the evangelistic task is part of our task. I do not mean that it is up to us to do what only God can do (that is, overcome people's rebellion), but it is up to us to work in the power of the Spirit to do what we can do on every front

Another line of defense for my claim can be developed out of your own experience in basic evangelism. I bet you have been frustrated by some conversation with a student or a professor who has no interest in Christ and thinks the Gospel completely irrelevant to everything she values. You recognize that something has shaped her resistance to the Gospel to the degree that she cannot hear the Gospel as good news.

You may think it is the combination of the postmodernism of our culture, the materialism in society, and the naturalism in the academy that contributes to this resistance. You are right about these things. Ideas and values emerge in cultural contexts and become assumptions that shape either receptivity or resistance to the Gospel.

You may also have thought about where these assumptions and values and ideas have come from. What happened in the nineteenth century that made it the case that most professors think that science is not compatible with Christianity? How did the idea that there is no objective truth gain a foothold such that it is the working assumption of every 16 year old? If you have reflected on questions such as these, you have faced the fact that resistance to the Gospel on the part of an individual is, in part, a result of a hundred years of values and ideas. If those ideas and values had

not taken root in the late nineteenth century, your evangelistic mission would not face of so many obstacles.

Jesus told a story that illustrates the fact that the progress of the Gospel is four dimensional.
(Matthew 13: 3-9)

Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear."

As we know from Jesus' own explanation, the farmer sows the Word.

There is a question that Jesus did *not* ask as part of this parable but that every person who listened to him understood. The question is: **what does the farmer do next year?** Everyone who heard Jesus knew the answer.

I had someone answer this question by saying, "The farmer sows the seed on the good soil." This is the wrong answer. No farmer had the luxury of sowing only on whatever good soil he happened to find. Each year, the good soil shrinks as the sun bakes the ground, the rocks emerge and the thorns grow.

Next year, the farmer goes out *before* he sows the seed, and he chops the hard ground, he pulls out the rocks and uproots the vines. That is what the farmer does next year. The reason that everyone who heard Jesus knew this is that they knew about farming first hand. Many of them spent long days in the fields chopping ground, pulling thorns and digging up rocks.

I think Jesus did not ask this question, not because he was not thinking about this aspect of the task but because it was obvious to everyone who heard. Part of the farmer's task is to prepare the soil.

Scope is two dimensional. It is three dimensional. It is four dimensional. Not one of these aspects of the progress of the Gospel can be neglected. While we go after the two dimensional and three dimensional part of the task, we have to think about what we must do to shape the evangelistic task for the next two hundred years.

It will take a lot of hard thinking to figure out how we can keep a two hundred year horizon in our ministry. I want to prompt your thinking with a few suggestions. In a later piece, I will take up this task in more detail.

First, we must continue to equip students and professors in the basics of evangelism and discipleship. The two and three dimensional aspects of the task are critical. Furthermore, most believers need a firm grounding in these basics before they can develop the diagnostic skills necessary for the four dimensional task. As we know, the best context for equipping is hands-on ministry experience.

Second, we need to equip our students and faculty to think hard about how their work can contribute to opening up receptivity to the Gospel and overturning resistance. If a student is in business we must help him wrestle with the question of how the business world must be transformed so that people who enter it are brought closer to the Gospel rather than pushed away from it. If a professor is a historian, the question might be about identifying which elements of the discipline of history need to be overthrown and which elements are opportunities that can be developed.

Equipping students and professors in this way must be part of our “100% sent” commitment. We are not trying to send students into the world only to be part of the two dimensional task. We also want them to be tilling the soil in their own domains so that the Gospel can progress more fruitfully.

The difficulties of equipping students and faculty in this way must be overcome. I will have more concrete suggestions as I begin to write about the integration process. For now, I want us to grasp the fact that the Progress of the Gospel is four dimensional and that therefore, our Scope is four dimensional.