

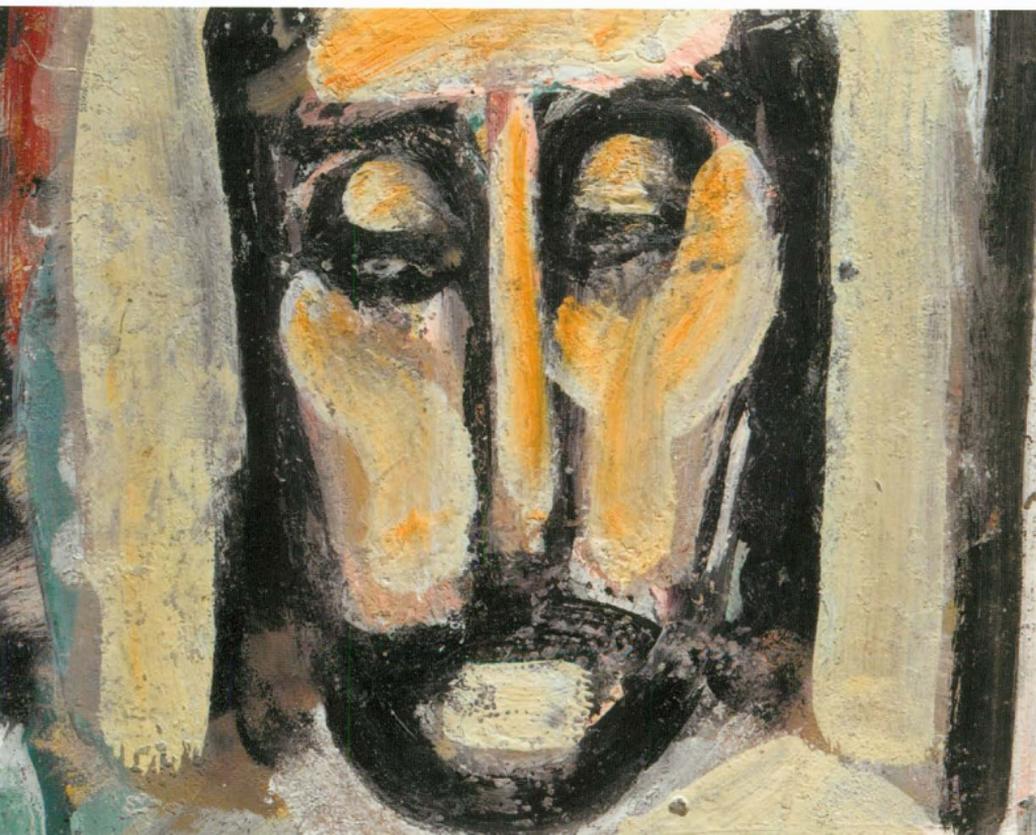
*The*  
WOUNDED HEALER

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Ministry in Contemporary Society

*In our own woundedness, we can become a source of life for others*

HENRI J. M. NOUWEN



\$12.00/Christianity  
(Canada: \$15.00)

In this hope-filled and profoundly simple book, Henri Nouwen offers a radically fresh interpretation of how we can best serve others. Here he inspires devoted men and women who want to be of service in their church or community, but who have found some traditional practices of outreach alienating and ineffective. Weaving keen cultural analysis with his psychological and religious insights, Nouwen has come up with a balanced and creative theology of service that begins with the realization of fundamental woundedness in human nature.

According to Nouwen, ministers are called to identify the suffering in their own hearts and make that recognition the starting point of their service. For Nouwen, ministers must be willing to go beyond their professional, somewhat aloof, roles and leave themselves open as fellow human beings with the same wounds and suffering as those whom they serve. In other words, we heal from our wounds.

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**HENRI J. M. NOUWEN** (1932–1996) was a Catholic priest who taught at several theological institutions and universities in his home country of the Netherlands and in the United States. He spent the final years of his life teaching and ministering to the mentally and physically disabled at L’Arche Daybreak Community in Toronto, Canada. His writings have touched millions of readers around the world, and recognition of their enduring value continues to grow.

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*Praise for*  
THE WOUNDED HEALER

“One’s overall response to the book has to be ‘Yes.’ Yes, this describes a style of ministry desperately needed by all of us in the churches. Since we all minister to each other, the book is well recommended to those beyond the ranks of professional clergy. . . . Perhaps, just perhaps, prayerful reflection on this book will help many of us leave behind what was pompous and magical in the priesthood and enter into the mystery of Christian ministry, with the help of the first Wounded Healer.”

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# THE WOUNDED HEALER

*Ministry in Contemporary Society*

HENRI J. M. NOUWEN

SECOND EDITION: TEXT COMPLETE, UPDATED, AND UNABRIDGED

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*New York London Toronto Sydney Auckland*



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*To Colin and Phyllis Williams*



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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

More than three decades have passed since this important work was first published in 1972. Its enduring popularity demonstrates how clearly Henri Nouwen sounds the chord that reveals ministry as an encounter and identification with those who wait for Good News.

Despite the timeless quality of Henri's writing, much of the language of this early work, particularly in regard to gender, was rooted in another time. The publishers and the people of the Henri Nouwen Legacy Trust wish to thank Sean Mulrooney and Kathryn Smith for their careful work in updating the text for today's readers. They have shown Henri's words as much consideration and respect as Henri himself would have done, and ensured that *The Wounded Healer* remains relevant, with insight and inspiration for the reader.

While the earlier edition might have attracted mainly people in Church ministry, the present volume is a universal call for compassion within relationships, on our journey to becoming more fully human.

Sue Mosteller, C.S.J.  
Henri Nouwen Legacy Trust  
November 2009



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Many people have played an important role in the development of the different chapters of this book. Those to whom I presented parts of the manuscript in lecture form have been especially helpful in reorganizing and rephrasing major sections.

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I have dedicated this book to Colin and Phyllis Williams, who by their friendship and hospitality made the Yale Divinity School a real free space for me.

*Henri J. M. Nouwen*



# THE WOUNDED HEALER



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# Introduction



## The Four Open Doors

What does it mean to be a minister in contemporary society? This question has been raised during the last few years by many men and women who want to be of service, but who find the familiar ways crumbling and themselves stripped of their traditional protections.

The following chapters are an attempt to respond to this question. But as Antonio Porchia says: "A door opens to me. I go in and am faced with a hundred closed doors." Any new insight that suggested an answer led me to many new questions, which remained unanswered. But I wanted at least to avert the temptation of not entering any doors at all out of fear of the closed ones. This explains the structure of this book.

The four chapters can be seen as four different doors through which I have tried to enter into the problems of ministry in the modern world. The first door represents the condition of a suffering world (Chapter 1); the second door, the condition of a suffering generation (Chapter 2); the third door, the condition of a suffering human (Chapter 3); and the fourth door, the condition of a suffering minister (Chapter 4).

The unity of this book lies more in a tenacious attempt to respond to the ministers who are questioning their own relevance and effectiveness, than in a consistent theme, or

a fully documented theoretical argument. Maybe our fragmented life experiences combined with our sense of urgency do not allow for a "handbook for ministers."

However, in the middle of the fragmentation one image slowly arose as the focus of all considerations: the image of the wounded healer. This image was the last in coming. After all attempts to articulate the predicament of those who live in contemporary society, the necessity to articulate the predicament of ministers themselves became most important.

For all ministers are called to recognize the sufferings of their time in their own hearts, and make to that recognition the starting point of their service. Whether we try to enter into a dislocated world, relate to a convulsive generation, or speak to a dying person, our service will not be perceived as authentic unless it comes from a heart wounded by the suffering about which we speak.

Thus, nothing can be written about ministry without a deeper understanding of the ways in which ministers can make their own wounds available as a source of healing. Therefore this book is called *The Wounded Healer*.

*New Haven, Connecticut*

CHAPTER I

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Ministry in a  
Dislocated World



## The Human Search

### *Introduction*

From time to time someone enters your life whose appearance, behavior, and words intimate in a dramatic way the contemporary human condition. Peter was one such person for me. He came to ask for help, but at the same time he offered a new understanding of my own world! This is his portrait:

Peter is twenty-six years old. His body is fragile; his face, framed in long blond hair, is thin, with a city pallor. His eyes are tender and radiate a longing melancholy. His lips are sensual, and his smile evokes an atmosphere of intimacy. When he shakes hands he breaks through the formal ritual in such a way that you feel his body as really present. When he speaks, his voice assumes tones that ask to be listened to with careful attention.

As we talk, it becomes clear that Peter feels as if the many boundaries that give structure to life are becoming increasingly vague. His life seems to be drifting. It is a life over which he has no control, a life determined by many known and unknown factors in his surroundings. The clear distinction between Peter and his milieu is gone and he

feels that his ideas and feelings are not really his; rather, they are brought upon him.

Sometimes he wonders: "What is fantasy and what is reality?" Often he has the strange feeling that small devils enter his head and create a painful and anxious confusion. He also does not know whom he can trust and who not, what he shall do and what not, why to say "yes" to one and "no" to another. The many distinctions between good and bad, ugly and beautiful, attractive and repulsive, are losing meaning for him. Even to the most bizarre suggestions he says: "Why not? Why not try something I have never tried? Why not have a new experience, good or bad?"

In the absence of clear boundaries between himself and his milieu, between fantasy and reality, between what to do and what to avoid, it seems that Peter has become a prisoner of the now, caught in the present without meaningful connections with his past or future. When he goes home he feels that he enters a world that has become alien to him.

The words his parents use, their questions and concerns, their aspirations and worries, seem to belong to another world, with another language and another mood. When he looks into his future everything becomes one big blur, an impenetrable cloud. He finds no answers to questions about why he lives and where he is heading. Peter is not working hard to reach a goal, he does not look forward to the fulfillment of a great desire, nor does he expect that something great or important is going to happen. He looks into empty space and is sure of only one thing: If there is anything worthwhile in life, it must be here and now.

I did not paint this portrait of Peter to show you a picture of someone in need of psychiatric help. No, I think Peter's situation is in many ways typical of the condition of modern men and women. Perhaps Peter needs help, but his experiences and feelings cannot be understood merely in terms of individual psychopathology. They are part of the historical context in which we all live, a context that makes it possible to see in Peter's life the signs of the times, which we too recognize in our life experiences. What we see in Peter is a painful expression of the situation of what I call "humanity in the modern age."

In this chapter I would like to arrive at a deeper understanding of our human predicament as it becomes visible through the many men and women who experience life as Peter does. And I hope to discover in the midst of our present ferment new ways to liberation and freedom.

I will therefore divide this chapter into two parts: The Predicament of Humanity in the Modern Age, and Humanity's Way to Liberation in the Modern Age.

## I. THE PREDICAMENT OF HUMANITY IN THE MODERN AGE

People have lost naïve faith in the possibilities of technology and are painfully aware that the same powers that enable us to create new life styles also carry the potential for self-destruction.

Let me tell you a tale of ancient India that might help us to illustrate the situation of humanity in the modern age:

Four royal sons were questioning what specialty they should master. They said to one another, "Let us search

the earth and learn a special science." So they decided, and after they had agreed on a place where they would meet again, the four brothers started off, each in a different direction. Time went by, and the brothers met again at the appointed meeting place, and they asked one another what they had learned. "I have mastered a science," said the first, "which makes it possible for me, if I have nothing but a piece of bone of some creature, to create straight away the flesh that goes with it." "I," said the second, "know how to grow that creature's skin and hair if there is flesh on its bones." The third said, "I am able to create its limbs if I have the flesh, the skin, and the hair." "And I," concluded the fourth, "know how to give life to that creature if its form is complete with limbs."

Thereupon the four brothers went into the jungle to find a piece of bone so that they could demonstrate their specialties. As fate would have it, the bone they found was a lion's, but they did not know that and picked up the bone. One added flesh to the bone, the second grew hide and hair, the third completed it with matching limbs, and the fourth gave the lion life. Shaking its heavy mane, the ferocious beast arose with its menacing mouth, sharp teeth, and merciless claws and jumped on his creators. He killed them all and vanished contentedly into the jungle.

Contemporary people realize that our creative powers hold the potential for self-destruction. We understand that vast new industrial complexes enable us to produce in one hour that which we labored over for years in the past, but we also realize that these same industries have disturbed

the ecological balance and, through air, water, and noise pollution, have contaminated our planet.

We drive cars and watch TV, but few of us understand the workings of the instruments we use. Most of us see such an abundance of material commodities around us that scarcity no longer motivates our lives, but at the same time we are groping for direction and asking for meaning and purpose. In all this we suffer from the inevitable knowledge that our time is one in which it has become possible for us to destroy, not only life but also the possibility of re-birth, not only an individual but also the human race, not only periods of existence but also history itself. The future of humanity has now become an option.

Those who lived in a pre-modern age might be aware of the real paradox of a world in which life and death touch each other in a morbid way and in which we find ourselves on a thin rope that can break so easily, but they have adapted this knowledge to their previous optimistic outlook on life. For those who were born in the modern age, however, this new knowledge cannot be adapted to old insights, nor be channeled by traditional institutions; rather it radically and definitely disrupts all existing frames of human reference. For such people, the problem is not that the future holds a new danger, such as a nuclear war, but that there might be no future at all.

Young people are not necessarily modern, and old people are not necessarily pre-modern. The difference is not in age but in consciousness and the related lifestyle. The psychohistorian Robert Jay Lifton has given us some excellent concepts to determine the nature of the quandaries of those

who live in today's world. In Lifton's terms, modern people can be characterized by (1) a historical dislocation, (2) a fragmented ideology, and (3) a search for new immortality. It might be useful to examine Peter's life in the light of these concepts.

### **1. Historical dislocation**

When Peter's father asks him when will he take his final exam, and whether he has found a good girl to marry; and when his mother carefully inquires about confession and communion and his membership in a Catholic fraternity—they both suppose that Peter's expectations for the future are essentially the same as theirs.

But Peter thinks of himself more as one of the "last ones in the experiment of living" than as a pioneer working for a new future. Therefore, symbols used by his parents cannot possibly have the same unifying and integrating power for him that they have for people with a pre-modern mentality.

This experience of Peter's we call "historical dislocation." It is a "break in the sense of connection, which men have long felt with the vital and nourishing symbol of their cultural tradition; symbols revolving around family, idea-systems, religion, and the life-cycle in general." Why should people marry and have children, study and build a career; why should they invent new techniques, build new institutions, and develop new ideas—when they doubt if there will be a tomorrow that can guarantee the value of human effort?

Crucial for those who live in the modern age is the lack of a sense of continuity, which is so vital for a creative life. We find ourselves part of a non-history in which only the

sharp moment of the here and now is valuable. For modern-age people life easily becomes a bow whose string is broken and from which no arrow can fly. In this dislocated state we become paralyzed. Our reactions are not anxiety and joy, which were so much a part of human existence, but apathy and boredom. Only when we feel ourselves responsible for the future can we have hope or despair; but when we think of ourselves as the passive victims of an extremely complex technological bureaucracy, our motivation falters and we start drifting from one moment to the next, making life a long row of randomly chained incidents and accidents.

When we wonder why the language of traditional Christianity has lost its liberating power for those who live in the modern age, we have to realize that most Christian preaching is still based on the presupposition that we see ourselves as meaningfully integrated with a history in which God came to us in the past, is living under us in the present, and will come to liberate us in the future. But when our historical consciousness is broken, the whole Christian message seems like a lecture about the great pioneers to someone on an acid trip.

## **2. Fragmented ideology**

One of the most surprising aspects of Peter's life is his fast-shifting value system. For many years he was a very strict and obedient seminarian. He went to daily Mass, took part in the many hours of community prayers, was active in a liturgical committee, and studied with great interest and even enthusiasm the many theological materials for his courses.

But when he decided to leave the seminary and study at a secular university, it took him only a few months to shake

off his old way of life. He quietly stopped going to Mass even on Sundays, spent long nights drinking and playing with other students, lived with a girlfriend, took up a field of study far removed from his theological interests, and seldom spoke about God or religion.

This is the more surprising since Peter shows absolutely no bitterness towards the old seminary. He even visits his friends there regularly and has good memories of his years as a religious man. But the idea that his two lifestyles are not very consistent hardly seems to hit him. Both experiences are valuable and have their good and bad sides, but why should life be lived from just one perspective, under the guidance of just one idea, and within one unchangeable frame of reference?

Peter does not regret his seminary days nor glorify his present situation. Tomorrow it might be different again. Who knows? All depends on the people you meet, the experiences you have, and the ideas and desires that make sense to you at the moment.

Those who live in the modern age, like Peter, do not live with an ideology. We have shifted from the fixed and total forms of an ideology to more fluid ideological fragments. One of the most visible phenomena of our time is the tremendous exposure of people to divergent and often contrasting ideas, traditions, religious convictions, and lifestyles.

Through mass media we are confronted with the most paradoxical human experiences. We are confronted not only with the most elaborate and expensive attempts to save the life of one person by heart transplantation, but also with the powerlessness of the world to help when thousands of

people die from lack of food. We are confronted not only with humanity's ability to travel to another planet, but also with our hopeless impotence to end a senseless war on this planet. We are confronted not only with high-level discussions about human rights and Christian morality, but also with the torture chambers of Brazil, Greece, and Vietnam. We are confronted not only with incredible ingenuity that can build dams, change river-beds and create fertile new lands, but also with earthquakes, floods and tornadoes that can ruin in one hour more than human beings can build in a generation. People confronted with all this and trying to make sense of it cannot possibly deceive themselves with one idea, concept, or thought system that would bring these contrasting images together into one consistent outlook on life.

“The extraordinary flow of post-modern cultural influences” asks a growing flexibility of those who live in the modern age, a willingness to remain open and live with the small fragments which at the moment seem to offer the best response to a given situation. Paradoxically, this can lead to moments of great exhilaration and exaltation in which we immerse ourselves totally in the flashing impressions of our immediate surroundings.

Those who live in the modern age no longer believe in anything that is always and everywhere true and valid. We live by the hour and create our lives on the spot. Our art is a collage art—an art that, through a combination of divergent pieces, is a short impression of how we feel at the moment. Our music is an improvisation that combines themes from various composers into something fresh as well as

momentary. Our lives often look like playful expressions of feelings and ideas that need to be communicated and responded to, but which do not attempt to oblige anyone else.

This fragmented ideology can prevent us from becoming fanatics who are willing to die or to kill for an idea. We are primarily looking for experiences that give us a sense of value. Therefore we are very tolerant, since we do not regard someone with a different conviction as a threat but rather as an opportunity to discover new ideas and test our own. We might listen with great attention to a rabbi, an imam, a minister, or a priest, without considering the acceptance of any system of thought, but quite willing to deepen our own understanding of what we experience as partial and fragmentary.

When we feel ourselves unable to relate to the Christian message, we may wonder whether this is not due to the fact that, for many people, Christianity has become an ideology. Jesus, a Jew executed by the leaders of his time, is quite often transformed into a cultural hero reinforcing the most divergent and often destructive ideological points of view. When Christianity is reduced to an all-encompassing ideology, those of us who live in the modern age are all too prone to be skeptical about its relevance to our life experience.

### **3. A search for new immortality**

Why did Peter come for help? He himself did not know exactly what he was looking for, but he had a general, all-pervading feeling of confusion. He had lost unity and direction in his life. He had lost the boundaries that could keep him together, and he felt like a prisoner of the present, drifting from left to right, unable to decide on a definitive course.

He kept studying with a sort of obedient routine to give himself the feeling of having something to do, but the long weekends and many holidays were mostly spent in sleeping, lovemaking, and just sitting around with his friends, gently distracted by music and the free-floating images of his fantasy. Nothing seemed urgent or even important enough to become involved in—no projects or plans, no exciting goals to work for, no pressing tasks to fulfill. Peter was not torn apart by conflict, was not depressed, suicidal, or anxiety-ridden. He did not suffer from despair, but neither did he have anything to hope for.

This paralysis made him suspicious about his own condition. He had discovered that even the satisfaction of his desire to embrace, to kiss, and to hold in a surrendering act of love had not created the freedom to move and to take new steps forward. He started to wonder whether love really is enough to keep us alive in this world, and whether, to be creative, we do not need to find a way to transcend the limitations of being human.

Perhaps we can find in Peter's life history events or experiences that throw some light on his apathy, but it seems just as valid to view Peter's paralysis as the paralysis of all humans in the modern age who have lost the source of their creativity, which is their sense of immortality. When we are no longer able to look beyond our own deaths and relate ourselves to what extends beyond the time and space of our individual lives, we lose both our desire to create and the excitement of being human. Therefore, I want to look at Peter's problem as that of modern-age people who are searching for new ways of being immortal.

Robert Lifton sees the threat to our sense of immortal-

ity as the core problem for those who live in the modern age. This sense of immortality “represents a compelling, universal urge to maintain an inner sense of continuity over time and space, with the various elements of life.” It is “man’s way of experiencing his connection with all human history.” But for those who live in the modern age the traditional modes of immortality have lost their connective power.

Many people feel they do not want to bring children into this self-destructive world. This means that the desire to live on in children is extinguished in the face of the possible end of history. And why should we want to live on in the works of our hands when one atomic blitz may reduce them to ashes in a second? Could perhaps an animistic immortality make it possible for humans to live on in nature? And how can a belief in a “hereafter” be an answer to the search for immortality when there is hardly any belief in the “here”? A life after death can only be thought of in terms of life before it, and nobody can dream of a new earth when there is no old earth to hold any promises.

No form of immortality—neither the immortality through children nor the immortality through works, neither the immortality through nature nor the immortality in heaven—is able to help us project ourselves beyond the limitations of this human existence.

It is therefore certainly not surprising that those who live in the modern age cannot find an adequate expression of their experience in symbols such as Hell, Purgatory, Heaven, Hereafter, Resurrection, Paradise, and the Kingdom of God.

A preaching and teaching still based on the assumption that we are on our way to a new land filled with promises, and that the creative activities in this world are the first signs of what we will see in the hereafter, cannot find a sounding board in someone whose mind is brooding on the suicidal potentials of our own world.

This brings us to the end of our description of those who live in the modern age. Peter was our model. We saw his historical dislocation, his fragmented ideology, and his search for a new mode of immortality. Obviously, the level of awareness and visibility is different in different people, but I hope you will be able to recognize in your own experiences and the experiences of your friends some of the traits that are so visible in Peter's life style. And I hope that this recognition might also help us all to realize that Christianity is radically challenged to adapt itself to be understood by the modern world.

## II. HUMANITY'S WAY TO LIBERATION

When you recognize modern humanity among your colleagues, friends, and family, and maybe even in your own self-reflections, you cannot avoid asking if there is not a way to liberation and freedom for this new type of human being. More important than constructing untested answers, which tend to create more irritation than comfort, we might be able to uncover, in the midst of the present confusion and stagnation, new trails that point in hopeful directions.

When we look around us we see humans paralyzed by dislocation and fragmentation, caught in the prison of our own mortality. However, we also see exhilarating experi-

ments of living by which people try to free themselves of the chains of our predicament, transcend our mortal condition, reach beyond ourselves, and experience the source of a new creativity.

My own involvement in the spasms and pains of those living in the modern age makes me suspect that there are two main ways by which we try to break out of our cocoons and fly: the mystical way and the revolutionary way. Both ways can be considered modes of "experiential transcendence," and both ways seem to open new perspectives and suggest new life styles. Let me therefore try to describe these two ways, and then show how they are interrelated.

### **1. The mystical way**

The mystical way is the inner way. People try to find in their inner lives a connection with the "reality of the unseen," "the source of being," "the point of silence." There they discover that what is most personal is most universal. Beyond the superficial layers of idiosyncrasies, psychological differences, and individual character traits, they find a center from which they can embrace all other beings at once and experience meaningful connections with all that exists.

Many people who have made risky trips on drugs and returned safely from them, have spoken about sensations during which they temporarily broke through their alienation, felt an intimate closeness to the mysterious power that brings us all together, and came to a liberating insight into what lies beyond death. The increasing number of houses for meditation, concentration, and contemplation, and the many new Zen and yoga centers show that we are trying to reach a moment, a point or a center, in which the dis-

inction between life and death can be transcended and in which a deep connection with all of nature, as well as with all of history, can be experienced.

In whatever way we try to define this mode of “experiential transcendence,” it seems that in all its forms we are trying to transcend our worldly environment and move one, two, three, or more levels away from the unrealities of daily existence to a more encompassing view that enables us to experience what is real. In this experience we can cut through our apathy and reach the deep currents of life.

There we feel that we belong to a story of which we know neither the beginning nor the end, but in which we have a unique place. By creating distance from the unrealities of our own ambitions and urges, humanity can break through the vicious circle of self-fulfilling prophecy that makes us suffer from our own morbid predictions.

There we come into contact with the center of our own creativity and find the strength to refuse to become passive victims of our own futurology. There we experience ourselves no longer as isolated individuals caught in the diabolic chain of cause and effect, but as beings able to transcend the fences of our own predicament and to reach out far beyond the concerns of self. There we touch the place where all people are revealed as equal and where compassion becomes a human possibility. There we come to the shocking, but at the same time self-evident, insight that prayer is not a pious decoration of life but the breath of human existence.

## **2. The revolutionary way**

But there is a second way that is becoming visible in the modern age. It is the revolutionary way of transcending our

human predicament. Here people become aware that the choice is no longer between our present world or a better world, but between a new world or no world. It is the way of those who say: Revolution is better than suicide.

Such people are deeply convinced that our world is heading for the edge of the cliff, that Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and My Lai are only a few of the many names that show how we kill ourselves off with our own absurd technological inventions. For them, no adaptation, restoration, or addition can help any longer. For them, the liberals and progressives are fooling themselves by trying to make an intolerable situation a little more tolerable.

They are tired of pruning trees and clipping branches; they want to pull out the roots of a sick society. They no longer believe that integration talks, corporate measures against pollution, Peace Corps, antipoverty programs, and civil-rights legislation will save a world dominated by extortion, oppression, and exploitation. Only a total radical upheaval of the existing order, together with a drastic change of direction, can prevent the end of everything.

But while aiming at a revolution, such people are not just motivated by the desire to liberate the oppressed, alleviate the poor, and end war. While in the past scarcity led people to revolt, present-day revolutionaries see the urgent and immediate needs of those who suffer as part of a much greater apocalyptic scene in which the survival of humanity itself is at stake. Their goal is not a better human being, but a new human being; one who relates to the self and the world in ways which are still unexplored but which belong to our hidden potentials.

The life of these new humans is not ruled by manipula-

tion and supported by weapons, but is ruled by love and supported by new ways of interpersonal communication. These new humans, however, do not develop from a self-guiding process of evolution. They might or might not come about. Perhaps it is already too late. Perhaps the suicidal tendencies, visible in the growing imbalance in culture as well as nature, have reached the point of no return.

Still, the revolutionaries believe that the situation is not irreversible and that a total reorientation of humanity is just as possible as is total self-destruction. They do not think their goal will be reached in a few years or even in a few generations, but they base their commitment on the conviction that it is better to give your life than to take it, and that the value of your actions does not depend on their immediate results. They live by the vision of a new world and refuse to be sidetracked by trivial ambitions of the moment. Thus they transcend their present condition and move from a passive fatalism to a radical activism.

### **3. The Christian way**

Is there a third way, a Christian way? It is my growing conviction that in Jesus the mystical and the revolutionary ways are not opposites, but two sides of the same human mode of experiential transcendence. I am increasingly convinced that conversion is the individual equivalent of revolution. Therefore every real revolutionary is challenged to be a mystic at heart, and one who walks the mystical way is called to unmask the illusory quality of human society.

Mysticism and revolution are two aspects of the same attempt to bring about radical change. Mystics cannot prevent themselves from becoming social critics, since in

self-reflection they will discover the roots of a sick society. Similarly, revolutionaries cannot avoid facing their own human condition, since in the midst of their struggle for a new world they will find that they are also fighting their own reactionary fears and false ambitions.

Mystics as well as revolutionaries have to cut loose from their selfish needs for a safe and protected existence and have to face without fear the miserable condition of themselves and their world. It is certainly not surprising that the great revolutionary leaders and the great contemplatives of our time meet in their common concern to liberate those who live in the modern age from their paralysis.

Their personalities might be quite different, but they show the same vision, which leads to a radical self-criticism as well as to a radical activism. This vision is able to restore the "broken connection" (Lifton) with past and future, bring unity to a fragmented ideology, and reach beyond the limits of the mortal self. This vision can offer a creative distance from ourselves and from our world and help us transcend the limiting walls of our human predicament.

For the mystic as well as for the revolutionary, life means breaking through the veil covering our human existence and following the vision that has become manifest to us. Whatever we call this vision—"The Holy," "The Noumenon," "The Spirit," or "Higher Power"—we still believe that conversion and revolution alike derive their power from a source beyond the limitations of our own createdness.

For a Christian, Jesus is the one in whom it has indeed become manifest that revolution and conversion cannot be separated in the human search for experiential transcendence. His appearance in our midst has made it undeniably

clear that changing the human heart and changing human society are not separate tasks, but are as interconnected as the two beams of the cross.

Jesus was a revolutionary who did not become an extremist, since he did not offer an ideology, but himself. He was also a mystic, who did not use his intimate relationship with God to avoid the social evils of his time, but shocked his milieu to the point of being executed as a rebel. In this sense he also remains for modern humanity the way to liberation and freedom.

### *Conclusion*

We saw the predicament of those who live in the modern age characterized by historical dislocation, fragmented ideology, and the search for immortality. We discovered the mystical as well as the revolutionary way by which we try to reach beyond ourselves. And finally we saw that for Christians, it was the human Jesus who made it manifest that these two ways do not constitute a contradiction but are in fact two sides of the same mode of experiential transcendence.

I suppose you will hesitate to consider yourself a mystic or a revolutionary, but when you have eyes to see and ears to hear you will recognize them in your midst. They are sometimes undeniably evident to the point of irritation, sometimes only partially visible.

You will find them in the eyes of guerillas, young radicals, or women who carry protest signs. You will notice them in the quiet dreamers playing guitar in the corner of a coffeehouse, in the soft voices of monks, in the melancholic

smile of students concentrating on their reading. You will see them in mothers who allow their children to go their own difficult ways, in the fathers who read to their children from a strange book, in the laughter of young girls, in the indignation of young rebels, and in the determination of protesters. You will find them in your own town, in your own family, and even in the strivings of your own heart, because they are in everyone who draws strength from the vision that dawns on the skyline of our lives and leads us all to a new world.

It is this new world that fills our dreams, guides our actions, and makes us go on, at great risk, with the increasing conviction that one day we will finally be free—free to love!

CHAPTER II

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Ministry for the  
Rootless Generations



## Looking into the Fugitive's Eyes

### *Introduction*

To set the tone for a discussion of Christian ministry in today's world, I would like to start with a short tale.

One day a young fugitive, trying to hide himself from the enemy, entered a small village. The people were kind to him and offered him a place to stay. But when the soldiers who sought the fugitive asked where he was hiding, everyone became very fearful. The soldiers threatened to burn the village and kill everyone in it unless the young man was handed over to them before dawn. The people went to the minister and asked him what to do.

The minister, torn between handing over the man to the enemy and having his people killed, withdrew to his room and read his Bible, hoping to find an answer before dawn. After many hours, in the early morning his eyes fell on these words: "It is better that one man dies than that the whole people be lost."

Then the minister closed the Bible, called the soldiers and told them where the fugitive was hidden. And after the soldiers led the young man away to be killed, there was a feast in the village because the minister had saved the lives of the people.

But the minister did not celebrate. Overcome with deep sadness, he remained in his room. That night an angel came to him, and asked, "What have you done?" He said: "I handed over the fugitive to the enemy." Then the angel said: "But don't you know that you have handed over the Messiah?" "How could I know?" the minister replied anxiously. And the angel said: "If, instead of reading your Bible, you had visited this young man just once and looked into his eyes, you would have known."

While versions of this story are very old, it still seems the most modern of tales. Like that minister, who might have recognized the Messiah if he had looked up from his Bible and into the young man's eyes, we are challenged to look into the eyes of the young men and women of today, who are turning away from our cruel ways. Perhaps that will be enough to prevent us from handing them over to the enemy and enable us to lead them out of their hidden places into the midst of the people, where they can redeem us from our fears.

It would seem, then, that we are faced with two questions. First, how do the men and women of tomorrow look today? And second, how can we lead them to the place from where they can redeem their people?

## I. THE MEN AND WOMEN OF TOMORROW

If the men and women of the 1950's can be thought of as anonymous members of David Riesman's "lonely crowd," their modern descendants are the children of the lonely crowd. When we look into the eyes of young people, we can catch a glimpse of at least a shadow of their lonely world.

Thus, Christian leadership must be shaped by at least three of the characteristics that the descendants of the lonely crowd share: inwardness, fatherlessness, and convulsiveness. The new minister must take a very serious look at these characteristics and consider them carefully during reflection and planning.

We will term these generations the inward generations, the generations without fathers, and the convulsive generations, and examine their characteristics so that we might better understand contemporary men and women.

### **1. The inward generations**

In a study of college students, published in October 1969, Jeffrey K. Hadden suggested that the best phrase with which to characterize those young men and women was “the inward generation.” It was the generation that gave absolute priority to the personal and that tended, in a remarkable way, to withdraw into the self. This might surprise those who think of the youth of that time as highly activist, sign-carrying protesters who staged teach-ins, sit-ins, walk-ins, and stay-ins all over the country and thought of themselves in many terms, but never in terms of inwardness.

First impressions, however, are not always the right ones. Let me describe a development in a famous youth center in Amsterdam. That center, called Fantasio, attracted thousands of young people from all over the world to its psychedelic, dreamlike atmosphere.

Fantasio was divided into many small, cozy, psychedelically painted rooms. Young people with long beards and long hair, in colorful clothing pieced together from old liturgical vestments, sat there quietly smoking their sticks,

smelling their incense, enthralled by the flesh-and-blood-pervading rock rhythms.

But then things changed. The young leaders threw out all psychedelic stimuli, remodeled their center into a very sober and more or less severe place, and changed the center's name from Fantasio to: Meditation Center the Kosmos. In the first issue of their newspaper they wrote: "Cut off your long hair, throw away your beards, put on simple clothes, because now things are going to be serious." "Concentration," "contemplation," and "meditation" became the key words of the place. Yogis gave classes in body control, people sat and talked for many hours about Chuang-tzu and the Eastern mystics, and everyone basically began trying to find the road that leads inward.

We might be inclined to dismiss this group's behavior as the sort of peripheral oddity found in every modern society. But Jeffrey Hadden shows that this behavior is a symptom of something much more general, much more basic, and much more influential. It is the behavior of people who are convinced that there is nothing "out there" or "up there" on which they can get a solid grasp, which can pull them out of their uncertainty and confusion. No authority, no institution, no outer concrete reality has the power to relieve them of their anxiety and loneliness and make them free. Therefore the only way is the inward way. If there is nothing "out there" or "up there," perhaps there is something meaningful, something solid "in there." Perhaps something deep in the most personal self holds the key to the mystery of meaning, freedom, and unity.

The German sociologist Shelsky speaks about our time as a time of continuing reflection. Instead of an obvious

authority telling us how to think and what to do, this continuing reflection has entered into the center of our existence. Dogmas are the hidden realities that humans have to discover in their inner consciousness as sources of self-understanding. The modern mind, Shelsky says, is in a state of constant self-reflection, trying to penetrate deeper and deeper into the core of its own individuality.

But where does this lead us? What kind of people does this inward-moving, self-reflective thinking produce? Jeffrey K. Hadden writes:

The prospects are both ominous and promising. If turning inward to discover the self is but a step toward becoming a sensitive and honest person, our society's unfettered faith in youth may turn out to be justified. However, inwardness' present mood and form seems unbridled by any social norm or tradition and almost void of notions for exercise of responsibility toward others.

Jeffrey K. Hadden is the last one to suggest that the inward generations are on the brink of revitalizing contemplative life, about to initiate new forms of monasticism. His data show, first of all, that inwardness can lead to a form of privatism, which is not only anti-authoritarian and anti-institutional, but is also very self-centered, highly interested in material comfort and the immediate gratification of existing needs and desires.

But inwardness need not lead to such privatism. It is possible that the new reality discovered in the deepest self can be "molded into a commitment to transform society." The inwardness of new generations can lead either to a higher

level of hypocrisy or to the discovery of the reality of the unseen, which can make for a better world. The path it takes will depend to a great extent on the kind of ministry given to the inward generations.

## **2. Generations without fathers**

The many who call themselves father or allow themselves to be called father, from the Holy Father to the many father abbots, to the thousands of “priest-fathers” trying to hand over some good news, should know that the last one to be listened to is the father. We are facing generations that have parents but no fathers, generations in which everyone who claims authority—because they are older, more mature, more intelligent, or more powerful—is suspect from the very beginning.

There was a time, and in many ways we see the last spastic movements of this time still around us, when our identity, our personhood and power, were given to us by the father from above. I am good when I am patted on the shoulder by him who stands above me. I am smart when some father gives me a good grade. I am important when I study at a well-known university as the intellectual child of a well-known professor. In short, I am who I am considered to be by one of my many fathers.

We could have predicted that new generations would reject this, since we have already accepted that human worth is not dependent on what is given us by fathers, but by what we make of ourselves. We could have expected this, since we have said that faith is not the acceptance of centuries-old traditions but an attitude that grows from within. We could have anticipated this ever since we started saying

that humans are free to choose their own future, their own work, their own spouse.

Today, seeing that the whole adult, fatherly world stands helpless before the threat of atomic war, eroding poverty, and the starvation of millions, modern men and women see that no father has anything to teach them simply because he has lived longer. An English rock group yells it out:

The wall on which the prophets wrote  
Is cracking at the seams.  
Upon the instrument of death  
The sunlight brightly gleams.  
When every man is torn apart  
With nightmares and with dreams  
Will no one lay the laurel wreath  
As silence drowns the screams.\*

This is what modern generations are seeing, and they know they can expect nothing from above. Young people looking into the adult world say:

I'm on the outside looking inside.  
What do I see?  
Much confusion disillusion  
All around me.

You don't possess me  
Don't impress me  
Just upset my mind

\*"Epitaph" by King Crimson

Can't instruct me or conduct me  
Just use up my time.\*

The only thing left is to try it alone, not proud or contemptuous of the fathers, telling them that they will do better, but with the deep-seated fear of complete failure. But they prefer failure to believing in those who have already failed right before their eyes. They recognize themselves in the words of a modern song:

Confusion will be my epitaph  
As I crawl a cracked and broken path.  
If we make it we can all sit back and laugh.  
But I fear tomorrow I'll be crying.  
Yes, I fear tomorrow I'll be crying.†

But the fearful generations who reject fathers and quite often reject the legitimacy of every person or institution that claims authority, is facing a new danger: the danger of becoming captive to themselves. David Riesman says: "As adult authority disintegrates, the young are more and more the captives of each other. . . . When adult control disappears, the young's control of each other intensifies."

Instead of the father, the peer becomes the standard. Many young people who are completely unimpressed by the demands, expectations, and complaints of the big bosses of the adult world, show a scrupulous sensitivity to what

\*"I Talk to the Wind" by King Crimson

†"Epitaph" by King Crimson

their peers feel, think, and say about them. Being considered an outcast or a dropout by adults does not worry them, but being excommunicated by the small circle of friends to which they want to belong can be an unbearable experience.

Many young people may even become enslaved by the tyranny of their peers. While appearing indifferent, casual, and even dirty to their elders, their indifference is often carefully calculated, their casualness studied in the mirror, and their dirty appearance based on a detailed imitation of their friends.

But the tyranny of fathers is not the same as the tyranny of one's peers. Rejecting the first means disobedience; rejecting the second, non-conformity. Rejecting the first creates feelings of guilt; rejecting the second, feelings of shame. In this respect there is an obvious shift from a guilt-based culture to a shame-based culture.

This shift has very deep consequences, for if youth no longer aspire to become adult and take the place of the fathers, and if the main motivation is conformity to the peer group, we might witness the death of a future-oriented culture or—to use a theological term—the end of eschatology.

Then we no longer witness any desire to leave the safe place and to travel to the father's house which has so many rooms, any hope to reach the promised land or to see the One who is waiting for the prodigal son, any ambition to sit at the right or the left side of the heavenly throne. Then staying home, keeping in line, and being in with your little group becomes life's most important goal. But that also is an absolute vote for the status quo.

This aspect of modern generations raises serious ques-

tions for Christian leadership. But we would be getting a very one-sided picture as a basis for that leadership if we did not first take a careful look at the third aspect of modern generations, called convulsiveness.

### 3. **The convulsive generations**

The inwardness and fatherlessness of modern generations might lead us to expect a very quiet and contented world in which people keep to themselves and try to conform to their own little in-groups. But then we must take into account the fact that these attributes are closely related to a very deep-seated unhappiness with contemporary society.

Many people are convinced that there is something terribly wrong with the world in which they live and feel that cooperation with existing models of living constitutes a kind of betrayal of the self. Everywhere we see restless and nervous people, unable to concentrate and often suffering from a growing sense of depression. They know that what is shouldn't be the way it is, but they see no workable alternative. Thus they are saddled with frustration, which often expresses itself in undirected, purposeless violence, or in suicidal withdrawal from the world, both of which are signs more of protest than of the results of a new-found ideal.

Immediately after the surrender of the exhausted state of Biafra, two high-school boys in France—Robert, nineteen years old, and Regis, sixteen years old—burned themselves to death and urged many of their peers to do the same. Interviews with their parents, pastors, teachers, and friends revealed the horrifying fact that both of these sensitive students had become so overwhelmed by the hopeless misery of the world and by the incapacity of adults to offer any real

faith in a better world, that they chose to set their bodies afire as their ultimate way of protest.

To reach a better understanding of the underlying feelings of such students, let me quote from the letter of a student who had stopped studying and was still trying to find a new world. He wrote to his mother on January 1, 1970:

Society forces me to live an unfree life, to accept values which are not values to me. I reject the society as it now exists as a whole, but since I feel compassion for people living together, I try to look for alternatives. I have given myself the obligation to become aware of what it means to be a man and to search for the source of life. Church people call it "God." You see that I am traveling a difficult road to come to self-fulfillment, but I am proud that I seldom did what others expected me to do in line with a so-called "normal development." I really hope not to end up on the level of a square, chained to customs, traditions and the talk of next-door neighbors . . .

This letter seems to me a very sensitive expression of what many young people feel. They share a fundamental unhappiness with their world and a strong desire to work for change, but they doubt deeply that they will do better than their parents did, and they almost completely lack any kind of vision or perspective. Within this framework I think that much erratic and undirected behavior is understandable. Those who feel caught like an animal in a trap may be dangerous and destructive, because of their undirected movements caused by their own panic.

This convulsive behavior is often misunderstood by those

who have power and feel that society should be protected against protesting youth. They do not recognize the tremendous ambivalence behind much of this convulsive behavior, and rather than offering creative opportunities, they tend to polarize the situation and alienate even more those who are in fact only trying to find out what is worthwhile and what is not.

Similarly, sympathetic adults may misread the motives of the young. Riesman, in an article about radical students on campus, writes that many

. . . adults fear to be thought old-fashioned or square and, by taking the part of the radical young without seeing the latter's own ambivalence, they are often no help to them but contribute to the severity of pressures from the peer group. And I expect to see that some faculty who have thought of themselves as very much on the side of students will themselves join the backlash when many students fail to reciprocate and are especially hostile towards the permissive faculty who have in the past been on their side.

Thus, modern generations are seeking desperately for a vision, an ideal to dedicate themselves to—a “faith,” if you want. But their paroxysmal actions and language are often misunderstood and considered more a threat than a plea for alternative ways of living.

Inwardness, fatherlessness, and convulsiveness—these three characteristics of modern people draw the first lines on the faces of coming generations. Now we are ready to ask what is expected of those who aspire to be Christian leaders in the world of tomorrow.

## II. TOMORROW'S LEADERS

When we look for the implications of our prognosis for the Christian ministry of the future, it appears as though three roles ask for special attention: (1) the leader as the articulator of inner events; (2) the leader as a compassionate; and (3) the leader as a contemplative critic.

### I. The minister as the articulator of inner events

Those who are inwardly directed are faced with a new and often dramatic task: they must come to terms with the inner *tremendum*. Since the God "out there" or "up there" is more or less dissolved in the many secular structures, the God within demands attention as never before. And just as the God outside could be experienced not only as a loving father but also as a horrible demon, the God within can be not only the source of a new creative life but also the cause of chaotic confusion.

The greatest complaint of the Spanish mystics St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, was that they lacked a spiritual guide to lead them along the right paths and enable them to distinguish between creative and destructive spirits. We hardly need emphasize how dangerous the experimentation with the interior life can be. Drugs, as well as different concentration practices and withdrawal into the self, often do more harm than good. On the other hand it also is becoming obvious that those who avoid the painful encounter with the unseen are doomed to live a supercilious, boring, and superficial life.

Therefore the first and most basic task required of contemporary ministers is to clarify the immense confusion

that can arise when people enter this internal world. It is a painful fact indeed to realize how poorly prepared most Christian leaders prove to be when they are invited to be spiritual leaders in the true sense. Most of them are used to thinking in terms of large-scale organization, getting people together in churches, schools, and hospitals, and running the show as circus directors. They have become unfamiliar with, and even somewhat afraid of, the deep and significant movements of the spirit. It is possible that the Church could be accused of having failed in its most basic task: to offer people creative ways to communicate with the source of human life.

But how can we avoid this danger? I think by no other way than to find the courage to enter into the core of our own existence and become familiar with the complexities of our own inner lives. As soon as we feel at home in our own house, discover the dark corners as well as the light spots, the closed doors as well as the drafty rooms, our confusion will evaporate, our anxiety will diminish, and we will become capable of creative work.

The key word here is "articulation." Those who can articulate the movements of their inner lives, who can give names to their varied experiences, need no longer be victims of themselves, but are able slowly and consistently to remove the obstacles that prevent the spirit from entering. They are able to create space for the Spirit whose heart is greater than their own, whose eyes see more than their own, and whose hands can heal more than their own.

This articulation, I believe, is the basis for a spiritual leadership of the future, because only those who are able to articulate their own experiences can offer themselves

to others as sources of clarification. Christian leaders are, therefore, first of all, those who are willing to put their own articulated faith at the disposal of those who ask for help. In this sense they are servants of servants, because they are the first to enter the promised but dangerous land, the first to tell those who are afraid what they themselves have seen, heard, and touched.

This might sound highly theoretical, but the concrete consequences are obvious. In practically all priestly functions, such as pastoral conversation, preaching, teaching, and liturgy, the minister tries to help people to recognize the work of God in themselves. The Christian leader, minister or priest, is not one who reveals God to the people—who gives something to those who have nothing—but one who helps those who are searching to discover reality as the source of their existence. In this sense we can say that the Christian leader leads humans to confession, in the classic sense of the word: to the basic affirmation that humans are human and God is God, and that without God, humans cannot be called human.

In this context, pastoral conversation is not merely a skillful use of conversational techniques to manipulate people into the Kingdom of God, but a deep human encounter in which people are willing to put their own faith and doubt, their own hope and despair, their own light and darkness at the disposal of others who want to find a way through their confusion and touch the solid core of life.

In this context, preaching means more than handing over a tradition; it is, rather, the careful and sensitive articulation of what is happening in the community so that those who listen can say: "You say what I only suspected,

you clearly express what I vaguely felt, you bring to the fore what I fearfully kept in the back of my mind. Yes, yes—you say who we are, you recognize our condition.”

When someone who listens is able to say this, then the ground is broken for others to receive the Word of God. And no minister need doubt that the Word will be received! The young especially do not have to run away from their fears and hopes but can see themselves in the face of the one who leads them; the minister will make them understand the words of salvation which in the past often sounded to them like words from a strange and unfamiliar world.

Teaching in this context does not mean telling the old story over and over again, but the offering of channels through which people can discover themselves, clarify their own experiences, and find the niches in which the Word of God can take firm hold. And finally, in this context liturgy is much more than ritual. It can become a true celebration when the liturgical leader is able to name the space where joy and sorrow touch each other as the place in which it is possible to celebrate both life and death.

So the first and most basic task of contemporary Christian leaders is to lead people out of the land of confusion into the land of hope. Therefore, they must first have the courage to be explorers of the new territory within themselves and to articulate their discoveries as a service to the inward generations.

## **2. Compassion**

By speaking about articulation as a form of leadership we have already suggested the place where the future leader

will stand. Not “up there,” far away or secretly hidden, but in the midst of the people, with the utmost visibility.

If we now realize that contemporary generations are not only inward generations asking for articulation, but also fatherless generations looking for a new kind of authority, we must consider what the nature of this authority will be. I cannot find a better word to name it than “compassion.”

Compassion must become the core, and even the nature, of authority. Christian leaders are people of God only insofar as they are able to make the compassion of God with humanity—which is visible in Jesus Christ—credible in their own world.

Compassionate leaders stand in the midst of their people but do not get caught in the conformist forces of the peer group, because through their compassion they are able to avoid the distance of pity as well as the exclusiveness of sympathy. Compassion is born when we discover in the center of our own existence, not only that God is God and humans are human, but also that our neighbor really is our fellow human being.

Through compassion it is possible to recognize that the craving for love that people feel resides also in our own hearts, that the cruelty the world knows all too well is also rooted in our own impulses. Through compassion we also sense our hope for forgiveness in our friends' eyes and our hatred in their bitter mouths. When they kill, we know that we could have done it; when they give life, we know that we can do the same. For a compassionate person nothing human is alien: no joy and no sorrow, no way of living and no way of dying.

This compassion is authority because it does not tolerate the pressures of the in-group, but breaks through the boundaries between languages and countries, rich and poor, educated and illiterate. This compassion pulls people away from the fearful clique into the larger world where they can see that every human face is the face of a neighbor. Thus the authority of compassion is the possibility for each of us to forgive our brothers and sisters, because forgiveness is only real for those who have discovered the weakness of their friends and the sins of their enemies in their own hearts, and are willing to call each human being their sister and brother.

A fatherless generation looks for brothers and sisters who are able to take away their fear and anxiety, who can open the doors of their narrow-mindedness and show them that forgiveness is a possibility that dawns on the horizon of humanity. The compassionate person who points to the possibility of forgiveness helps others to free themselves from the chains of their restrictive shame, allows them to experience their own guilt, and restores their hope for a future in which the lamb and the lion can lie down together.

But here we must be aware of the great temptation that faces Christian ministers. Everywhere Christian leaders, men and women alike, have become increasingly aware of the need for more specific training and formation. This need is realistic, and the desire for more professionalism in the ministry is understandable. But the danger is that instead of becoming free to let the spirit grow, ministers may entangle themselves in the complications of their own assumed competence and use their specialism as an excuse to avoid the much more difficult task of being compassionate.

The task of Christian leaders is to bring out the best in everyone and to lead them forward to a more human community; the danger is that their skillful diagnostic eye will become more an eye for distant and detailed analysis than the eye of a compassionate partner. And if priests and ministers think that more skill training is the solution for the problem of Christian leadership, they may end up being more frustrated and disappointed than the leaders of the past. More training and structure are just as necessary as more bread for the hungry. But just as bread given without love can bring war instead of peace, professionalism without compassion will turn forgiveness into a gimmick, and the kingdom to come, into a blindfold.

This brings us to the final characteristic of Christian leaders. If they are to be not just one in a long row of professionals who try to help people with their specific skills, if they are really to be agents leading from confusion to hope and from chaos to harmony, they must be not only articulate and compassionate, but contemplative at heart as well.

### **3. The minister as a contemplative critic**

We have said that the inward, fatherless generations desperately want to change the world in which they live but tend to act spastically and convulsively due to the lack of a credible alternative. How can the Christian leader direct this explosive energy into creative channels and really be an agent of change? It might sound surprising and perhaps even contradictory, but I think that what is asked of the modern Christian leader is to become a contemplative critic.

I hope I will be able to prevent the free association of the word "contemplative" with a life lived behind walls, with

minimal contact with what is going on in the fast-moving world. What I have in mind is a very active, engaged form of contemplation of an evocative nature. This needs some explanation.

People who do not know where they are going or what kind of world they are heading toward, who wonder if bringing forth children into this chaotic world is not an act of cruelty rather than love, will often be tempted to become sarcastic or even cynical. They laugh at their busy friends, but have nothing to offer in place of their activity. They protest against many things, but do not know what to witness for.

But Christian ministers who have discovered in themselves the voice of the Spirit and have rediscovered their fellow human beings with compassion might be able to look at the people they meet, the contacts they make, and the events they become a part of, in a different way. They might uncover the first glimpse of the new world behind the veil of everyday life. As contemplative critics they keep a certain distance to prevent becoming absorbed in what is most urgent and most immediate, but that same distance allows them to bring to the fore the real beauty of the world and of humanity, which is always different, always fascinating, always new.

It is not the task of Christian leaders to go around nervously trying to redeem people, to save them at the last minute, to put them on the right track. For we are redeemed once and for all. Christian leaders are called to help others affirm this great news, and to make visible in daily events the fact that behind the dirty curtain of our painful symp-

toms there is something great to be seen: the face of God in whose image we are shaped.

In this way contemplatives can be leaders for a convulsive generation because they can break through the vicious circle of immediate needs asking for immediate satisfaction. They can direct the eyes of those who want to look beyond their impulses, and steer their erratic energy into creative channels.

Here we see that contemporary Christian ministers can in no way be considered those who are concerned only with helping individuals to adapt themselves to a demanding world. In fact, Christian leaders who are able to be critical contemplatives are revolutionaries in the most real sense. Because by testing all they see, hear, and touch for its evangelical authenticity, they are able to change the course of history and lead their people away from panic-stricken convulsions to the creative action that will make a better world.

They do not shoulder every protest sign in order to be in with those who express their frustration more than their ideas, nor do they easily join those asking for more protection, more police, more discipline, and more order. But they do look critically at what is going on and make decisions based on insight into their own vocation, not on the desire for popularity or the fear of rejection. They criticize the protesters as well as the rest seekers when their motives are false and their objectives dubious.

Contemplatives are not needy or greedy for human contact, but are guided by a vision of what they have seen beyond the trivial concerns of a possessive world. They do not bounce up and down with the fashions of the moment, be-

cause they are in contact with what is basic, central, and ultimate. They do not condone that anybody worship idols, and they constantly invite their fellow human beings to ask real, often painful and upsetting questions, to look behind the surface of charming behavior, and to take away all the obstacles that prevent us from getting to the heart of the matter.

Contemplative critics take away the illusory mask of the manipulative world and have the courage to show what the true situation is. They know that they may be considered to be foolish, mad, a danger to society and a threat to the human race. But they are not afraid to die, since their vision makes them transcend the difference between life and death and makes them free to do what has to be done here and now, notwithstanding the risks involved.

More than anything else, they look for signs of hope and promise in the situation in which they find themselves. Contemplative critics have the sensibility to notice the small mustard seed and the trust to believe that "when it has grown it is the biggest shrub of all and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and shelter in its branches" (Mt. 13:31-32). They know that if there is hope for a better world in the future the signs must be visible in the present, and they will never curse the now in favor of the later.

They are not naïve optimists who expect their frustrated desires to be satisfied in the future, nor bitter pessimists who keep repeating that the past has taught them that there is nothing new under the sun; they are rather people of hope who live with the unshakable conviction that now they are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror, but one day they will see the future face to face.

Christian leaders who are able not only to articulate the movements of the spirit, but also to contemplate the world with a critical but compassionate eye, may expect that convulsive generations will not choose death as the ultimate, desperate form of protest, but instead the new life of which the contemplative, compassionate minister has made visible the first hopeful signs.

### *Conclusion*

We looked into the eyes of the young fugitive and found him inward, fatherless, and convulsive. We wanted to prevent ourselves from handing him over to the enemy to be killed; we wanted instead to lead him to the center of our village and to recognize in this coming man the redeemer of a fearful world. To do this we are challenged to be articulate, compassionate, and contemplative.

Is this too much of a task? Only if we feel we have to accomplish this individually and separately. But if anything has become clear in our day, it is that leadership is a shared vocation that develops by working closely together in a community. And it is within the context of community that men and women can make each other realize that, as Teilhard de Chardin remarked, "to those who can see, nothing is profane."

Having said all this, I realize that I have done nothing more than rephrase the fact that Christian leaders must be in the future what they have always had to be in the past: people of prayer—people who have to pray, and who have to pray always. That I bring up this simple fact at this point may be surprising, but I hope I have succeeded in taking

away all the sweet, pietistic, and churchy aura attached to this often misused word.

For people of prayer are, in the final analysis, people who are able to recognize in others the face of the Messiah. They are people who make visible what was hidden, who make touchable what was unreachable. People of prayer are leaders precisely because through their articulation of God's work within themselves they can lead others away from confusion and towards clarification; through their compassion they can guide others out of the closed circuits of in-groups and towards the wider world of humanity; and through their critical contemplation they can convert convulsive destructiveness into creative work for the new world to come.

CHAPTER III

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Ministry to a  
Hopeless Man



## Waiting for Tomorrow

### *Introduction*

When we think about leadership we usually think about one person offering ideas, suggestions, or directions to many others. We think of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Charles de Gaulle—all people who played an important role in modern history and found themselves at the center of public attention. But when we want to determine what kind of leadership Christians can claim for themselves, it sometimes seems better to start closer to home. There we have no chance to hide behind the excuse that we are not striving for worldwide change.

There is hardly a man or woman who does not exercise some leadership over others. Among parents and children, teachers and students, bosses and employees, many different patterns of leadership can be found. In less formal settings—playgrounds, street gangs, academic and social societies, hobby and sports clubs—we also see how much of our life is dependent on the way leadership is given and accepted.

In this chapter I would like to concentrate on the simplest structure in which leadership plays a role: the encounter between two people. In this one-to-one relationship we are involved in leading one another from point to point,

from view to view, from one conviction to another. We need not name people like Hitler or Gandhi to demonstrate how destructive or creative this type of leadership can be. Even in the simple form of a conversation between two people, leadership can be a question of life and death. Indeed, in precisely this one-to-one encounter we discover some of the principles of Christian leadership, which also have implications for more complex leadership relationships.

Let a short conversation between a hospital patient and his visitor serve as a starting point for our discussion. The patient, Mr. Harrison, is a forty-eight-year-old farm laborer, stocky, tough looking, and not used to expressing himself verbally. He comes from a very simple Baptist family and feels completely disoriented in the big-city hospital where he was brought for an operation on his legs. He suffers from an insufficient functioning of his arteries.

The visitor, John Allen, is a theology student who is taking a year of clinical-pastoral training under the supervision of the hospital chaplain. This is John's second visit to Mr. Harrison.

The patient sits in a wheelchair in the middle of the ward; other patients are present, some of them talking with each other. The following conversation takes place:

JOHN: Mr. Harrison, I'm . . . I came by . . . to see you the other day.

MR. HARRISON: Oh yes, I remember.

JOHN: How are things going?

MR. HARRISON: Well, I'll tell you. They were supposed to operate on me last week. They got me drugged, took

me up there and my heart flew up. They decided they'd better not try it then. They brought me back down here and I'm supposed to have the operation tomorrow.

JOHN: You say your heart flew up?

MR. HARRISON: Yes, they thought it might be too risky to go through with it. [PAUSE] I guess I'm ready for the operation. I think I can make it.

JOHN: You feel you're ready for it.

MR. HARRISON: Well, I'm not ready to die. But I think the operation is necessary or I'll lose my legs.

JOHN: You're not ready for the end, but you want something to be done if possible so you won't lose your legs.

MR. HARRISON: Yeah [nodding]. If this is the end, this is one who's gonna be lost.

JOHN: You feel the cause is lost if you don't make it through the operation.

MR. HARRISON: Yeah! Of course they tell me there's not too much to the operation. They're gonna dope me up right here and keep me here until it's time for the operation. They said they're going to put some plastic tubes inside me and that oughta save my legs. You see my foot here [takes shoe off and shows his foot]. This toe here gets blue when I stand on it. They could amputate here by the ankle, but this way they might save my legs.

JOHN: It's worth the operation if you can use your legs again.

MR. HARRISON: Yeah. Course I don't want to die during the operation. I'd rather die a natural death than die through anesthesia.

JOHN: You know the possibility of death is present during

the operation, but the only way you can get well is to have the operation.

MR. HARRISON: Yeah, that's right,

*Pause*

JOHN: You got much waiting for you when you leave the hospital?

MR. HARRISON: Nothing and nobody. Just hard work.

JOHN: Just a lot of hard labor.

MR. HARRISON: Yeah, that's right. Course I got to gain my strength back. I figure I'll be ready about the time the tobacco crop is ready.

JOHN: You'll be working with the tobacco crop?

MR. HARRISON: Yeah, picking starts around August.

JOHN: Mmm-hm.

*Pause*

JOHN: Well, Mr. Harrison, I hope things go well for you tomorrow.

MR. HARRISON: Thank you. Thanks for coming by.

JOHN: I'll be seeing you. Good-bye.

MR. HARRISON: Good-bye.

John did not speak to Mr. Harrison again. The next day, during the operation, Mr. Harrison died. Perhaps we might better say: "He never woke up from the anesthesia."

John had been asked to guide Mr. Harrison in this critical moment, to lead him to a new tomorrow. And what did "tomorrow" mean? For Mr. Harrison it meant either a be-

ginning of his return to the tobacco crop or an entry into the realm beyond death.

In order to come to a deeper understanding of the meaning of Christian leadership we will study in more detail the encounter between Mr. Harrison and John Allen. First we will consider Mr. Harrison's condition; then we will raise the question of how John could have led Mr. Harrison to tomorrow. Finally, we will discuss the main principles of Christian leadership that became apparent in this encounter.

### I. THE CONDITION OF MR. HARRISON

John was irritated and even a little angry when he reported to the chaplain supervisor shortly after his visit to Mr. Harrison. He had the feeling that Mr. Harrison was a stubborn, indifferent man, with whom a decent conversation was hardly possible. He did not believe that Mr. Harrison had really appreciated his visit, and felt that in his bitter and somewhat coarse way of talking, this patient had in fact expressed more hostility toward his visitor than gratitude. John was disappointed and did not hesitate to call Mr. Harrison an impossible man, that is, not a likely candidate for pastoral help.

John's reaction is quite understandable. As a young theology student he had hoped for a meaningful conversation with his patient, in which he could offer some hope and consolation. But he had felt frustrated, let down, and unable to "get anywhere."

Only when he started to write, read, and reread his conversation and to discuss with his supervisor what had actually happened, was he able to develop the distance necessary

to see the painful condition of Mr. Harrison. Through that distance he could see that Mr. Harrison found himself in an impersonal-mechanical situation, afraid to die, but also afraid to live again. It was this paralyzing condition that John needed to feel and taste deeply before he could be of help.

### **1. The impersonal milieu**

For a theology student who went through grade school, high school, college, and divinity school, it was hard to imagine what it meant for a forty-eight-year-old laborer to be placed in the middle of the technocracy of a modern hospital. It must have been like coming to another planet where the people dress, behave, talk, and act in a frightfully strange way.

The nurses, with their efficient way of washing, feeding, and dressing patients; the doctors with their charts, making notes and giving orders in an utterly strange language; the many unidentifiable machines with bottles and tubes; and all the strange odors, noises, and foods must have made Mr. Harrison feel like a little child who has lost his way in a fearful forest. For him nothing was familiar, nothing understandable, nothing even approachable.

Suddenly this tough man who had always maintained his own independence through hard manual labor found himself the passive victim of many people and operations that were totally alien to him. He had lost control over himself. An anonymous group of "they people" had taken over: "*They* got me drugged, took me up there . . . *They* decided they'd better not try it then. *They* brought me back down here . . ."

This language shows that Mr. Harrison felt that strange powers had taken away his identity. The operation on his legs became a mysterious otherworldly manipulation. His own presence seemed unwanted in the process: "They're gonna dope me up right here and keep me here until it's time for the operation. They said they're going to put some plastic tubes inside me and that oughta save my legs."

For Mr. Harrison, "they" were working as if his very presence was only an incidental fact. No self-initiative was required or appreciated, no question expected or answered, no interest respected or stimulated. Mr. Harrison's perception of this experience is best described as: "They do things to it."

It was within this impersonal milieu that John Allen desired to offer his pastoral help.

## **2. The fear of death**

While studying the verbatim report of his conversation with Mr. Harrison, John discovered that death had been at the center of his patient's concern. In some way, Mr. Harrison had realized that his condition was a matter of life and death. Three times during their short interchange, Mr. Harrison spoke about his fear of death, while John seemed constantly to avoid the subject, or at least to cover up its painful reality.

Mr. Harrison feared an impersonal death, a death in which he did not have a part, of which he was not aware, and which was more real in the minds of the many powers around him than in his own mind. He must have sensed that the opportunity to die as a man was to be denied him: "Course I don't want to die during the operation. I'd rather

die a natural death than die through anesthesia.” Mr. Harrison realized that in the mechanical, incomprehensible milieu to which “they” brought him, his death was but one part of this process of human manipulation to which he remained an outsider.

There was a moment of protest in his hopeless remark. He, a man from the fields who had worked hard to make a living, who had had to rely wholly on his own body, knew that he had a right to die his own death, a natural death. He wanted to die the way he had lived. But his protest was weak and he must have realized that there was no choice. He would just vanish, slip away, stop living in the dreamlike state brought on by those who were going to “dope him up.”

And he knew that if he died, he would be absent in that most crucial moment of human existence. It was not just the possibility of death during the operation that frightened Mr. Harrison, but also that the chance to make death his own would be taken away from him, that in fact he would not face death, but simply fail to regain consciousness.

But there is more—much more. Mr. Harrison was not ready to die. Twice he tried to make his utter despair known to John, but John did not hear him. When John said, “You feel you’re ready for it,” meaning the operation, Mr. Harrison revealed what was really on his mind: “Well, I’m not ready to die . . . If this is the end, this is one who’s gonna be lost.”

We can only guess what lay behind these desperate words full of agony and despair—perhaps something too difficult for John to address. He tried to soften the hard realities. He called death “the end,” and transformed “this is one who’s gonna be lost” into “the cause is lost.” But by softening the

words of Mr. Harrison, John evaded confrontation with the personal agony of his patient.

Nobody can understand all the implications of Mr. Harrison's cry: "If this is the end, this is one who's gonna be lost." For what does "being lost" really mean? We do not know, but his Baptist background and his rough, lonely life imply that he might well have been speaking about being condemned, about facing an eternal life in hell.

This forty-eight-year-old man, without family or friends, without anybody around to talk with him, to understand or to forgive him, faced death with the burden of a painful past on his shoulders. We have no idea of the many images that came to his mind at this hour, but someone as lonely and desperate as Mr. Harrison probably could not draw on past experiences that had established in him an awareness of God's love and forgiveness.

Further, if the hour of death often brings back early memories, it might well be that the Baptist sermons of his childhood, threatening with eternal punishment anyone who yields to the "pleasures of this world," returned with horrifying vividness, forcing Mr. Harrison to identify himself in retrospect as "one who's gonna be lost." Maybe Mr. Harrison had not visited a church for years and had not met a minister since he was a boy. When the young chaplain, John, appeared at his wheelchair, it is likely that all the warnings, prohibitions, and admonitions of his childhood returned to him, and made the transgressions of his adulthood seem a heavy burden that could only lead to hell.

We do not know what really took place in Mr. Harrison's mind; however, there is no reason to underestimate the agonizing quality of his own words. Our "maybes" and

“perhapses” can at least make us partially aware of what it means for a man to bring his forty-eight years of life to the day of judgment.

“I’m not ready to die.” This means that Mr. Harrison was not prepared for a faithful act of surrender. He was not prepared to give his life away in faith and hope. His present suffering was small compared with what he expected beyond the boundary of life. Mr. Harrison feared death in the most existential way. But did he desire to live?

### 3. The fear of life

There are few patients who do not hope for a recovery when they face an operation. The complex hospital industry exists to heal, to restore, to bring people back to “normal life.” Everyone who has paid a visit to a hospital and talked with patients knows that “tomorrow” means the day closer to home, to old friends, to the job, to everyday life. General hospitals are places that people want and expect to leave as soon as possible. It is in this context—the context of the healing power of human hope—that doctors, nurses, and aides do their work.

People who do not want to leave the hospital do not cooperate with the over-all purpose of the institution and limit the power of all those who want to help them. Did Mr. Harrison strive to recuperate? We know he was afraid to die; however, that does not mean he wanted to live.

Returning to normal life means, in part, returning to those who are waiting for you. But who was waiting for Mr. Harrison? John sensed Mr. Harrison’s loneliness when he asked, “You got much waiting for you when you leave the

hospital?" This question opened a deep wound, and Mr. Harrison replied, "Nothing and nobody. Just hard work."

It is very difficult if not impossible for most people to realize what it means when nobody cares whether you live or die. Isolation is among the worst of human sufferings, and for someone like John the experience of isolation was endless miles away. He had his supervisor to talk to, his friends to share ideas with, his family and all the people who in one way or another were interested in his well-being.

In contrast, what is life to one for whom no one waits, who expects only hard work in the tobacco crop, whose only motive for a cure is to recover enough strength for the picking season? Certainly life does not call, does not pull the isolation away from the destructive processes in his body. Why should Mr. Harrison return to life? Only to spend a few more years struggling in the hot sun to make just enough money to feed and dress himself until he could die a "natural death"? Death may be hell, but that life, no less.

Mr. Harrison did not really want to live any longer. He feared that life, which gave him so little happiness and so much pain. His legs hurt and he knew that without his legs there was no life for him. But his legs couldn't bring him love; they promised only hard work, and that was a frightening and dismal thought.

Thus John found Mr. Harrison in an impersonal milieu, afraid to die and afraid to live. We do not know how serious Mr. Harrison's illness was, and we do not know how much chance he had to survive the operation. But Mr. Harrison was not ready for it. He did not understand what was going

on around him; he wanted neither to die nor to live. He was caught in a terrible trap. Any option would have been fatal, condemnation either to hell or to hard work.

This was Mr. Harrison's condition. Like many, he suffered from a psychic paralysis in which his deepest aspirations were cut, his desires blocked, his strivings frustrated, his will chained. Instead of someone filled with love and hate, desire and anger, hope and doubt; he had become a passive victim unable to give any direction to his own history.

When the hands of doctors touch a person in this condition they touch a body that no longer speaks a language, and which has given up every form of cooperation. Mr. Harrison could not struggle to win the battle for life, or surrender peacefully if his chances to win diminished. Under the surgeon's hands he did not really have a name, nor did he claim one for himself. He had become an anonymous body that had lost even the ability to live. He simply stopped functioning.

As we all know, Mr. Harrison's is not an isolated case. Many people are the prisoners of their own existence. Mr. Harrison's condition is the condition of all men and women who do not understand the world in which they find themselves, and for whom both death and life are loaded with fear.

And there are many like John as well. There are many idealistic, intelligent men and women who want to free others and lead them to tomorrow. How then to free people like Mr. Harrison from their paralysis and lead them towards a tomorrow when a new life can start? This is the question we now have to consider.

## II. HOW TO LEAD MR. HARRISON TO TOMORROW

John visited Mr. Harrison in order to help him. The obvious question is: "What could or should John have done for Mr. Harrison?" But this question is really not fair, for the condition of Mr. Harrison was not immediately clear and comprehensible. Perhaps even now, after many hours of careful analysis of this short interchange, we still have nothing but a very partial understanding of what was happening to the patient.

It is too easy to criticize the responses of John and to show how often he failed to come close to Mr. Harrison. In fact, what we see is a serious attempt by John to listen to Mr. Harrison and to apply the rules of nondirective counseling, which he learned in class. The result is academic, awkward, and obviously filled with feelings of fear, hesitation, confusion, self-preoccupation, and distance.

John and Mr. Harrison represent two worlds so different in history, thought, and feeling that it is totally unrealistic, if not inhuman, to expect that they would be able to understand each other in two rather casual conversations. It is even pretentious to think that anyone will ever know who this farm worker really was and how he faced his death. The mystery of one human being is too immense and too profound to be explained by another.

But still, "How could Mr. Harrison have been led to tomorrow?" remains a valid question. For we all need others to live, and the deeper we are willing to enter into the painful condition we all know, the more likely it is that we can become successful leaders, leading people out of the desert and into the promised land.

Therefore, what follows is not a lesson to show John how miserably he failed to help Mr. Harrison and to tell him what he should have done, but an attempt to recognize in Mr. Harrison's condition the agony of all people: our desperate cry for a human response from our brothers and sisters.

Possibly John couldn't have done much more than he did during his talk with Mr. Harrison, but the study of this tragic human situation may reveal that our response can indeed be a matter of life and death. The response that might have been within the reach of human possibility is a personal response in an impersonal milieu, by which one person can wait for another in life, as well as in death.

### **1. A personal response**

When theology students read the conversation between John and Mr. Harrison they usually strongly criticize John's responses and offer ideas about what they themselves might have said. They explain, "I would have told him to think about the good experiences he had in life and would have attempted to offer him hope for a better life," or, "I would have explained to him that God is merciful and will forgive him his sins," or, "I would have tried to find out more about the nature of his illness and showed him that he really had a good chance to recover," or, "I would have talked more with him about his fear of death and would have talked about his past so that he could unburden his guilty conscience," or, "I would have talked about death as a way to new life for those who can put their faith in Christ."

All these and other proposed responses are grounded in a deep desire to help and to offer a message of hope that

would alleviate the pains of this suffering man. But still, the question remains, "What use can an illiterate man in the hour of agony make of the words, explanations, exhortations, and arguments of a theology student?"

Can anyone change another's ideas, feelings, or perspectives a few hours before death? To be sure, forty-eight years of living are not ruffled by a few intelligent remarks by a well-meaning seminarian. John may have been too non-directive, he may have lacked the courage for clear witness or for deeper concern. But what difference would it really have made?

The possibilities of John's visit to Mr. Harrison will never be made manifest if we expect any salvation from a change in terminology, or from a new twist in the nature of the words we use. We might even ask ourselves, "Wouldn't it have been better for John to stay away from Mr. Harrison, to leave him alone, to prevent him from making morbid associations with the appearance of a preacher?"

Yes . . . unless in the middle of the anonymity created by his surroundings Mr. Harrison had met someone genuine who called him by his name and became his brother . . . unless John had become a person Mr. Harrison could truly see, touch, smell, and hear, and whose real presence would in no way be denied. If John had appeared from out of the cloudiness of Mr. Harrison's existence and looked at him, spoken to him, and pressed his hands in a gesture of real concern, that would have mattered.

The emptiness of the past and the future can never be filled with words, but only by the presence of a human being. Because only then can hope be born, that there might be at least one exception to the "nobody and nothing" lament—a

hope that will inspire the whisper, "Maybe, after all, someone is waiting for me."

## 2. Waiting in life

None of us can offer leadership to anyone unless we make our presence known—that is, unless we step forward out of the anonymity and apathy of our surroundings and make the possibility of fellowship visible. But how could John, even when really present to Mr. Harrison, even when able to express his real concern for him, lead him out of his fear into the hope for tomorrow?

We might as well start by realizing that neither John nor any other concerned person would want Mr. Harrison to die. The operation was meant to save his legs, and when Mr. Harrison said, "I think I can make it," only a heartless person would have criticized his careful guess. For a patient facing surgery, tomorrow must be the day of recovery, not the day of death. John's task was therefore to strengthen his patient's desire to recover and to reinforce what little strength he had in the struggle for life. But how?

By making Mr. Harrison's dangerous generalization, "Nothing and nobody is waiting for me," untrue, by reducing it to a paralyzing self-complaint. And by a frontal attack against that false self-concept: "Look at me, and try to say that again—you will see in my eyes that you are wrong—I am here, and I am waiting for you—I will be here tomorrow and the day after tomorrow—and you are not going to let me down."

None of us can stay alive when there is nobody waiting for us. Each one of us who returns from a long and difficult trip is looking for someone waiting for us at the station or

the airport. Each one of us wants to tell our story and share our moments of pain and exhilaration with someone who stayed home, waiting for us to come back.

Alexander Berkman, the anarchist who attempted to kill the industrial captain Henry Clay Frick in 1892, would have gone insane during his fourteen years of brutal prison life had there not been a few friends waiting for him outside.

George Jackson, who was imprisoned in 1960 when he was eighteen years old for robbing a gas station of \$70, and who was killed in 1971 while trying to escape, would never have been able to write the impressive human document he did if his mother, father, his brothers Robert and Jonathan, and his friend Fay Stender had not been waiting outside, receiving his letters and constantly reacting to his thoughts.

Human beings can keep their sanity and stay alive as long as there is at least one person waiting for them. The human mind can indeed rule the body even when there is little health left. A dying mother can stay alive long enough to see her child before she gives up the struggle, a soldier can prevent his mental and physical disintegration when he knows that his wife and children are waiting for him. But when "nothing and nobody" is waiting, there is no chance to survive in the struggle for life.

Mr. Harrison had no reason to come out of the anesthesia if returning to consciousness meant arriving at a station where thousands of people ran left and right, but where no one raised a hand, approached him with a smile of recognition, or welcomed him back into the land of the living. John might have been that one person. He might have saved Mr. Harrison's life by making him realize that returning to life is a gift to the one who is waiting.

Thousands of people commit suicide because there is nobody waiting for them tomorrow. There is no reason to live if there is nobody to live for. But when someone says to a fellow human being, "I will not let you go. I am going to be here tomorrow waiting for you and I expect you not to disappoint me," then tomorrow is no longer an endless dark tunnel. It becomes flesh and blood in the form of the brother or sister who is waiting and for whom the patient wants to give life one more chance.

When tomorrow only meant the tobacco crop and hard labor and a lonely life, Mr. Harrison could hardly have been expected to cooperate with the surgeon's work. But if John had stood on the threshold of tomorrow, Mr. Harrison might have wanted to know what he would have to say about the day after, and have given the doctor a helping hand.

And let us not diminish the power of waiting by saying that a lifesaving relationship cannot develop in an hour. One compassionate gaze or one affectionate handshake can substitute for years of friendship when a person is in agony. Not only does love last forever, it needs only a second to be born. John might indeed have saved Mr. Harrison's life by becoming his tomorrow.

### **3. Waiting in death**

But Mr. Harrison's recovery was far from sure. Mr. Harrison himself was the first to realize this. Three times he explicitly spoke about his death, and he knew that his illness was serious enough to question a positive outcome from the operation. In the short interchange with John Allen, Mr.

Harrison seemed to fear death even more than a return to life.

Does not John's presence and faithful waiting become ridiculous in the face of someone who quite possibly will not be alive the next day? Many patients have been fooled with stories about recovery and the better life that will follow, while the people consoling them scarcely believed their own words. What sense does it make to speak about waiting for tomorrow when those words will quite likely be the last words spoken to the patient?

Here we touch upon the most sensitive part of John's encounter with Mr. Harrison. Why should a healthy young man make himself really present to one in whom the forces of death are at work? What does it mean for someone who is dying to be confronted with another person for whom life has hardly begun? This looks like psychological torture, in which a dying man is reminded by his visitor's youth that his life could have been so different, but that it is too late to change.

Most people in our society do not want to disturb each other with the idea of death. They want someone to die without ever having realized that death was approaching. Surely John could not lead Mr. Harrison to tomorrow by playing this false game. Instead of leading him he would have been misleading him. He would have stolen his human right to die.

In truth, can John really say, "I will be waiting for you," if this would only be true in the case of Mr. Harrison's recovery? Or can one person wait for another, whatever happens, including death?

In the face of death there is hardly any difference between John and Mr. Harrison. They will both die. The only difference is time. But what does time mean when two people have discovered each other as fellow human beings? If John's waiting could have saved Mr. Harrison's life, the power of his waiting would not be conditioned by Mr. Harrison's recovery, because when two people have become present to each other, the waiting of one must be able to cross the narrow line between the living or dying of the other.

Mr. Harrison was afraid to die because he was afraid of condemnation, of an eternal prolongation of his isolation. Whatever else hell may have meant to Mr. Harrison, it certainly entailed his total rejection. But had he been able to truly feel John's presence, he might have known that someone at least protested against his fear, and that in the hour of death he was not alone.

It is indeed possible for human beings to be faithful in death, to express a solidarity based not just on a return to everyday life, but also on a participation in the death experience—an experience which belongs in the center of the human heart.

“I will be waiting for you,” means much more than, “If you make it through the operation I will be here with you again.” There will be no “ifs.” “I will wait for you” goes beyond death and is the deepest expression of the fact that faith and hope may pass, but love will remain forever. “I will wait for you” is an expression of solidarity that breaks through the chains of death.

At that moment John is no longer a chaplain trying to do a good piece of counseling and Mr. Harrison is no longer a

farm worker doubting he will make it through the operation. Rather they are two human beings who reawaken in each other the deepest human intuition—that life is eternal and cannot be made futile by a biological process.

Each of us can lead another to tomorrow even when tomorrow is the day of the other's death, because we can wait for the other on both sides. But would it have been so meaningful for John to have led Mr. Harrison back to his life if this was just another delay for a man on death row?

Humans protest against death, for we are not content with a mere postponement of the execution. And it is this protest that might have mobilized in Mr. Harrison both the powers of recovery and the ability to break through the wall of his fear, making his death an entry into a life where he was awaited. So perhaps John might indeed have led Mr. Harrison to tomorrow by making himself present to him and by waiting for him in life and in death.

Indeed, it is exactly the willingness of John to enter with Mr. Harrison into his paralyzing condition that would have enabled him to be a guide or leader in the best sense. Only by this personal participation could he have freed Mr. Harrison of his paralysis and made him responsible again for his own history. In this sense he could indeed have saved Mr. Harrison's life, whether or not that entailed recovery. With John waiting, the surgeon would not have had to work on a passive victim, but with a person able to make decisions that count.

Mr. Harrison's condition is more than the condition of one particular person in one particular hospital. It is a reflection of the condition of all. The leadership potential is not just a possibility to be actualized by well-trained theo-

logians; it is the responsibility of every Christian. Therefore let us now finally discuss the main principles of Christian leadership that become apparent in this encounter.

### III. PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

How could we speak about Christian leadership without mentioning the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? The only answer is: Jesus has been here from the first page of this chapter.

The understanding of Mr. Harrison's condition and the search for a creative response were based on God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This revelation shows in the paralyzing condition of Mr. Harrison, the condition of all human beings. It also reveals to us the possibility of following Christ in faithful waiting for another beyond the boundaries that separate life from death.

Therefore we can discover and rediscover in the encounter between Mr. Harrison and John the basic principles of Christian leadership: first, personal concern, which asks people to give their lives for others; second, a deep-rooted faith in the value and meaning of life, even when the days look dark; and third, an out-going hope that always looks for tomorrow, even beyond the moment of death. And all these principles are based on the one and only conviction that, since God has become human, it is human beings who have the power to lead their fellows to freedom.

Let us now pay special attention to these three principles, which we derived from John's visit to Mr. Harrison.

**1. Personal concern**

If there is any posture that disturbs a suffering man or woman, it is aloofness. The tragedy of Christian ministry is that many who are in great need, many who seek an attentive ear, a word of support, a forgiving embrace, a firm hand, a tender smile, or even a stuttering confession of inability to do more, often find their ministers distant people who do not want to burn their fingers.

Such ministers are unwilling or unable to express their feelings of affection, anger, hostility, or sympathy. It is a paradox indeed that those who want to be for "everyone" often find themselves unable to be close to anyone. When everybody becomes my "neighbor," it is worth wondering whether anybody can really become my "proximus," that is, the one who is most close to me.

After so much stress has been laid on the necessity of leaders preventing their own personal feelings and attitudes from interfering in a helping relationship, it seems necessary to re-establish the basic principle that none of us can help anyone without becoming involved, without entering with our whole person into the painful situation, without taking the risk of becoming hurt, wounded, or even destroyed in the process.

The beginning and the end of all Christian leadership is to give your life for others. Thinking about martyrdom can be an escape unless we realize that real martyrdom means a witness that starts with the willingness to cry with those who cry, laugh with those who laugh, and to make one's own painful and joyful experiences available as sources of clarification and understanding.

Who can save a child from a burning house without taking the risk of being hurt by the flames? Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without taking the risk of experiencing similar pains in their own heart and even losing their precious peace of mind? In short, "Who can take away suffering without entering it?"

It is an illusion to think that a person can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there. Our lives are filled with examples telling us that leadership requires understanding, and understanding requires sharing. So long as we define leadership in terms of preventing or establishing precedents, or in terms of being responsible for some kind of abstract "general good," we have forgotten that no God can save us except a suffering God, and that no one can lead others except the one who is crushed by their sins.

Personal concern means making Mr. Harrison the only one who counts, the one for whom I am willing to forget my many other obligations, my scheduled appointments and long-prepared meetings, not because they are not important but because they lose their urgency in the face of Mr. Harrison's agony. Personal concern makes it possible to experience that going after the "lost sheep" is really a service to all those who are alone.

Many will put their trust in someone who went all the way out of concern for just one of them. The remark, "You really cared for us," is often illustrated by stories demonstrating that forgetting the many for the sake of the one is a sign of true leadership.

It is not just curiosity that makes people listen to preachers when they speak directly to a man and a woman whose marriage they are blessing, or to the children of one they

are burying in the ground. People listen in the deep-seated hope that personal concern might give preachers words that carry beyond the ears of those whose joy or suffering they share. Few listen to a sermon that is intended to be applicable to everyone, but most pay careful attention to words born out of concern for only a few.

All this suggests that when one has the courage to enter where life is experienced as most unique and most private, one touches the soul of the community. Those who have spent many hours trying to understand, feel, and clarify the alienation and confusion of one of their fellow human beings might very well be the best equipped to speak to the needs of the many, because all of us are one at the well-spring of pain and joy.

This is what Carl Rogers pointed out when he wrote: “. . . I have—found that the very feeling which has seemed to me most private, most personal and hence most incomprehensible by others, has turned out to be an expression for which there is a resonance in many other people. It has led me to believe that what is most personal and unique in each one of us is probably the very element which would, if it were shared or expressed, speak most deeply to others. This has helped me to understand artists and poets who have dared to express the unique in themselves.”

It does indeed seem that the Christian leader is, first of all, the artist who can bind together many people by the courageous act of giving expression to his or her own most personal concerns.

## 2. Faith in the value and meaning of life

Faith in the value and meaning of life, even in the face of despair and death, is the second principle of Christian leadership. This seems so obvious that it is often taken for granted and overlooked.

John's visit to Mr. Harrison needed personal concern, but that concern could only be sustained by a strong faith in the value and meaning of Mr. Harrison's life. And such faith is shaped by the visit itself.

Christian leadership is a dead-end street when nothing new is expected, when everything sounds familiar, and when ministry has regressed to the level of routine. Many have walked into that dead-end street and found themselves imprisoned in a life where all the words were already spoken, all the events had already taken place, and all the people had already been met.

But for a person with a deep-rooted faith in the value and meaning of life, every experience holds a new promise, every encounter carries a new insight, and every event brings a new message. But these promises, insights, and messages have to be discovered and made visible.

Christian leaders are not leaders because they announce a new idea and try to convince others of its worth. They are leaders because they face the world with eyes full of expectation, and with the expertise to take away the veil that covers its hidden potential.

Christian leadership is called ministry precisely to express that in the service of others new life can be brought about. It is this service that gives eyes to see the flower breaking through the cracks in the street, ears to hear

a word of forgiveness muted by hatred and hostility, and hands to feel new life under the cover of death and destruction.

Mr. Harrison was not just a bitter and hostile man, resistant to pastoral help. For a real minister he incarnates the truth that it belongs to the dignity of each one of us to die a human death, to surrender life instead of allowing it to be taken away from us in a state of unconsciousness. Underneath Mr. Harrison's coarse and bitter remarks, Christians hear a cry for help in facing what is hidden behind our imminent death, and above all, the cry for someone who will be with us in life and in death.

The encounter between these two men in a crisis situation therefore is not an accidental event but a direct appeal to both of them to discover the basic search of the human heart. But this appeal can only be heard by those who have a deep-rooted faith in the value and meaning of life, by those who know that life is not a static given but a mystery that reveals itself in the ongoing encounter between humanity and our world.

### 3. Hope

While personal concern is sustained by a continuously growing faith in the value and meaning of life, the deepest motivation for leading our fellow human beings to the future is hope. For hope makes it possible to look beyond the fulfillment of urgent wishes and pressing desires and offers a vision beyond human suffering and even beyond death.

Christian leaders are people of hope whose strength, in the final analysis, is based neither on self-confidence derived from their own personalities, nor on specific expecta-

tions for the future, but on a promise given to each one of us. This promise not only made Abraham travel to unknown territory; it not only inspired Moses to lead his people out of slavery; it is also the guiding motive for any Christian who keeps pointing to new life even in the face of corruption and death.

Without hope, we will never be able to see value and meaning in the encounter with a decaying human being and become personally concerned. This hope stretches far beyond the limitations of one's own psychological strength, for it is anchored not just in the soul of an individual, but in God's self-disclosure in history. Leadership therefore is not called Christian because it is permeated with optimism against all the odds of life, but because it is grounded in the historic Christ-event, which is understood as a definitive breach in the deterministic chain of human trial and error, and as a dramatic affirmation that there is light on the other side of darkness.

Every attempt to attach this hope to visible symptoms in our surroundings becomes a temptation when it prevents us from the realization that promises, not concrete successes, are the basis of Christian leadership. Many ministers, priests, and Christian laity have become disillusioned, bitter, and even hostile when years of hard work bear no fruit, when little change is accomplished. Building a vocation on the expectations of concrete results, however conceived, is like building a house on sand instead of on solid rock, and even takes away the ability to accept successes as free gifts.

Hope prevents us from clinging to what we have and frees us to move away from the safe place and enter unknown and fearful territory. This might sound romantic,

but when we enter with our fellow human beings into the fear of death and are able to wait for that person right there, "leaving the safe place" might turn out to be a very difficult act of leadership.

In fact, it is an act of discipleship in which we follow the hard road of Christ, who entered death with nothing but bare hope.

### *Conclusion*

Thus, waiting for tomorrow, as an act of Christian leadership, asks for personal concern, a deep faith in the value and meaning of life, and a strong hope that breaks through the boundaries of death. In this analysis it has become clear that Christian leadership is accomplished only through service.

This service requires the willingness to enter into a situation complete with all the vulnerabilities one human being has to share with another. This is a painful and self-denying experience, but it is an experience that can indeed lead each of us out of our prisons of confusion and fear.

Indeed, the paradox of Christian leadership is that the way out is also the way in, that only by entering into communion with human suffering can relief be found. As John was invited to enter into Mr. Harrison's agony and wait for him there, all Christians are constantly invited to overcome their neighbors' fear by entering into it with them, and to find, in the fellowship of suffering, the way to freedom.



CHAPTER IV

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Ministry by a  
Lonely Minister



## The Wounded Healer

### *Introduction*

In the middle of our convulsive world men and women raise their voices time and again to announce with incredible boldness that we are waiting for a Liberator. We are waiting, they announce, for a Messiah who will free us from hatred and oppression, from racism and war—a Messiah who will let peace and justice take their rightful place.

If the ministry is meant to hold the promise of this Messiah, then whatever we can learn of the Messiah's coming will give us a deeper understanding of what is called for in ministry today.

How does our Liberator come? I found an old legend in the Talmud which may suggest to us the beginning of an answer:

Rabbi Yoshua ben Levi came upon Elijah the prophet while he was standing at the entrance of Rabbi Simeron ben Yohai's cave . . . He asked Elijah, "When will the Messiah come?"

Elijah replied, "Go and ask him yourself."

"Where is he?"

"Sitting at the gates of the city."

“How shall I know him?”

“He is sitting among the poor covered with wounds. The others unbind all their wounds at the same time and then bind them up again. But he unbinds one at a time and binds it up again, saying to himself, ‘Perhaps I shall be needed: if so I must always be ready so as not to delay for a moment.’”

The Messiah, the story tells us, is sitting among the poor, binding his wounds only one at a time, always prepared for the moment when he might be needed. So it is too, with ministers. Since it is their task to make visible the first vestiges of liberation for others, they must bind their own wounds carefully, in anticipation of the moment when they will be needed.

They are each called to be the wounded healer, the ones who must not only look after their own wounds, but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others. They are both wounded ministers and healing ministers, two concepts I would like to explore in this last chapter.

## I. THE WOUNDED MINISTER

The Talmud story suggests that, because he binds his own wounds one at a time, the Messiah would not have to take time to prepare himself if asked to help someone else. He would be ready to help.

Jesus has given this story a new fullness by making his own broken body the way to health, to liberation and new life. Thus, like Jesus, those who proclaim liberation are called not only to care for their own wounds and the wounds

of others, but also to make their wounds into a major source of healing power.

But what are our wounds? They have been spoken about in many ways by many voices. Words such as “alienation,” “separation,” “isolation,” and “loneliness” have been used to name our wounded condition. Maybe the word “loneliness” best expresses our immediate experience and therefore most fittingly enables us to understand our brokenness.

The loneliness of ministers is especially painful, for over and above their experience as people in modern society, they feel an added loneliness, resulting from the changing meaning of the ministerial profession itself.

### **I. Personal loneliness**

We live in a society in which loneliness has become one of the most painful human wounds. The growing competition and rivalry that pervade our lives from birth have created in us an acute awareness of our isolation. This awareness has in turn left many with a heightened anxiety and an intense search for the experience of unity and community. It has also led people to ask anew how love, friendship, brotherhood, and sisterhood can free us from isolation and offer us a sense of intimacy and belonging.

All around us we see the many ways by which the people of the Western world are trying to escape this loneliness. Psychotherapy, the many institutes that offer group experiences with verbal and nonverbal communication techniques, summer courses and conferences supported by scholars, trainers, and “huggers” where people can share common problems, and the many experiments that seek to

create intimate liturgies where peace is not only announced but also felt—these increasingly popular phenomena are all signs of a painful attempt to break through the immobilizing wall of loneliness.

But the more I think about loneliness, the more I think that the wound of loneliness is actually like the Grand Canyon—a deep incision in the surface of our existence that has become an inexhaustible source of beauty and self-understanding. Therefore I would like to voice loudly and clearly what might seem unpopular and maybe even disturbing: The Christian way of life does not take away our loneliness; it protects and cherishes it as a precious gift.

Sometimes it seems as if we do everything possible to avoid the painful confrontation with our basic human loneliness and allow ourselves to be trapped by false gods promising immediate satisfaction and quick relief. But perhaps the painful awareness of loneliness is an invitation to transcend our limitations and look beyond the boundaries of our existence. The awareness of loneliness might be a gift we must protect and guard, because our loneliness reveals to us an inner emptiness that can be destructive when misunderstood, but filled with promise for those who can tolerate its sweet pain.

When we are impatient, when we want to give up our loneliness and try to overcome the separation and incompleteness we feel, we easily relate to our human world with devastating expectations. We ignore what we already know with a deep-seated, intuitive knowledge—that no love or friendship, no intimate embrace or tender kiss, no community, commune, or collective, no man or woman, will ever

be able to satisfy our desire to be released from our lonely condition.

This truth is so disconcerting and painful that we are more prone to play games with our fantasies than to face the truth of our existence. Thus we keep hoping that one day we will find the man who really understands our experiences, the woman who will bring peace to our restless life, the job where we can fulfill our potentials, the book that will explain everything, and the place where we can feel at home.

Such false hope leads us to make exhausting demands and prepares us for bitterness and dangerous hostility when we start discovering that nobody, and nothing, can live up to our absolutistic expectations. Many marriages are ruined because neither partner was able to fulfill the often hidden hope that the other would take his or her loneliness away. Many celibates live with the naïve dream that in the intimacy of marriage their loneliness will be taken away.

And when ministers live with these false expectations and illusions they prevent themselves from claiming their own loneliness as a source of human understanding, and are thus unable to offer any real service to the many who do not understand their own suffering.

## **2. Professional loneliness**

The wound of loneliness in the life of ministers hurts all the more, since they not only share in the human condition of isolation, but also find that their professional impact on others is diminishing. Ministers are called to speak to the ultimate concerns of life: birth and death, union and sep-

aration, love and hate. They have an urgent desire to give meaning to people's lives. But they find themselves standing on the edges of events and only reluctantly admitted to the spot where the decisions are made.

In hospitals, where many utter their first cry as well as their last words, ministers are often more tolerated than required. In prisons, where the human desire for liberation and freedom is most painfully felt, a chaplain feels like a guilty bystander whose words hardly move the wardens. In the cities, where children play between buildings and old people die isolated and forgotten, the protests of priests are hardly taken seriously and their demands hang in the air like rhetorical questions. Many churches decorated with words announcing salvation and new life are often little more than parlors for those who feel quite comfortable in the old life, and who are not likely to let the minister's words change their stone hearts into furnaces where swords can be cast into plowshares, and spears into pruning hooks.

The painful irony is that ministers, who want to touch the center of people's lives, find themselves on the periphery, often pleading in vain for admission. They never seem to be where the action is, where the plans are made and the strategies discussed. They always seem to arrive at the wrong places at the wrong times with the wrong people, outside the walls of the city when the feast is over.

A few years ago, when I was chaplain of the Holland-America Line, I was standing on the bridge of a huge Dutch ocean liner that was trying to find its way through a thick fog into the port of Rotterdam. The fog was so thick, in fact, that the steersman could not even see the bow of the ship.

The captain, carefully listening to a radar station opera-

tor who was explaining his position between other ships, walked nervously up and down the bridge and shouted his orders to the steersman. When he suddenly stumbled over me, he blurted out: "God damn it, Father, get out of my way." But when I was ready to run away, filled with feelings of incompetence and guilt, he came back and said, "Why don't you just stay around. This might be the only time I really need you."

There was a time, not too long ago, when we felt like captains running our own ships with a great sense of power and self-confidence. Now we are standing in the way. That is our lonely position: We are powerless, on the side, liked maybe by a few crew members who swab the decks and goof off to drink a beer with us, but not taken very seriously when the weather is fine.

The wound of our loneliness is indeed deep. Maybe we had forgotten it, since there were so many distractions. But our failure to change the world with our good intentions and sincere actions and our undesired displacement to the edges of life have made us aware that the wound is still there.

So we see how loneliness is the ministers' wound, not only because we share in the human condition, but also because of the unique predicament of our profession. It is this wound that we are called to bind with more care and attention than others usually do. For a deep understanding of our own pain makes it possible for us to convert our weakness into strength and to offer our own experiences as a source of healing to those who are often lost in the darkness of their own misunderstood sufferings.

This is a very hard call, because for ministers who are committed to forming a community of faith, loneliness is a

very painful wound that is easily subject to denial and neglect. But once the pain is accepted and understood, denial is no longer necessary, and ministry can become a healing service.

## II. THE HEALING MINISTER

How can wounds become a source of healing? This is a question that requires careful consideration. For when we want to put our wounded selves in the service of others, we must consider the relationship between our professional and personal lives.

On the one hand, ministers cannot keep their own experience of life hidden from those they want to help. Nor should they want to keep it hidden. While doctors can still be good doctors even when their private lives are severely disrupted, ministers cannot offer service without a constant and vital acknowledgment of their own experience.

On the other hand, it would be very easy to misuse the concept of the wounded healer by defending a form of spiritual exhibitionism. Ministers who talk in the pulpit about their own personal problems are of no help to their congregation, for suffering people are not helped by those who tell them that they have the same problems. Remarks such as, "Don't worry because I suffer from the same depression, confusion, and anxiety as you do," help no one. This spiritual exhibitionism adds little faith to little faith and creates narrow-mindedness instead of new perspectives. Open wounds stink and do not heal.

Making one's own wounds a source of healing, therefore, does not call for a sharing of superficial personal pains, but for a constant willingness to see one's own pain and suffer-

ing as rising from the depth of the human condition that we all share.

To some, the concept of the wounded healer might sound morbid and unhealthy. They might feel that the ideal of self-fulfillment is replaced by an ideal of self-castigation, and that pain is romanticized instead of criticized. I would like to show how the idea of the wounded healer does not contradict the concept of self-realization, or self-fulfillment, but deepens and broadens it.

How does healing take place? Many words, such as "care" and "compassion," "understanding" and "forgiveness," "fellowship" and "community," have been used for the healing task of the Christian minister. I like to use the word "hospitality," not only because it has such deep roots in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but also, and primarily, because it gives us more insight into the nature of response to the human condition of loneliness.

Hospitality is the virtue that allows us to break through the narrowness of our own fears and to open our houses to the stranger, with the intuition that salvation comes to us in the form of a tired traveler. Hospitality makes anxious disciples into powerful witnesses, makes suspicious owners into generous givers, and makes closed-minded sectarians into interested recipients of new ideas and insights.

But it has become very difficult for us today to fully understand the implications of hospitality. Like the Semitic nomads, we live in a desert with many lonely travelers who are looking for a moment of peace, for a fresh drink, and for a sign of encouragement so that they can continue their mysterious search for freedom.

What does hospitality as a healing power require? It re-

quires first of all that hosts feel at home in their own house, and second, that they create a free and fearless place for the unexpected visitor. Therefore, hospitality embraces two concepts: concentration and community.

### **1. Hospitality and concentration**

Hospitality is the ability to pay attention to the guest. This is very difficult, since we are preoccupied with our own needs, worries, and tensions, which prevent us from taking distance from ourselves in order to pay attention to others.

Not long ago I met a parish priest. After describing his hectic daily schedule—religious services, classroom teaching, luncheon and dinner engagements, and organizational meetings—he said apologetically, “Yes . . . but there are so many problems. . . .” When I asked, “Whose problems?” he was silent for a few minutes, and then more or less reluctantly said, “I guess—my own.” Indeed, his incredible activities seemed in large part motivated by fear of what he would discover when he came to a standstill. He actually said: “I guess I am busy in order to avoid a painful self-concentration.”

So we find it extremely hard to pay attention because of our intentions. As soon as our intentions take over, the question no longer is, “Who is he?” but “What can I get from him?”—and then we no longer listen to what he is saying but to what we can do with what he is saying. Then the fulfillment of our own unrecognized need for sympathy, friendship, popularity, success, understanding, money, or a career becomes our concern, and instead of paying attention to others we impose ourselves upon them with intrusive curiosity.

Those who want to pay attention without intention have to be at home in their own house—that is, they have to discover the center of their lives in their own hearts. Concentration, which leads to meditation and contemplation, is therefore the necessary precondition for true hospitality. When our souls are restless, when we are driven by thousands of different and often conflicting stimuli, when we are always “over there” between people, ideas, and the worries of this world, how can we possibly create the room and space where others can enter freely without feeling themselves unlawful intruders?

Paradoxically, by withdrawing into ourselves, not out of self-pity but out of humility, we create the space for others to be themselves and to come to us on their own terms. James Hillman, director of studies at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, wrote this about counseling:

For the other person to open and talk requires a withdrawal of the counselor. I must withdraw to make room for the other . . . This withdrawal, rather than going-out-to-meet the other, is an intense act of concentration, a model for which can be found in the Jewish mystical doctrine of Tsimtsum. God as omnipresent and omnipotent was everywhere. He filled the universe with his Being. How then could the creation come about? . . . God had to create by withdrawal; He created the not-Him, the other, by self-concentration . . . On the human level, withdrawal of myself aids the other to come into being.

But human withdrawal is a very painful and lonely process, because it forces us to directly face our own condition

in all its misery as well as all its beauty. But when we are not afraid to journey into our own center, and to concentrate on the stirrings of our own souls, we come to know that being alive means being loved. This experience tells us that we can only love because we are born out of love, that we can only give because our life is a gift, and that we can only make others free because we are set free by the One whose heart is greater than our own.

And when we have finally found the anchor place for our lives within our own center we can be free to let others enter into the space created for them, and allow them to dance their own dance, sing their own song, and speak their own language without fear. Then our presence is no longer threatening and demanding, but inviting and liberating.

## **2. Hospitality and community**

Ministers who have come to terms with their own loneliness and are at home in their own houses are hosts who offer hospitality to their guests. They give them a friendly space, where they may feel free to come and go, to be close and be distant, to rest and to play, to talk and to be silent, to eat and to fast. The paradox indeed is that hospitality asks for the creation of an empty space, where the guests can find their own souls.

Why is this a healing ministry? It is healing because it takes away the false illusion that wholeness can be given by one to another. It is healing because it does not take away the loneliness and the pain of others, but invites them to recognize their loneliness on a level where it can be shared. Many people in this life suffer because they are anxiously searching for the man or woman, the event or encounter,

which will take their loneliness away. But when they enter a house with real hospitality they soon see that their own wounds must be understood, not as sources of despair and bitterness, but as signs that they have to travel on in obedience to the calling sounds of those wounds.

From this we get an idea of the kind of help a minister may offer. Ministers are not doctors whose primary task is to take away pain. Rather, they deepen the pain to a level where it can be shared. When people come with their loneliness to ministers, they can only expect that their loneliness will be understood and felt, so that they no longer have to run away from it but can accept it as an expression of the basic human condition. When a woman suffers the loss of her child, ministers are not called upon to comfort her by telling her that she still has two beautiful healthy children at home; they are challenged to help her realize that the death of her child reveals her own mortal condition, the same human condition that the minister and others share with her.

Perhaps the main task of the minister is to prevent people from suffering for the wrong reasons. Many people suffer because of the false supposition on which they have based their lives. That supposition is that there should be no fear or loneliness, no confusion or doubt. But these sufferings can only be dealt with creatively when they are understood as wounds integral to our human condition.

Therefore ministry is a very confrontational service. It does not allow people to live with illusions of immortality and wholeness. It keeps reminding others that they are mortal and broken, but also that with the recognition of this condition, liberation starts.

No minister can save anyone. We can only offer ourselves as guides to fearful people. Yet, paradoxically, it is precisely in this guidance that the first signs of hope become visible. This is so because a shared pain is no longer paralyzing, but mobilizing, when it is understood to be a way to liberation. When we become aware that we do not have to escape our pains, but that we can mobilize them into a common search for life, those very pains are transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope.

Through this common search, hospitality becomes community. Hospitality becomes community as it creates a unity based upon the shared confession of our basic brokenness and upon a shared hope. This hope in turn leads us far beyond the boundaries of human togetherness to the One who calls all people away from the land of slavery to the land of freedom. It belongs to the central insight of the Judaeo-Christian tradition—that it is the call of God that forms the people of God.

A Christian community is therefore a healing community, not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision. Mutual confession then becomes a mutual deepening of hope, and shared weakness becomes a reminder to one and all of the coming strength.

When loneliness is among the chief wounds of the minister, hospitality can convert that wound into a source of healing. Concentration prevents ministers from burdening others with their pain and allows them to accept their wounds as helpful teachers of their own and their neighbor's condition. Community arises where the sharing of

pain takes place, not as a stifling form of self-complaint, but as a recognition of God's saving promises.

### *Conclusion*

I started this chapter with the story of Rabbi YOSHUA ben LEVI, who asked ELIJAH, "When will the Messiah come?" There is an important conclusion to this story. When ELIJAH had explained to him how he could find the Messiah sitting among the poor at the gates of the city, Rabbi YOSHUA ben LEVI went to the Messiah and said to him:

"Peace unto you, my master and teacher."

The Messiah answered, "Peace unto you, son of Levi."

He asked, "When is the master coming?"

"Today," he answered.

Rabbi YOSHUA returned to ELIJAH, who asked,

"What did he tell you?"

"He indeed has deceived me, for he said 'Today I am coming' and he has not come."

ELIJAH said, "This is what he told you: 'Today if you would listen to His voice.'"

Even when we know that we are called to be wounded healers, it is still very difficult to acknowledge that healing has to take place today, because we are living at a time when our wounds have become all too visible. Our loneliness and isolation have become so much a part of our daily experience that we cry out for a Liberator who will take us away from our misery and bring us justice and peace.

To announce, however, that the Liberator is sitting among the poor and that the wounds are signs of hope and that today is the day of liberation, is a step very few can take. But this is exactly the announcement of the wounded healer: “The master is coming—not tomorrow, but today, not next year, but this year, not after all our misery is passed, but in the middle of it, not in another place but right here, where we are standing.”

And with a challenging confrontation he says:

O that today you would listen to his voice!  
Harden not your heart as at Meribah,  
as on that day at Massah in the desert  
when they tried me, though they saw  
my work. (Psalm 95:7)

If indeed we listen to the voice and believe that ministry is a sign of hope because it makes visible the first rays of light of the coming Messiah, we can make ourselves and others understand that we already carry in us the source of our own search. Thus ministry can indeed be a witness to the living truth that the wound, which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated a new creation.

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# Conclusion



## A Forward Thrust

In the last chapter of this book I described hospitality as a central attitude of ministers who want to make their own wounded condition available to others as a source of healing. Hopefully, the implications of this attitude have become visible through the different guests for whom ministers are called to be receptive hosts.

Those searching for new modes of immortality in the middle of a fragmented and dislocated existence; the inward, fatherless, convulsive generations; and Mr. Harrison, the crippled farm worker, lost in the impersonal milieu of the hospital, afraid to die and afraid to live—they are all asking for space in which they can move without fear and enjoy the freedom to discover new directions. When imitating Christ does not mean living a life like Christ, but rather living your own life as authentically as Christ lived his, then there are many ways in which someone can be a Christian.

Ministers are those who can make their search for authenticity possible, not by standing on the side as neutral screens or impartial observers, but as articulate witnesses of Christ, who put their own search at the disposal of others. This hospitality requires that ministers not only know where they stand and whom they stand for, it also requires that they allow others to enter into their lives, to come close

to them, and to ask how their lives are connected with one another.

Nobody can predict where this will lead us, because every time hosts allow themselves to be influenced by their guests they take the risk of not knowing how their lives will be affected. But it is exactly in common searches and shared risks that new ideas are born, that new visions reveal themselves, and that new roads become visible.

We do not know where we will be two, ten, or twenty years from now. What we can know, however, is that humans suffer and that a sharing of this suffering can help us move forward. Ministers are called to make this forward thrust credible to their many guests, so that they do not stay still, but have a growing desire to move on in the conviction that the full liberation of humankind is still to come.

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

- 3 "A door opens to me . . ."—Antonio Porchia, *Voices*, Chicago, 1969.

### CHAPTER I

- 9-10 "Four royal sons were questioning . . ."—*Tales of Ancient India*, translated from the Sanskrit by J. A. B. van Buitenen (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), pp. 50-51.
- 12 "[A] break in the sense of connection . . ."—Robert Jay Lifton, *History and Human Survival* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 318.
- 14 We have shifted from the fixed . . . —Robert Jay Lifton, *Boundaries* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 98.
- 15 "The extraordinary flow of post-modern cultural influences . . ." —Lifton, *History and Human Survival*, p. 318.
- 18 This sense of immortality "represents . . ." —Lifton, *Boundaries*, p. 22.
- 20 "experiential transcendence" —Lifton, *History and Human Survival*, p. 330.
- 20 The mystical way is the inner way . . . —cf. Carl Rogers *On Becoming a Person* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 26.

## CHAPTER II

- 30 **David Riesman's "lonely crowd"** —David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).
- 33 **"The prospects are both ominous and promising . . ."** —Jeffrey K. Hadden, *Psychology Today*, October 1969.
- 35 **"The wall on which the prophets wrote . . ."** —Portions of the lyrics from "Epitaph" by King Crimson (Words and music by Robert Fripp, Ian McDonald, Greg Lake, Michael Giles, and Peter Sinfield).
- 35-36 **"I'm on the outside looking inside . . ."** —Portions of the lyrics from "I Talk to the Wind" by King Crimson (Words and music by Ian McDonald and Peter Sinfield).
- 36 **"Confusion will be my epitaph . . ."** —Portions of the lyrics from "Epitaph" by King Crimson (Words and music by Robert Fripp, Ian McDonald, Greg Lake, Michael Giles, and Peter Sinfield).
- 36 **"As adult authority disintegrates . . ."** —David Riesman, *Psychology Today*, October 1969.
- 40 **" . . . adults fear to be thought old-fashioned . . ."** —David Riesman, *Psychology Today*, October 1969.

## CHAPTER III

- 71 **Alexander Berkman** —Alexander Berkman, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (New York, 1970).
- 71 **George Jackson** —George Jackson, *Soledad Brother, The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (New York, 1970).
- 77 **After so much stress has been laid on the necessity of leaders . . .** — See the excellent study by Seward Hiltner, *Counselor on Counseling* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 1950).

- 79 “. . . I have—found that the very feeling . . .” —Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 26.

CHAPTER IV

- 87–88 “Rabbi Yoshua ben Levi . . .” —Taken from the *Tractate Sanhedrin*.
- 96 So we find it extremely hard to pay attention . . . —See James Hillman, *Insearch* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967), p. 18.
- 97 “For the other person to open and talk . . .” —James Hillman, *Insearch*, p. 31.
- 101 “Peace unto you, my master and teacher . . .” —Taken from *Tractate Sanhedrin*, Folio 98a.