Values and Counselling in Different Societies and Cultures*

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If all of the nations of the world were divided into two groups, a values conflict that is frequently violent would be apparent in each group. Developing nations are on a crash program to develop their industry and their technology and, in so doing, they are rapidly developing some of the traditional values of the industrial nations. Such assumptions as 'bigger is better', 'more and more of everything', 'growth is our main concern' are too often concepts that reduce the significance and dignity of the individual person. The strain between growth and quality, between things and persons may become well-nigh intolerable.

Among the industrial and technologically developed countries it is a different kind of strain. The strain here is the beginnings of the movement from the bureaucratic, highly organized, technological values to values which take into account more of the quality of living than the possession of things, and more of a concern for the people as persons rather than as cogs in a machine. Stories of this kind of conflict are beginning to be heard in many of our countries.

This shift of values is not a dramatic thing which occurs overnight. It is, to use a motion picture analogy, something like a 'fading-out' of one scene into another. And in this dissolving, fading-out process there is confusion; the situation and the scene become ambiguous. It is a time, I think, which is threatening to many people. The tendency is to cling to past values and then to be faced with realities which are not consonant with those past values.

I think the safe thing for us to do — since the counselor is in the midst of all this — is to deal primarily with the present and the approaching future. I do not think that it is possible for a counsellor to remain apart from this kind of conflict. Not only does he or she have problems with the client, who may be an adult client struggling with the new and trying to cling to the past — or more youthful clients who are threatened with the clash between loyalty to old values and the understanding of the realities of the present — but the

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counsellor also has problems with himself.¹ The counsellor as a human being has his own clash of values and is troubled about whether or not he can handle them in the face of the various problems presented by his client.

Ralph Keyes, in a 1973 book called *We, the Lonely People*, proposes that there is a drive towards needing a sense of community, a sense of being involved with each other. But this clashes with other things that one may desire perhaps even more – the need for privacy, the need for mobility, and the need for convenience. And these are antithetical to community, which means involvement and concern with people, particularly with your neighbors. So this clash is what I am now seeing in our country and in others; and the counsellor is in the middle of it. The counsellor is concerned in terms of his value structure, what he believes in, what he thinks is most appropriate and most significant, those things for which he lives. He is concerned with the matter of whether or not he imposes his own values upon his client. And the answer, I am reluctant to say, is that of course he does. We have those in our country who believe that a counsellor does not impose his values – he should not and, therefore, he does not. Well! He should not, but he does. Inevitably! As a person reacting to some other person, his values become apparent to the client and they influence the client.

I want to comment on certain value changes that have taken place in our country, and I have collected some of those which I shall specify. I will then compare them with value changes that I understand are taking place in other countries.

The other countries that I have given some thought to, and with which I have had some correspondence, are 16 in number: Australia, Belgium, Canada, The Republic of China, Czechoslovakia, England, Egypt, India, Iran, Japan, Northern Ireland, The Philippines, South Africa, Sweden, Venezuela, and Yugoslavia. I must confess to you that in all this discussion of values I have no precise instrument; I deal with matters of judgment. In the case of my own country I feel a little more sure of my judgment because I have given some years to the study of these changes of values. When it comes to my respondents from other countries, they gave me their best thinking as they survey the situation in their countries. The sampling from these countries is not random, reports are judgments only, not facts. These are from people whom I know as fellow professionals in these various countries or who were

¹ The masculine pronoun throughout this paper is used in its generic sense, meaning 'mankind', 'a person', not man in the sense of a sex category. There are in most parts of the world more women counsellors than men counsellors and often they are the better of the two as far as my perception of counselling is concerned!