Koinonia

Steve Stratton

Venessa A. Brown

Margaret I. Manning

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Back to the Future in Christian Counseling
Thoughts from a Student Learning Perspective

Dr. Steve Stratton, Director of Counseling, Asbury College

In 1994, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) publishes a pivotal document whose ideas are currently being discussed, debated, and applied across the country in settings of post-secondary education. That document, The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs (ACPA, 1994), calls for all student affairs specialty areas to come back to their roots. The message is that all student services must be performed from the perspective of learning, and all services must be evaluated by their contribution to the learning process. Counseling services are no different. As Fitzpatrick (1968) asserted almost three decades ago,, the goal of college student counseling is to assure “that learning takes place under the optimum conditions and that the rights of others to teach and learn are not damaged by the actions of an individual or group of individuals” (p.11).

Although the Student Learning Imperative (SLI) was not developed specifically for college and university counseling centers, it does influence the departments of student affairs in which most are administratively housed. As a result, the SLI exerts indirect impact counseling services by influencing the mission philosophy of student affairs and thereby its goals and purposes. This presents some challenging implications for the specialty of mental health service provision in college and university settings. College and university centers must begin to consider and articulate their contribution to student learning and personal development in order to remain a justifiable and valued partner in the modern post-secondary educational institution.

The prospect of viewing college and university counseling from the perspective of the SLI generates mixed feelings and thoughts. On the one hand, it is exciting because it suggests that the boundary between classroom and residence hall or counseling office is a spurious one. College and university environments must work to become “seamless” — all one piece (Kuh, 1996). One can no longer think in terms of curricular as separate from cocurricular.

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One of our Bethel colleagues reminds us yearly of how quickly a school year passes. He announces very early in the fall semester— "the first year's almost over!" By the time new and returning students are oriented and welcomed, moved into the residences, and launched into academic life, it does seem like a year's worth of effort has indeed already been expended. So even though this issue of the Koinonia is reaching you in February, you too may be feeling like the year is almost over!

That means that the ACSD Annual Conference will soon be upon us. As I write this column, it has been a month since the Executive Committee met on Asbury's campus with their conference planning team. We were very encouraged by, and impressed with, their planning and preparation. We had opportunity to sample some of the speakers, residences, local activities — the things you'll be a part of in June. We weren't able to work in a round of golf, but that option will definitely be there for you golf enthusiasts. Not only will the conference program be strong, the campus and the area are beautiful. The Kentucky horse farms are very picturesque, as is the nearby river valley. As in each previous conference, the Asbury conference will reflect the unique character and spirit of the host site, and we will all be the richer for it, professionally and spiritually.

Please pray faithfully for the Asbury team, chaired by VP Joe Brockinton. Last year when Bethel hosted, we were greatly encouraged by those of you who wrote and called to say you were lifting us up in prayer. I know the conference will reflect Asbury's hard work and creativity. Pray for the detail, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the stamina and spirit of the planning team. They're doing a great job as they prepare us to clearly see "When The Pieces Fit."

The Executive Committee also dealt with other items of business and issues related to the ongoing work of the organization. It is our privilege to do so. We selected the award winners; we continued our discussions on diversity; we poured over the budget and thanked God for continuing good news with ACSD finances; we made decisions and read proposals and nominated candidates and ... The agenda was packed and the spirit of the group was equal to it, and more. They come with such hearts for the organization and for all of you who are members in it. Truly they are your servants and I thank God for each of them — Sam, Skip, Barry, Denise and Tim.

It is always good to share with others what God is doing in each of our institutions, and we also took time to do that before we headed back to work on our own campuses. Even though "the year is almost over," I hope you'll be encouraged in your work by Dallas Willard as he writes: "In our services and in our models of the ministry and of ministers [and our models of student development], we must remember that we are not making robots who sing, clap, pray, give and show up for meetings when they are supposed to. We are bringing forth the sons and daughters of God to live their unique lives in this world to His glory. We must do all we can to suit the means we employ to that end."* I hope Willard's words will give you energy and vision as you minister to and develop students on your campus. By God's grace and with His help, surely there are plenty of days left in the year for that!

I hope you enjoy the article “Back to the Future In Christian Counseling” by Dr. Steve Stratton, Director of Counseling at Asbury College. I was pleased to be afforded the opportunity to provide the membership with an article regarding counseling and student development. Hopefully you will find it thought provoking. Thanks Steve!

One of my concerns as Editor is the production of a publication that is useful and helpful to the reader. With that in mind I ask that you submit any suggestions that you may have regarding the content or format of the Koinonia. I would greatly appreciate hearing your ideas.

I continue to look for articles written by members of ACSD. Dr. Stratton’s article in this edition is another example of such work. So warm up the keyboards, write your ideas down, and send them to me for future publication.

If you have recently read a book that has impacted you and believe it is worthy of review for the membership, please send me the title. Or if you have a title you would like for us to review to determine whether or not you should read send that along as well. I am always on the lookout for books which can impact our lives and profession.

I look forward to hearing from some of you in the future.

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Back to the Future in Christian Counseling

lar activities, on campus as opposed to off campus experiences, or academic in competition with non academic programming. The SLI asserts that academic services, student services such as counseling, and the student body itself must be unified toward the cumulative goals of student learning and personal development. “Forging collaborative partnerships” (SLI, 1994) with faculty, administration, other student affairs professionals, and students holds invigorating potential for college student counseling and the future of higher education.

On the other hand, the SLI perspective is unsettling because it forces counseling services to justify their existence from a limited research base. Counselors in college and university settings can often give anecdotal or indirect evidence of their impact on student learning and personal development, but “harder” data are difficult to come by for a number of legitimate reasons. In addition, this perspective becomes uncomfortable because it calls for a paradigm shift. Most college and university counselors view themselves proudly as counselors first and foremost. The role of educator ranks further down the priority list. A student learning perspective suggest that all college and university personnel are educators first, informed by their specialty areas.

A Step Backward

The last ten to twenty years in college and university centers have been full of threatening changes. Demand for mental health services has grown along with a noted increase in the severity of presented concerns (Gallagher, 1996). But despite the research that supports student counseling’s positive effects on retention, student quality of life, and academic performance (Ayco, 1989), the effect has been the opposite. Higher education has wondered about the advisability of institutionally supported counseling for its student population. Some have determined that the costs outweigh the benefits and have begun to limit services or have asked the counseling centers to pay for themselves. Others have entered into dialogues with various off-campus service providers. The result has been either an on-campus referral service with little more than intake services, an on-campus group private practice with little real connection to the rest of the college, or a managed care system with little understanding of the community ethos.

For those colleges and universities that continue to envision counseling services as an aspect of their student affairs mission, the expectation is often to meet increasing needs without increasing staff or budget. In fact, the National Survey of Counseling Center Directors (Gallagher, 1996) reported that a large number of on-campus centers have felt budget cuts over the last year. Almost half of those who reported budget cuts lost staff, while 72.9% saw reduction in other costs. Doing more with less is a daily reality in most college settings.

The Student Learning Imperative offers a unique opportunity for college counseling to regain its collective footing among the specialty areas of student affairs. It offers a chance to take a step backwards to principles of community counseling that once formed the guiding philosophy for college and university counseling services. It
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seems that in the last twenty years the guiding philosophy has drifted, out of necessity, toward a more clinical practice. With increased service demands, increased severity of complaints, and tightened budgets, campus counseling centers have felt pushed to become more like individual and group private practices which excel in clinical remediation at the expense of community planning and intervention. As a consequence, a single service approach is provided to fewer number of students behind the closed doors of counseling offices, while a multifaceted approach to the community is neglected. The single service approach gradually relinquishes contact with the community in which the student is embedded in order to keep up with the demands. Student counseling becomes like any other private practice counseling in assumption, goals, and strategies for intervention. Clinical services become the primary focus.

The harsh reality is that student counseling centers are not an economically competitive student service when they adhere to a single service approach only. Unfortunately, as campus centers have grown more singular in their service, the modern college has come to view counseling as all that is done in student counseling services. Even vocational counseling and career development, historically an indispensable and valued part of student counseling, has been relegated to a subordinate, entry-level, informational service role and separated from student counseling. It may be called counseling but it is often practiced as if it were a guidance service that can be administered by a job placement officer. As a result, when an institution begins to question the need for clinical services, it considers the professional counselors employed in the campus center as less valuable. The “reemphasis” of the SLJ on student learning and personal development necessitates a reevaluation of this current perspective and a calculated move back toward “old” turf, a community counseling focus.

A Step Toward Community

Community counseling entered the lexicon of mental health services with the passage of the Community Mental Health Centers Act (Public Law 88-164) in 1963. In reality, student counseling was functioning from a similar perspective event before this development. The model basically calls for counselors to assume the role of change agents in their communities. The hallmark of a social change agent is a style of intervention referred to by a Rappaport and Chinsky (1974) as the “seeking mode.” In contrast to a “waiting mode,” counselors are encouraged to take an active collaborative stance with fellow community agents to build on existing strengths and modify obstacles to individual and community mental health.

In higher education, community counseling interventions are always opportunities for learning and development. They may focus on the student, the community, or both in interaction with one another.

Community counseling in a college setting concentrates on the student and the community which reciprocally influence one another. The multifaceted goal is to work for the evolution of a growthful system that diversely functions for the benefit of developing learners and their educators. In such a system, the entire community becomes not only the location for student learning but the primary motivator for personal development. Led by current research, the college and university community counselor becomes an epidemiologist and a “participant-conceptualizer” for community growth and programming in the unique setting of higher education. This broadens the current day perspective of student counseling considerably.

A college and university working within this framework might accomplish the mission of student counseling services in a variety of community roles (e.g., advocate, consultant, trainer, program designer, mediator, catalyst, or assessor) in addition to that of a counselor. As a result, a community counselor might serve in a variety of community settings (e.g., classrooms, residence halls, board rooms, adventure/challenge courses, chapel services, retreats) in addition to the traditional counseling office. It is appropriate that as many contemplate a broader perspective they will worry about conflicts of interest and confidentiality, but these and other ethical issues are manageable. Community mental health counselors have demonstrated it for over three decades.

In higher education, community counseling interventions are always opportunities for learning and development. They may focus on the student, the community, or both in interaction with one another. Consequently, they are multifaceted and diverse. Jegar and Slotnic (1982) refer to this approach as behavioral-ecology and describe in the following passage the broad purpose of community counseling interventions.

There exists either congruence or incongruence (i.e., mismatch) between individuals and environments. Environments are characterized by the demands they make on individuals and the resources they provide. Likewise, individuals bring their own demands and resources to specific environments...Person-environment congruence is achieved if the nature of environmental structure and support “fits” the needs and abilities of individuals. For example, environments providing high levels of challenge and support are likely to yield optimal adaptations. On the other hand, environments providing low levels of challenge and excessive support tend to result in dependence behaviors.

[10]
Counseling interventions on college and university campuses, no matter what their focus, should be a facilitator of a "student-community congruence" characterized by an effective combination of challenge and support. Challenge, best defined in a college setting as "creative conflict" (Palmer, 1989; Sessa, 1994) or "crisis" (Marcia, 1980), and support, best described as a student-community "holding environment" (Kegan, 1994), seem to be the foundational principles for any student learning and personal development.

Balancing challenge and support on campus us a dynamic process. College and university communities must evolve toward their own equilibrium with regard to these variables. But wherever the institution ends up in the evolutionary process, challenge and support must be intentionally applied to each student in a manner that fits the boundaries of the community and respects the dignity and worth of the individual. This is congruence. Speaking more broadly, this is health in community terms, and four principles (Heath, cited in Glading, 1997) are evident in a healthy community. First, the community encourages the anticipatory rehearsal of new transitions in personal and community development. Second, the community process requires constant externalization of what is learned and promotes its correction by action. Thirdly, community members are allowed to experience the consequences of their own decisions and behavior. And, fourth, the community celebrates the collective and individual strengths of the corporate body that is the college or university. Student counseling is in a unique position to give leadership toward this vision of community health which works for all community members whether they be students faculty, or staff.

Practical Step for the Future

Bloom (1977) identifies characteristics that delineate the practical, operational aspects as well as the philosophical issues associated with community counseling. Using these adapted characteristics as an outline, this section will attempt to address college student counseling from a community counseling framework:

1. Community counseling places its emphasis on practice in the community instead of referring to outside agencies. At first glance it might seem to some that the mission of the student counseling center is to function, upon request, as the sole provider of mental health services on campus. That is a daunting and arguably impossible task in this day of frozen budgets, decreasing staffs, and increased demands for services. However, this criticism is based on reasoning from a single service, private practice approach which evaluates worth and efficiency on the basis of appointments made and kept. This, however, is impractical. It isolates the counselor in his or her office away from other community educators and developers, and if not watched carefully, it isolates the student from potent sources of learning and development in a time of potential openness. It neglects the community aspects of students' concerns and the community contribution to removing personal and social obstacles to learning and development. A community focused practice uses counseling when it is the most effective intervention, but utilizes other non-clinical options when they are more appropriate.

2. Community counseling emphasizes a total community rather than individual clients. A readjustment toward the "total community" and away from a single service focus will mean that college and university counselors are able to include services that "humanize campus environments" for students (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 1991). Community counselors take into account the unique aspects (i.e., location, surrounding area, size, residential pattern, type of student population, pattern of communication) of their institutional community in an effort to create a healthy physical and psychological environment for social relationships, the foundation for learning and development. The thought is that counseling must begin to consider intentionally involving the community in work with students. Stated even more emphatically, the assumption is that a healthy college and university community based on balanced support and challenge is a better influence for learning and development than clinical services alone.

3. Community counseling seeks to identify sources of stress within the community. It is assumed that incongruences do not always arise from within the individual student alone. They are responses to stress from the student, the community, or both—an interacting and reciprocal system. A systemic approach results in five steps (Huber, 1983). First, counselors must identify the problem and the community factors that maintain it. Second, agreement must be gained within the student-community system that the community is to some degree responsible for maintaining incongruence. This does not suggest that in recognizing responsibility for some aspect of the incongruence, the community must adapt to every student issue. Yet, it is important to expect that community adaptation may be a necessary and healthy response to a student issue. Third, an assessment must be made of the maintaining conditions within the community that are associated with the problem. Fourth, the counselor works with the student, the community, or both to bring about change through learning and development. The
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4. Community counseling is invested in developing innovative strategies to address student-community incongruences in larger numbers of students. “Innovative strategies” refers to creative interventions in an incongruence that takes into account the unique aspects of the community system. The aim of these interventions is either directly or indirectly to promote student learning and personal development. Interventions can be categorized into four areas: diagnostic interventions, process interventions, structural interventions, and individual interventions (Beers, 1980). Diagnostic interventions refer to assessment and research conducted on the total institutional community or its parts for the purpose of systemic feedback and/or diagnosis. Process interventions refer to diverse activities that promote the growth of relationships within the community system and educate individuals and/or groups to blockages and hindrances within the student or the community. Any type of group development, whether it is for clinical purposes or not, fits a process strategy. Structural interventions are activities designed to improve system effectiveness through policy development and procedural evolution in the community. The idea is to develop a functional environment in which the boundaries for living and develop students so that better congruence between student and community is achieved. Clinical services remain a valuable, indispensable tool in these days of escalating severity in presented concerns, yet this “top gun” of counseling strategies is not the only, or in many cases, the best approach to a student-community learning opportunity.

5. Community counseling promotes the importance of indirect services. “Indirect services” refers to consultative activities in the campus community, Whether it is with residence hall staffs, leadership trainers, student groups, faculty committees, or administrative officials college and university counselors have applicable training, experience, and research to contribute to the work of these specialty areas.

Whether it is with residence hall staffs, leadership trainers, student groups, faculty committees, or administrative officials college and university counselors have applicable training, experience, and research to contribute to the work of these specialty areas.

6. Community counseling promotes preventive services in addition to clinical services. Prevention naturally flows from a community focus and is viewed as essential. The assumption is that student and community incongruences can be proactively addressed prior to their appearance or at least before they create significant distress. It is based on a developmental model that emphasizes growth. The single service clinical approach, based in a remediation model, perceives prevention as a worthy addition but less essential than clinical services. The current approach taken by modern day counseling centers is illustrated by the classic lament, “When do we fit in preventive services?” This typically means, “We have so many individuals and groups to see that we don’t have time to leave our offices.” The perspective is a remediation one. Clinical duties rank above prevention activities in priority. For some this is a philosophical stance adopted out of therapeutic necessity — direct services are the most effective modality; therefore, use all necessary time for direct services. For other centers that charge for services, it is a pragmatic stance — direct services pay the bills; therefore, give time to what pays. Community-building interventions are seen as less rewarding. Prevention is currently something to do as time permits. If time does not permit, it is easily omitted.

7. Community counseling encompasses a broad spectrum of mental health service providers. Rather than viewing counselors, psychologists, and social workers as the only providers of mental health services on campuses, community counseling involves other types of workers in the provision of direct and indirect services to the student population. On college campuses, these other workers may include paraprofessionals, who have received some sort of training (brief to extensive) and are reimbursed (i.e., money, academic credit, entry level experience) for their service role, volunteers, who provide support services without pay to meet campus needs (e.g., 12-Step programs, academic support/advising), and indigenous helpers, who are noted non-professional faculty, staff, or peer helpers in the community. Community counseling suggests that paraprofessionals, volunteers, and indigenous helpers are inadequately utilized resources, and with some cases they may be equally effective when compared with professionals or those in training to be professionals (Duriak, 1979, Nietzel & Fisher, 1981, Hattie, Sharples, & Rogers, 1984, Berman & Norton, 1985). In fact, a number of these studies conclude more specifically that academic counseling and mild behavioral problems in college populations may be handled as effectively by a paraprofessional.

8. Community counseling emphasizes community control of service priorities and programming. Students and other community members become central in deciding what
services are offered. Counselors are not considered the sole source of information about the mental health needs of the community or the best way to meet them. Instead, counselors, students, and other community representatives collectively identify needs, design and evaluate counseling programs to address the needs, and plan strategically for future counseling goals based on anticipated student learning and personal development concerns (Bloom, 1977).

How might this be done in higher education? An unavoidable fact of life in modern higher education is outcome assessment. Counseling centers cannot escape the cost of time and energy to evaluate whether they are making a contribution to the educational mission of the institution. If the goal is student learning and personal development, assessment procedures and instruments need to be rethought to reflect this emphasis. Assessment reports from student counseling services will therefore take on a community counseling "look." It will no longer be adequate to report only on number of appointments, range of diagnoses, and satisfaction with clinical services. Research information on topics such as prevention services, consultation activities, community health needs, and collaborative action will be required. And, most importantly, this information needs to be disseminated to the community who evaluate the quality of the service for the community.

Another possible option is the use of a community board made up of students, residence life staff, faculty, administrative officials, alumni, and other community members. Care should be exercised that the composition of the board represent the community and not the popular and powerful only. The purpose of this board is to function in an advisory and evaluative capacity for the counseling service. The board is designed to speak for the community when it comes to guidance and evaluation of student counseling services. This, of course, necessitates the creation of specific counseling center goals developed collaboratively with the board as well as ways to assess the achievement of these goals.

Another potential option involves the use of focus groups to assess services and guide program development. Those that do not use counseling services are as essential to this endeavor as those that do. The makeup of the group depends on the question to be asked or the issue to be assessed. In this, again, the composition of the group must allow representation from different community sectors with disenfranchised groups intentionally involved.

The Last Step

Student counseling from a community perspective concentrates on health that is operationalized as balanced support and challenge. The assumption is that the functional environment created by this emphasis develops student-community congruence which maximizes student learning and personal development. This approach is not novel. In many ways, it is a restatement of the historical foundations of college and university counseling. Any other model results in a narrowed, single-service focus that is imposed on the community, for the health of a community where students are the focal point. The Student Learning Imperative offers a unique opportunity to review the status of student counseling as a profession at a critical time for higher education. Student counseling has a pivotal role to play in the modern college or university, and it is a community counseling role.

References


A Bridge Toward Cultural Competency in Christian Colleges

Venessa A. Brown, Ph.D
Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville
Chair, National Christian Multicultural Student Leadership Conference

The demographics of our world are dramatically changing and Christian colleges must prepare and expose their students to this multicultural reality. The U.S. in the year 2000 will have an increased percentage of African Americans, Latinos, women and other minority groups. Imagine the plight of students in Christian colleges if they are not prepared or exposed to the way our new world will look. I have been a student and a professor at a Christian College where approximately 2-5% of the students were of color. I have struggled with the injustice of having students attend college for four years, many of whom graduate having had very little contact with people of color.

At this time we must start to appreciate all of the wonderful people God has created. Each racial and ethnic group has its own cultural reality which differs somewhat from the dominant culture. One of the problems is that for us to value other cultures, we must understand and value our own. One of the most important things in life is to explore your "cultural filter" and come to know who you are so that you might be encouraged to develop a sensitivity to the "cultural filters" of others.

Some initiatives are being developed in Christian Higher Education to help students develop a sensitivity to diversity. For example, The National Christian Multicultural Student Leadership Conference (NCMSLC), which was started at Messiah College, is one initiative being supported by Christian Colleges and Universities.

In 1993, the NCMSLC was reorganized and is now being hosted at different Coalition Colleges and Universities across the United States. A National Steering Committee of committed Christians was established and is responsible for assuring that the vision initially established at Messiah continues to touch the lives of students.

The NCMSLC has prepared thousands of students to face the challenges of spiritual, academic, social and leadership development within a multi-ethnic context. The conference empowers student leaders to embrace cultural diversity and sensitivity, while motivating them to model inclusive leadership that brings together people who travel life's many roads.

For the past ten years, the conference has become a major source of encouragement and support for student leaders from coalition member institutions. In addition, it provides an opportunity for collegiate administrators and advisors to brainstorm, exchange ideas and initiatives while receiving practical feedback from students.

The Conference is founded upon the concept of unity and diversity illustrated in Romans 12:4-5: "Just as there are many parts of our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, as it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we have different work to do. So we belong to each other and each needs all the others."

We must start to appreciate all of the wonderful people God has created.

Students have been challenged at Wheaton College to understand, "A Whole New World." At Calvin College, they were challenged to "Celebrate Diversity" as a critical process leading to fully embracing God's Justice. At Messiah College, they were challenged to "Reach For Tomorrow With What We Hold Today." Next year at Anderson University, they will be challenged to develop models for change that will address their personal and collective needs on campus and in society. The conference is to be held at Anderson, November 6-9, 1997.

This conference will continue to be an avenue for students in Christian higher education to broaden their understanding and sensitivity to diversity. Dr. King in his "I Have A
Dream” speech said, “Now is the time for America to make real her promise of democracy for all of her children.” Jesse Jackson said, “Nobody will save us from us for us but us.” Frederick Douglass said, “Without a struggle, there will be no progress.”

All of these quotes from noted African American heroes hold true for us today, and as Christians we must take responsibility for sharing God’s love and building bridges across cultural and ethnic lines. It is indeed factual that without the knowledge of one’s own history, there can be no appreciation of another’s history. The challenge today is to celebrate, appreciate and respect what God has created.

**HOT ideas!**

**TWISTER TOURNAMENT**

Looking for an old and familiar activity for many people? Join the ranks of many COCCA Schools and try this one!

**Purpose**

- To encourage teamwork
- To offer opportunity to use some physical stamina
- An opportunity for spectatorship and socialization

**Description**

- The format and supplies were offered from Milton Bradley. The organization of the event is similar to a regular Twister Game, just magnified for 100 people to play. The guidelines are the same as a regular game, but there is a process of elimination.

**Resources**

- Athletic Department for gymnasium
- Milton Bradley are free Twister mats, tournament instructions, spinner board, and publicity sheets
- Local toy store for prizes (i.e. Twister games) and movie theatre for gift certificate prizes

- Students to act as referees and MCs

**Promotion**

- Posters
- Banners (possibly made from Twister mats)
- Colored dots (large) around campus promoting activity
- Posters with the picture of the band

**Student Reaction**

- Fantastic

**Strengths**

- Maxed out participation in the actual tournament
- Over 150 students came to watch
- Great activity to have indoors at the beginning of second semester, during winter months

**Weaknesses**

- Competitive spirit of some participants became argumentative with referees
Postmodern Times
A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture
By Gene Edward Veith, Jr.

"Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Judges 21:25b (NASB)

The Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St. Louis, Missouri represented the pinnacle of modernist ideals. "When it was originally built," writes Stanley Grenz, "it was hailed as a landmark of modern architecture. More importantly, it stood as the epitome of modernity itself in its goal of employing technology to create a utopian society for the benefit of all." Modernism and postmodernism are two very distinct philosophical and cultural movements. Modernism, birthed by the Enlightenment espouses the belief that the human mind, rationality, and science can explain everything in the universe. The supernatural is explained by reason alone, and religion is based upon rationality and not revelation. Eventually, modernists came to see the universe as a closed system of cause and effect and were not a reflection of any divine order or mandate. Despite all this, modernists still believed in objective truth, albeit a scientific/rational one.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, turns modernism on its head by arguing that there is no objective truth. Truth simply does not exist because all of reality is socially constructed. In other words, each social group or culture creates its own sense or reality or "truth." Because of this, there is no inherent meaning or purpose in life; no closed system of cause and effect. Instead, each group must create its own meaning. And this meaning has no validity for any other group. Therefore, groups often battle to assert or enforce their own sense of meaning. Every exchange between culture groups becomes a "will to power" a struggle over who will gain power or influence over whom. The "culture wars" in this decade in particular are an example of this postmodernist principle.

Where did this postmodernism come from? Veith explains that postmodernism builds upon many of the philosophical tenets from Romanticism and Existentialism. For example, postmodernism has opened the door to a broader sense of "spirituality" which may incorporate principles for Christianity and eastern spirituality, or Gaia worship, the worship of the earth. This openness comes, in part from the Romantic notion of an immanent god in humanity and in nature. Likewise, the lack of any...
More and more, our age reflects the warning Paul gave to Timothy: “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires; and will turn aside their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths” (II Tim. 4:3-4).

have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires; and will turn aside their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths” (II Tim. 4:3-4). In addition, Veith notes that without any sense of objective truth, moral values become relative. Each social group constructs its own morality and tolerance becomes the cardinal virtue. Like the time of the Judges, everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

Even within evangelical Christianity, Veith notes the disturbing statistic that 53% of those who call themselves “evangelical” believe that there are no absolutes. Is it any wonder then, that we see an increase in immoral or amoral behavior among our college students and young adults? Without any foundations of morality and objective truth, the Church will continue to look more and more like the world.

So what can we do as Christians to combat the effects of postmodernism? Veith suggests that the foundations and doctrines of Christianity must be presented not as abstract ideas, but as concrete stories, parables (as Jesus used) and illustrations. Practical application of biblical truths must always be presented. Appealing to the postmodern concern for the “group” may mean emphasizing small groups, like smaller fellowship groups or bible study groups. In addition, appealing to the postmodern interest in the past may call for reexamining the traditions and history of the church. Perhaps the most important way the Church can combat postmodernism is through personal relationship. Discipleship was a key component to Jesus’ ministry, and it should be a key component of ours as we work in the church and at our schools. People of all ages need role models, and those who faithfully model a commitment to Christ and to His truth may help to lead those with incongruent beliefs, like the young man mentioned earlier, into congruent truth.

The demise of modernism, as demonstrated in the destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project, and the onset of postmodernism need not deter our proclamation of the truth, though we may need to constantly evaluate how we present that truth. Rather, we must remember that we serve a sovereign God who is driving history, who has a purpose and a plan and who is greater than the forces of modernism, and of postmodernism.


Review written by Margaret I. Manning,
255 Grapevine Rd., Box 11, Wenham, MA 01984; (508) 921-7342; email: mmanning@hope.gordonc.edu.