

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO WEIMAR COLLEGE?

A thought paper by David Grams

A former World Church President says of his 1979 visit to Weimar College:

“My heart was touched...

“It was a stimulating experience...

“I liked what I learned...”

Possibly most impressive of all to this administrator was the heartfelt and mature prayer life of the students. Speaking of two young men that he overheard earnestly praying, this renowned leader exclaimed:

“There was no stilted rhetoric, no hackneyed clichés, no selfish claims on God. The words flowed from young lips freely and easily...they held up friends and loved ones to God, pleading for their conversion or spiritual growth. They talked in appreciative tones to the Lord about their teachers, whom it was evident they loved and appreciated.” ¹

In those early days of the College, prayer was palpable! Is that to say that prayer is lightly regarded at Weimar today? Hardly. In this, the 21st Century, a visitor to a Weimar College chapel meeting would also be impressed by the fervor, commitment, and genuine expressions of love for Jesus and service to mankind.

So, with such a strong history of practical spirituality in evidence, why has Weimar slipped from 151 college students (1991-92) to just 14 today? And why are so few former students even remotely interested in their old alma mater, much less financially supportive?

History tells us that Weimar College was birthed in a vision literally saturated with enthusiastic energy, an energy that for more than a decade and a half seemed almost limitless. In the early days, Weimar College personnel would remind everyone that probably around 200, or at most 250 students, would be the ideal and the “cap” on enrollment.

And now, after 30 years...14 students?

Some would just bluntly intone that the problem is inferior instruction and inept administrators. Others would cite the lack of “following the blueprint.” Still more voices would insist that a sharper pencil in Weimar’s business affairs would have steered the College into blissful harbors.

And the list of “answers” really does go on...and on! Many solutions have been trumpeted. Many “Monday morning quarterbacks” are doing brilliant work. For sure, it seems that human nature demands a clear scapegoat, something (or someone!) we can point our longest finger at and shout triumphantly: *We know* why Weimar College closed!

But what if *history* were to suggest an answer totally unexpected? What if the terminal problems of Weimar College had comparatively little to do with the College staff or the Institute administrators? Or, even the board! What if this whole sad episode is the result of something less definable? Less easy to scapegoat.

At this point, may I be so bold as to suggest what has caused the closure? May I now, despite my earlier warnings, point a finger? Maybe, just maybe, I can be consistent, even while stretching a long, bony finger at the tragic cause! You see, *consistency* would insist that I not “name names”---and I will not. *Consistency* would insist that no single entity is singled out as the cause of failure. And none will be. And finally, *consistency* mightily insists on discovering the *fundamental* flaw. Yes indeed, *consistency* demands an entirely new paradigm for solving this problem of a college in collapse.

The problem? The *fundamental* flaw?

Lack of accountability.

No.

I’m not speaking of a lapse of morals” or a secret embezzlement campaign. And I’m not referring to “failures” of staff, board members or administrators to put in an honest days labor and ask others to do the same. Many folk know, and heaven surely does, that most everyone who’s been connected with Weimar knows how to work---too much at times!

Lack of accountability simply means that Weimar College has never constructed an airtight, personnel transcending instrument that would have *insured* a “reliable product”; namely, a *consistent* curriculum that could be relied on to deliver *viable* credits that would *allow* a Weimar student to be *accepted* in the academic marketplace.

When I speak of a college that is “personnel transcending” I refer to a school that is not dependent on “Teacher X” or “Administrator Y” to implement quality instruction and leadership. In other words, what happens to a particular course offering when Teacher X leaves Weimar? And what “bridges” are in place to adequately equip a new administrator, either at the College or Institute level? Are there comprehensive and clearly written expectations that are integral for all incoming administrators and teachers?

Ah---It’s not that no one has considered this issue. In fact, I could cite names of stellar administrators and teachers who have done all the above! So, why am I attempting to “re-invent the wheel” when others of higher stature than I have already brilliantly developed effective accountability tools?

Good question. And now I must delve even deeper into the ramifications of accountability. The pages of Weimar’s history are filled with the notable accomplishments of incredibly qualified college teachers and singularly effective administrators. But, despite all this, even in the “best of times” the essential flaw at Weimar---the Achilles’ heel---was untouched.

And that flaw was that a *corporate and collective* “will” to implement high levels of accountability never saw the light of day. Again, I could name an administrator whose acuity is legendary and who attempted to solve this very problem a long time ago. But alas---the *corporate climate* was not conducive to such a radical suggestion.

And so, year after year, decade after decade, Weimar College basked in the euphoria of “pocket successes”; that is, many of Weimar’s student’s were so sought after and successful that few seemed concerned that concurrently with a “land of plenty” there *lived an entire population of markedly disappointed, even disgusted, young people*, the proverbial “silent majority.”

Oh, oh---at this point I better stop and amplify a bit before someone jumps to an unwarranted conclusion! You see, I will “break my rule” and name a name...my own. I’ve interacted with Weimar since 1977 and first moved there with my family in 1981. So, my connection to Weimar is not only long-lived (I’ve worked with or for every president but one) but also includes three different “periods” of Academy and College history.

I say all this as a preface to a truth that is unsettling at best, and maybe even unpalatable to some. That truth is simply this: There is a literal legion of former Weimar College students who sacrificed time, money, ambitions and the best years of their lives for something that promised to deliver, but did not.

Ah, you’ve got to be kidding! How? When? Who?

Allow me to build the case by “digressing” a moment. You see, while we in the religion department were basking in the satisfaction of placing virtually every graduate and even doing a follow-up study almost ten years later, which revealed more positive results, we were blissfully unaware of a tragedy unfolding at the same time!

The tragedy?

The education majors, and to a lesser degree, the health majors as well, never received a training that was *acceptable and accountable* to other colleges. Thus, the education majors were shipped to PUC for the “finishing touches”, complete with very difficult tests that only the Weimar students were required to take.

And the health majors? Well, that depended on your creativity. Some, as far back as the early 80’s, came up with ways and means to market themselves and collect some credits for further training. Many others were restricted in their endeavors and just started over or moved on to other pursuits.

Say! Think all this was the fault of the college teachers?

Never!!

The strange truth of this entire confusing scenario is that in *both* the education and health departments resided some of the most outstanding teachers in the denomination! For example, a teacher in the education department with the longest tenure as chairperson was...was...well...a singularly accomplished educator! Oh yes, this individual well understood *all* that I've just shared. But again, the *corporate will* would not allow a change; often, because of misplaced "convictions" about accreditation.

Glowing reports could also be made for Weimar's health department. Talk about a Spanish Armada of high-powered professors! That's why I have to stifle a horselaugh when I hear of supposed "intellectuals" who pontificate about the "simple folk attending a college that never really offered a college-level class." For those who know, the quality of advanced science courses at Weimar is legendary, as evidenced by students who were able, as I've said, to creatively "market" their work at Weimar by successfully struggling for "credits" at another college.

And yes, even some education majors were able to pursue successful careers in education, *but only after "sanitizing" their Weimar credits* with either a stint at another college or arduous efforts to transfer at least some credits to another school's education program.

Is this the way to *train and prepare* young people for effective service? To put them through twisted hoops in the hope that they'll eventually have a teaching license? Furthermore, how many of the students at Weimar were aware that since the early 90's, *no student* coming from Weimar could *ever* qualify in the State of California for full certification, even if completing the degree through PUC!

I realize that some might be asking: Where was the college administration during all this tumult? Well, I'll bluntly tell you just where they were in 2003--right with us! That's right. The entire college faculty and administration realized all the above! And worked diligently to solve the problem, spending untold hours, weeks, and even months preparing the documents necessary to ramp up the curriculum and set in place a viable

college curriculum that would be *accountable!* And *accepted* in other colleges and for employment!

I know what you're saying... What happened? Why did the college continue to slide and now has to close? Why did not these efforts turn things around?

Simple answer: In 2004 there was a "waiting period" before being able to "deliver the product".

Translation: The results of all the good work done by the college faculty would take time to implement, even in the best of circumstances. Without obvious markers of progress, students couldn't afford to "stand around" until we had a *peer-reviewed* and *accountable* curriculum "off and running."
(See my attachments on accreditation)

More complex answer: For reasons that we may never know till eternity, the almost heroic efforts of the college faculty were somehow grounded and stalled by interminable "pauses".

Translation: The details, even if discoverable, are really irrelevant now. The fact is, we at the college probably needed to spend more time consensus building. After all, it takes a *village* to make a college!

Summary: "Blame games" really do accomplish absolutely nothing. The challenge, rather, is to learn from our mistakes and to remember that our young people are truly a most valuable heritage from the Lord!

For more details, please read my accompanying email attachments