



RECONSIDERATIONS

EXPLORING CHRISTIAN THOUGHT IN THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

WEAVING JUSTICE INTO THE ART OF THERAPY

Laurie A. Goddard

Each year the Study Center awards a graduate assistantship to a Christian graduate student who has gotten our attention and whose work we want to encourage. We then benefit tremendously from our graduate assistant who typically assists us with our electronic communications and contributes to our intellectual community. This past year we were very pleased to give this award to Laurie Goddard. Laurie has been part of our community for several years--as a student, as a barista, and as the manager of Pascal's Coffeehouse, so we were delighted to have her on staff with us for this past year as well. She has been a treasured member of our team over the years, and she and her husband Rob will always be a dear part of our CSC community. Laurie has been exemplary and inspiring in her thoughtfulness, and in the following essay she does a great job of bringing the insights of our recent speakers together with her own work as a graduate student in the counseling program at UF.

In 2013 Peter Rohloff, the Director of *Wuqu' Kawoq*, an organization committed to providing medical care to indigenous people groups of Guatemala, came to speak at the Center as a part of our *Seeing Justice, Seeking Justice* series. Rohloff began by pointing out that the indigenous Mayan languages (of which there are 21) spoken by his patients cannot be understood by the average person wanting to extend a helping hand. As a result, sometimes we literally cannot understand the voice of the poor. Rohloff ultimately suggests that a theology that only speaks about the oppressed without hearing their voice, fails to welcome the true presence of the Spirit into our work. The linguistic and medical work of *Wuqu' Kawoq* quite literally rests on letting the poor speak for themselves, a right

taken away because of the imposition of the Spanish language. Thus, the question must be posed concerning helping endeavors, "Whose voice are we listening to?" Language furthermore, remains but one facet of understanding a person and her culture. Counseling committed to pursuing justice necessitates a counselor willing to develop multicultural competence.

Herein lies much of the goal and work of counseling: beyond the idea of language differences, a counselor works to create a space where voices can be heard. What many thinkers, including many of our *Seeing Justice, Seeking Justice* lectures have helped me to understand is that my conceptions of justice and

the art of therapy can resonate deeply with each other. This interplay hinges upon an understanding of justice that, for me, points to the characteristics of the Judeo-Christian God. My Christian faith helps to deepen my understanding of humans, yet I have found the Christian conception of justice to challenge my development as a counselor because it exposes so many of the

nuances of therapy and holds them up to the light.

Let me begin by asking: What does a multicultural understanding or Rohloff's perspective from Guatemala have to do with faithful counseling that is committed to justice? It means that a counselor be willing to understand that the person across the way must certainly be very different from you, through language, culture, socio-economic status, sex, etc. And beyond this, a multiculturally competent counselor recognizes that his or her own culture, color of skin, etc., and position of power as a counselor over the client affects the intersection and energy of

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the counseling relationship. All such awareness contributes to more efficacious counseling, and, I would argue, to counseling that pursues justice. For to ignore cultural implications begs the question Rohloff posed, "Whose voice are we listening to?" Or, as the Director of the Center often asks "What frames what?" Are my own ideas of the good, ideas that stem from my background and culture, informing the way I look at this client? Or, am I willing to quiet my own voice, listen carefully to the voice across the room, and ask God how his love of this person, his redemptive work in this world, and his Gospel of truth frame the way I seek to understand this person and move towards change?

Changes in the field of counseling have abounded over the past century and a half. In the beginning, Freud essentially conceptualized people as sexual animals driven by innate desires. Later came Carl Rogers, promulgator of self-actualization and the person-centered approach. In another major shift, we saw the breakdown of the stereotype that only the middle to upper class can afford or benefit from counseling. As the diversity of counseling expanded, so did our conceptions of counseling. Today I hear a challenge for counselors to explore the different, creative modes that counseling could embrace to better reach people beyond our usual ideas of therapy.

Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff's 2008 lecture at the Center, "Love and Justice," provides a rich framework for my work as a counselor that has become integral to my sense for justice. He points out that Christian social work was traditionally thought of as charity, benevolence, or love: It was seen as going beyond the requirement. As a result, seeking out the good of others could be lauded as especially exceptional but not as the call of every Christian's life. As Wolterstorff expounds, the language matters. The way we talk becomes integral to our understanding. For to think of our serving or vocational endeavors as "charity" supposes that the work is optional and frames counseling in a way that that presupposes categories of superior and inferior. While often used as a trendy term to catch the attention of a generation of millennials, justice needs to be grounded in human rights. Even more so, however, Christians especially need an understanding that makes sense of how we understand rights. Yet again, Wolterstorff helps here.

“ This kind of love imparts unarguable worth to the one loved.

The image of God bestows worth upon humans, Wolterstorff argues, but it is not all that is needed to infer rights.¹ Standing alone, the *imago dei* still pulls us back to human capacity. Our very identities as humans cause us to work, to create, to love, and to seek out community. These are the typical ways that we understand how the image of God is made manifest in us. But what about those who lack the capacity to work, love, create, or enjoy community? The other reality that bestows worth on those lacking in human capacity would be worth bestowed by the love of God. Bestowed worth says that God loves each person bearing the *imago dei*, and it is this very relational property

that completes the picture of worth that grounds rights for all humans. But what kind of love can bestow worth? Wolterstorff gives three examples to help us understand. First, love as attraction is drawn to entities that are already worthy -

beautiful, lovely things. For instance in counseling, a therapist can easily be drawn to clients who possess much insight, who understand layers of meaning, and who are physically attractive. Second, love as benevolence or charity can impart worth to its receiver but only if some alteration occurs such that "her life is going better because she now has adequate food. But having adequate food would make her life better no matter how that came about, whether by benevolence or in some other way."² Indeed, a counselor needs to exercise caution not to tie her identity to her desire to see change and make life better for a client. Third, Wolterstorff offers God's love as 'love as attachment.' This love does not care for the recipient's loveliness or how she can be altered to be made more lovely. It exists simply because the Lover is attached. He is bonded with the beloved. This kind of love imparts unarguable worth to the one loved. Through understanding love as attachment, Wolterstorff brings us around to a theistic grounding of human rights that provides solid ground for a counselor. More often than not, a counselor can find herself in a room with someone whose choices have wrecked his or her family or whose self-centered attitude has heaped pain and even injustice upon others; or mental illness has so seriously ravaged the client's soul that traditional notions of human capacity disappear. Human rights must be grounded in the *imago dei* and in the bestowed worth given by the Lord's deep, bonded love to all.

Wolterstorff argues that while the Bible mentions corrective or retributive justice, the truth is that for the most part, when the Bible speaks of justice, it speaks of primary justice. Wolterstorff posits that primary justice concerns inherent rights that inevitably relate to interpersonal relationships, such that each person can pursue a full life of being treated rightly in relationship and in such manner flourish in this life. This connection to relationships cannot be ignored in how it relates to counseling. It is through understanding a client's relationship to others and the world that I learn to think systemically. This means that rather than taking a completely intrapsychic stance, I work to make sense of a client through his ongoing concentric circles of intersection with family, friends, neighborhood, school systems, workplaces, current economy, political policies, and even national agendas. Only by taking a systemic lens can counseling hope to be justice-seeking. If we do not understand a person's relationships with the world, we inevitably will not see the larger picture of where injustice may be occurring. To confuse matters further for counselors, we are blind ourselves; issues of injustice can be lost in our own myopic vision, and we can unknowingly contribute to injustice. As counselors who often enjoy considerable privilege in this world, the work of systemic thinking, the work of understanding someone who does not come from privilege is just that—work.

While Wolterstorff pointed me to understanding primary justice, James K.A. Smith has reminded me that “thy Kingdom come” does not rest entirely on me or even others.³ As a counselor I can often feel trapped, fluctuating between two camps: despair on the one hand and self-righteous confidence or indignation on the other. The former leads me to a posture of defeat and disheartedness that ultimately creates paralysis. The latter creates a posture of self-assurance, a belief that I see the wrong and I know how to correct it. This response easily becomes a blame-casting game that offers me an enticing, upper seat where I can sit above my own sin and muddled motives. From this vantage point, I rise above, resting on my confidence that my perspective is the right one and that I have made sense of every angle and complexity of the situation. This kind of understanding can also be found in our Christian circles when we create straight-jackets of understanding justice and impose them on others. It is Christ on the cross that humbles me, gives me a prayerful stance, and yet still offers hope to stand up and combat injustice, knowing that every injustice upon him was laid (Isaiah 53). Thus, the prayer “thy kingdom come” does not have to be trite and empty, nor full of self-righteous confidence

and human vigor, but full of the presence of a suffering, risen Lord, who is well acquainted with our wrongs, his death being the ultimate injustice. As a counselor looking on towards injustices wrapped in complex systems, I can lament, without despair; and I can work toward the kingdom, without illusions of my own purity.⁴

As a counselor who wants to pursue justice in a variety of settings, I am pressed to apply James K.A. Smith's understanding of faithfulness and culture through Daniel of the Old Testament. Christian tradition exalts Daniel's uncompromising witness in a foreign land. Daniel does not defile his body or worship other gods. Yet, in many other ways, Daniel adapts and compromises to living in a city that is not his own, as an exile in Babylon. Smith points out that Daniel gains influence in Babylon because “he has no illusions that Babylon is Zion.”⁵ To borrow language from sociologist James Davidson Hunter, the story of Daniel impresses upon me the value of a “faithful presence” in the community.⁶ Therefore, no matter the counseling context in which I find myself, I can work to be a “faithful presence,” a competent counselor, a follower of Christ who knows that she is living in exile, but still understands that the welfare of my city follows my welfare (Jeremiah 29:7).

In Dr. Richard Hays' lecture in the Center's *Seeing Justice, Seeking Justice* series, the last question posed to him asked: How does one continue to pursue justice when defeated or ignored? Indeed, counselor burnout and fatigue remains an on-going topic considering the often short-lived counseling careers. Hays' answer to the audience articulated a deep-felt simplicity and power - we look to the cross. The response must be hearts of gratitude for the undeserved grace received and then a choice to look outward, motivated by an understanding of the gift given. In this way, a counselor can look out toward persons abandoned by family, weighed down by past trauma, disregarded because of skin color, or scorned because of stigma. The counselor can move toward a broken person knowing the worth, dignity, and pleasure that the Lord finds in them as his created ones to whom he is deeply attached.

Hays' thoughts about the cross, together with Wolterstorff's view of God's love as attachment corresponds deeply to research in the counselor development field. Research reveals that the counseling relationship is the most powerful factor in effective counseling.⁷ Therefore, more than any other theoretical orientation, therapeutic intervention, or treatment plan a

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counselor might use, his most powerful tool is the relationship he develops with the person sitting across from him. For this reason, I understand one's individual conceptions of justice and the good to be paramount to efficacious counseling. For how could we look upon another and truly believe that she deserved a full life shaken free of anxious battles, shackles of insecurity, or oppression from the world, if we did not believe that justice demands her very identity as a human implies the right to pursue a whole life? Consequently, my understanding of how to view the person sitting across from me must be informed by a conviction of the Lord's deep, bonded love and what justice demands.

Miroslav Volf, who concluded our *Seeing Justice, Seeking Justice* series, also offers a helpful voice of wisdom regarding the work and life of Christians in an increasingly pluralistic, multi-faith society. Volf argues that if Christians draw their identity from Christ the truth, the *center*, they do not have to be obsessed with the *boundaries*, areas at which our differences become apparent. When one draws from the center, the boundaries tend to take care of themselves, and differences emerge appropriately. More commonly, however, the temptation to draw personal, religious identity from the boundaries persists, and we tend to say, "This is in, and this is out." Volf likens this kind of attitude to the Jewish religious leaders, who built a fence around the Torah, an extra set of rules and guidelines to protect the center. In a counseling setting, I could limit my understanding of clients by a "this in and this is out" attitude. Ultimately, living in the boundaries admits a lack of confidence in the center to be able to hold itself together. Volf provides a framework for me to be able to work in secular settings as a counselor with confidence, for I could easily be disturbed by the boundaries, the places where I see non-truth, such that I close the door to certain people and places because I am not sure the center, Christ, could sustain me or this situation.⁸

“The places and people most impacted by injustice are often in settings where Christians become wary and tend to emphasize difference.”

Volf's framework offers a way of understanding for the Christian that honors the power and sovereignty of Christ and gently pulls us back to the center. From my experience, the places and people most impacted by injustice are often in settings where Christians become wary and tend to emphasize difference. "How can I move towards this group when I cannot see past our differences?" For me, a counseling degree offers a deeper way into issues of injustice. I can be an agent of change in settings where I would not otherwise have a voice. In these settings, I do not have to obsess over everything that is not truth, but I am freed to continue proclaiming Christ the truth. When identity can be drawn from the center, I can trust that Christ, the center, will hold and will take care of the boundaries. In this way, I can work toward justice through the profession of counseling. I can trust the center, Christ, and I can rest in the coming now present Kingdom.

Notes

1. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*. Princeton University Press, 2008. 342 - 361.
2. *Ibid.*, 359.
- 3, 5. James K.A. Smith, Faithful compromise. *Comment: Public Theology for the Common Good*. Spring issue, 2014, 2-4.
4. James K.A. Smith, World view: An annotated reading of your world. *Comment: Public Theology for the Common Good*. Fall issue, 2013, 8-9.
6. James Davidson Hunter, *To change the world: The irony, tragedy, & possibility of Christianity in the late modern world*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
7. Michael J. Lambert & Dean E. Barley, Research summary on the therapeutic relationship and psychotherapy outcome. *Psychotherapy: Theory Research, Practice, and Training*. Vol 38(4), 2001, 357-361. doi: 10.1037/0033-3204.38.4.357.
8. Miroslav Volf, February 20, 2014. From an informal coffee hour hosted by the CSC before Volf's formal lecture.

All of the Center's lectures mentioned (with the exception of Dr. Volf's) can be found at www.christianstudycenter.org/audio

THE WORK ITSELF

The CSC has recently been blessed with a grant from the Lilly Foundation enabling us to advance our new initiative on faith and vocation entitled “The Work Itself.” We are pursuing this initiative out of a deep commitment to cultivate Christian thought in an academic environment, especially as the concept of vocation is integral to educational pursuits. The heart behind this initiative is conveyed well in the following excerpt from a proposal written by the program director, Dr. Richard Horner:

“Often, when mature Christian professors and other professionals talk about how they serve Christ in their work, they mention everything but the work itself. They talk about their attitudes toward colleagues and students. They talk about praying with students or leading Bible studies with colleagues. They point to the fish symbol on their office door or they talk about how they identify themselves publicly as Christians before their students. They talk about everything but the work itself. Why is this? Why do people, who are often mature in their faith and advanced in their careers, not connect their faith to their work more readily?”

If this is the state in which we find seasoned Christian professors, what can we say about incoming freshmen? Typically, students dichotomize their lives in a way that simply leaves work outside

the framework provided by their Christian faith. Whether this work takes the form of studying, handling a part-time job, or anticipating the career that lies ahead, the work itself appears, at best, as a neutral area in their life and, at worst, as a necessary evil that tends to get in the way of what they view as truly important. As a result, the activities that will actually fill the great portion of their lives are often framed by the assumptions of their secularized culture rather than by theological reflection. Sadly, these students have often learned this way of thinking in the churches in which they have grown up.

This tendency for Christians to divide their lives in a way that leaves their vocation outside the framework of theological reflection constitutes a serious problem that the Study Center has been addressing since we first opened our doors thirteen years ago. Indeed, since so much of what we have done for the past decade has addressed this problem, the phrase ‘the work itself’ has become something of a mantra for our institution. We want to see a Christian understanding of vocation capture the minds of young students and continue to bear fruit as they take positions of leadership throughout our world. We pray that this program will encourage students to see the Christian faith as a way of understanding all of life, including the work they do.”

Our initiative involves three main projects focusing on faith and vocation:

Undergraduate Seminars

We hope to serve students seeking to answer questions about work and Christian faith by offering small scale, relationally based seminars focusing on intentional reflection and discussion. Seminars are organized in 5 tracks centered on specific vocational areas and led by local Christian professionals in mentoring roles.

Library Expansion

We are building a library supporting research on the topic, adding resources that challenge readers to develop a Christian conception of vocation by considering ideas throughout history and across various Christian traditions.

Summer Institutes

Our first summer institute will be with speaker James K.A. Smith, professor of philosophy at Calvin College and author, for students and professionals in the community to devote a weekend to faithful consideration, thoughtful conversation, and personal connection centering on the theology of faith and vocation.

Please see christianstudycenter.org for more details. We are grateful that God has led us to this initiative focusing on seeing him in “The Work Itself” and continue to seek him as we move forward. Thank you for your prayers and support.

Seminar Tracks for 2014/2015 Academic Year

- Christian Ministries
- Science, Engineering and Technology
- Medicine and Health
- Creating Wealth for the Community
- Help! I haven't got a clue what I'm doing with my life

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE: FLANNERY O'CONNOR

Flannery O'Connor, *Flannery O'Connor, Spiritual Writings*, Robert Ellsberg, editor (Orbis Books, 2003), and *The Complete Stories* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971).

by Richard V. Horner

I do not know what your summer reading list includes, but I want to encourage you to put some Flannery O'Connor on it. Her short stories make for great beach reading. Not only will you enjoy her story-telling ability, after you close the book, you will be able to sit back, close your eyes, and have plenty to think about. Probably her best known story is "A Good Man is Hard to Find," but my own favorites include "Revelation" and "The Enduring Chill," both of which we read this past spring in our main reading group. We also read excerpts from her essays and correspondence from a book we have come to love called *Flannery O'Connor, Spiritual Writings*. I put it second only to Pascal's *Pensées* for being the best \$12.00 investment you will make in your lifetime. Then, buy *The Complete Stories* too.

As a wonderful group of students joined in on our O'Connor reading group this past semester, I once again remembered just how spoiled I am in my job. I get to spend time with great students. Not only are they smart, articulate, interested, and insightful, they are also motivated and always ready to learn. Students do not get academic credit for our classes, so everything they do is above and beyond what is asked of them elsewhere. I know that I get to work with the very best of the local student population, and it is my privilege to spend time with them. It is so satisfying to see them enriched by the theological reflection of thoughtful Christians like Flannery O'Connor, and it is even more satisfying to learn with them and from them.

At the end of the semester I asked Michelle, one of the students in this group, to write down a few of her thoughts on O'Connor, and I want to pass those thoughts on to you. (Her thoughts are in quotation marks; the words tucked in between are my own. Citations of O'Connor are from her *Spiritual Writings*.)

"In my time as an English major at the University of Florida I have heard Flannery O'Connor's name referenced in the classroom

frequently. She is famous for her detailed descriptions, sometimes presenting grotesque imagery that turns your stomach or makes you cringe. For this reason she is a staple in the creative writing curriculum at the University of Florida." Her grotesque imagery and the violence of her stories, however, also leave her readers shocked to hear that she is a Christian. "I had to admit along with others in the reading group that even after reading a couple of her short stories, I had no idea she was a devout Catholic. As Dr. Horner said at our first reading group, 'You are not likely to find Flannery O'Connor at a Christian bookstore.'"

"Perhaps the reason she won't be found on bookstore shelves next to other Christian writers is simply because she is not writing for Christians. Instead, she is writing for a modern audience, one that agrees with Nietzsche that God is dead. O'Connor writes in an age that is at best 'an age of searchers and discoverers, and at its worst, an age that has domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily.' Given this situation O'Connor helps her audience see the perversity in her characters and hopes in the process that they will also see the perversity in themselves—and their need for redemption. She writes, 'The novelist with Christian concerns will find in life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take even more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience.' She weaves the brokenness of her characters into her stories and implies their need for forgiveness through sometimes crass and disturbing honesty."

While O'Connor does write for a modern audience, however, she also aims a lot of her strongest challenges at shallow, hypocritical Christianity. Along with all of us in the room, Michelle felt the sting of these challenges. "Her letters are humble and simple, void of religious or intellectual pretense. I had to laugh in agreement when O'Connor said about herself, 'I distrust pious phrases,

particularly ones that issue from my mouth.' She doesn't exalt the religious characters in her stories but rather exposes them. O'Connor's characters are so realistic that the reader cannot help but see herself in them." Read her short story "Revelation" and you will see what Michelle is talking about.

What Michelle did not note in her comments to me was her own contribution to our discussion of "The Enduring Chill," the second short story we read last spring. In this story O'Connor does get at the arrogance of Yankee, intellectual snobbery—at the modern mind that has "domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily." In the process of the story she narrates a wonderfully hilarious exchange between a would-be intellectual and a country priest. The conversation centers momentarily on James Joyce, but what Michelle pointed out to us that it is not just through this conversation that O'Connor gets at Joyce. She also does so in her portrayal of the would-be intellectual in whom Michelle saw Joyce in ways that had never been apparent to me

till she pointed it out to us. There is always far more going on in O'Connor's writings than is obvious, but if for no other reason than to enjoy this hilarious exchange between the intellectual and the priest, buy *The Complete Stories*. This exchange alone is worth the purchase price.

After you read a few of her short stories, though, you need to buy *Flannery O'Connor, Spiritual Writings* and read it as you read her stories. Listen for her comments on the way that Christian dogma frees her to write and guarantees that there is something worth writing about. Watch for ways that she employs violence to capture the work of God's grace, and notice that the incarnation is never far from sight. Then read a few more short stories and watch O'Connor go to work.



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Inside this Edition

ESSAY: Weaving Justice into the Art of Therapy

by Laurie A. Goddard

Synthesizing many of the lectures from our Seeing Justice, Seeking Justice series and other thinkers, Ms. Goddard brings experience and thoughts from the field of counseling into conversation with justice.

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THE WORK ITSELF: Learn about our new initiative on faith and vocation.

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RECOMMENDED RESOURCE: Flannery O'Connor, *Spiritual Writings*,

editor Robert Ellsberg

by Richard V. Horner

Dr. Horner offers a compelling reason to read O'Connor and Michelle Atkinson, a recent alumni of the Center, offers some of her reflections on O'Connor as well.

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FINANCIAL PARTNERSHIP: The Study Center is gearing up for the fall program.

Please consider making a summer gift to the Center to support Christian thought in the university community. Thank you.

This newsletter is a publication of the Christian Study Center of Gainesville which facilitate the thoughtful consideration of a Christian understanding of life and culture in the university community.



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