

by Tony Campolo

Response to “The Future is Now for Renewed Commitment”

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Decades have passed since I wrote “The Future is Now for Renewed Commitment” for the 1981 for the *National ACAC Journal*. Back then, prospective students were sure that a college education was a ticket to social and economic success. Today that certainty is greatly diminished and many young people are asking whether or not a college education is a good investment of time and money.

As America entered the 1980s, few students questioned that they would realize the American Dream. They were entering “The Me Decade” and there was an increasing rejection of the idealism that, during the 1960s, had campuses alive with movements to champion peace and justice. Even the Women’s Movement, which then was picking up momentum, was marked with concerns for personal success, primarily focusing on breaking through the “glass ceiling” that was hindering most women from moving into the top echelons of leadership.

Those days are gone and have been replaced by a time when students are uncertain about the future of America and entertain doubts about gaining the socioeconomic success of their parents. Such an ethos raises questions about what we can promise incoming students that will help them believe that a college education is worthwhile.

Granted these are generalizations, but they are generalizations that we, for the most part, recognize to be true. In the face of these circumstances, what I said 30 years ago needs some tweaking. Actually, my 1981 call to commitment is even more important today.



I sense a hunger among young people for a politics of hope and a growing desire to make their lives count for something good in the world. The campaign of Barack Obama caught their imaginations and they began to believe that America could end war instead of starting them; that universal health care was a possibility; that the environment could be delivered from destructive forces; and that the unfinished social revolution that would ensure equality for all people, regardless of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation, could be realized. Teaching at an Evangelical school, I sense that there are more and more students who are questioning the goals prescribed by a consumeristic culture and aspiring to careers that are marked by altruism. Egged on by the likes of Bono, the lead singer of the rock band U2, and Mother Theresa, students increasingly are considering how they can invest their lives in ministries to the poorest of the poor. They amaze me by living among the poor, reaching out to the homeless, volunteering to serve in Third World countries, and calling for an end to the oppression of

GLBT peoples (a somewhat new thing for many Evangelicals).

As I visit secular campuses, I find the same kind of altruistic enthusiasm. Celebrities such as Sean Penn, working with the earthquake victims of Haiti, and Angelina Jolie, reaching out to starving children in Africa, have become heroes who challenge young people to give themselves to the noble causes of our day. Students are spending spring breaks in community service projects, such as building houses for the poor with Habitat for Humanity. This growing commitment to service has become so noticeable that many college admission counselors are learning that recruiting students by telling them about their school’s involvement in community service programs is a must.

These developments should be inspiring for educators to make teaching more than just vocational training to enable students to get the credentials for climbing the ladder of socioeconomic success. Our mission—should we choose to accept it—is to define for a new generation that hungers for meaning how education can enable them to do with their lives that which provides lasting significance.



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