



New Life through Caring Relationships in the Church

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I. THE EGO AND THE SHADOW

The human being is a troubled creature. As such he is the object of many analyses and therapeutic theories. Some of these focus on his relationship to his environment—his interpersonal transactions, social systems, and environmental pressures and attractions. Others focus on his intra-psychic division—what St. James calls our *doublemindedness*. Of these latter, Sigmund Freud in his division of id, ego, and super-ego, C. G. Jung in ego and shadow, Paul Tournier in person and personage, and Eric Berne in parent, adult, and child, are prominent examples.

For our perception of the human conflict and for our understanding of the ministry to troubled persons I shall limit myself to the Jungian description as this is interpreted by the Christian analyst, Fritz Kunkel. Kunkel sees the human being as one whose conflict is due to his being off-centered. The *real self* is in relationship to God, and is directly under God. If God were compared to the sun, the real self would cast no shadow. The off-centered self is the *ego*—a distorted “I,” in differentiation from the Freudian usage of ego which is an integrating “I.” The distorted “I” is ego-centric, egotistic. The ego, being off-center, casts a shadow. The *shadow* is the opposite of whatever the ego-image is, and therefore is a constant threat to the ego whose ego-image is its basis for a pseudo-security. If the ego-image is that of masculine toughness, the shadow is that one is fearful and weak. If the ego-image is that one is genuine and sincere, the shadow is that one is hypocritical and devious. A common ego-image, in spite of what our “heads” tell us, is that we are immortal, and the shadow is a reminder of our inevitable death.

Since the shadow is a threat to the ego-image, the ego needs to look away from it—to repress and deny it. Yet this self-deception is never fully effective. The shadow, though kept from our observation, lingers always at the edge of awareness where it is a constant source of anxiety and conflict. What we fear most in our anxiety is more anxiety. Therefore, we resist any influence that would rouse the subliminal awareness of the shadow into full consciousness, and we tend to attack those who push us into this awareness.

I have a friend who did this to an austere and humorless house guest who gave every impression of being purely cerebral, perhaps even asexual. He placed on the nightstand by his guest's bed two books: one a devotional book of the guest's own preference and the other a book with an erotic title and the picture of an Egyptian belly dancer on its cover. Only it wasn't a book; it was a box made to look like a book, and opening it released a mechanism that made a loud noise. As you by now have surmised, he wasn't in the room a minute before a loud *bang*

went sounding through the house. The next morning the guest was sullenly indignant.

Our fear is basically a fear of ourselves. We are afraid that if we face our shadow, we will become *unglued*—unmanageable—that all sorts of chaos will ensue and we will go out of control. Yet life conspires against our ability to escape and evade. Suffering, failure, defeat, illness, and loss may bring about this feared confrontation with our shadows. In these crisis times there is a closing in of horizons, of options, as our defenses and rationalizations collapse before our attempt to retreat.

Jack, for example, saw himself as one who loved Jeanie so much that he would do anything for her. When I suggested that he might ease off a bit and do that for her, he said he loved her too much to stay away from her. I pointed out that he might well hold back somewhat for her sake since she was not well and needed time for herself. He grimaced in hostile anguish. “What about me!” he cried out, “Why doesn’t anyone ever think about me!” The shadow of his selfishness had erupted.

The words that the ego fears the most, says Kunkel, are the words “too late.” The ego in its conflict with the shadow has its own prescience of doom. As a psychologist friend of mine puts it, “We tend to read foreverness into our pains and frustrations.” So far as the ego is concerned, there is no hope once the truth about the shadow is known. Since the alternative is evasion or denial, however, the confrontation of ego and shadow, regardless or even because of the pain, is the way to the real self. The first step toward integration is in facing the pain. As Kunkel puts it, “When he went down and hit the rock bottom of life, he found love.”¹

The ego’s conception of love is as distorted as the ego is a distortion of the self. It only knows a conditional love. When it collapses before the onslaught of the shadow, all that remains for it is despair. Yet it is through despair that a new reality may break through. When ego and shadow meet, they tend to cancel each other out so that the real self may be restored through God’s revelation of unconditional love. Now instead of reading foreverness into the awfulness of the moment, we can read forgiveness into it. The real self needs no ego-image to survive; rather it lives by being in relationship, by being directly under rather than to the side of God, by being a recipient of unconditional love.

Christianly speaking, we can paraphrase Kierkegaard at this point by saying that being restored to the real self means that we can stand transparent before the Creator and face who we are and will to be who we are. The end of our doublemindedness comes not through any achievement of our own, but rather through a reconciliation effected for us by God in Christ and mediated to

¹Fritz Kunkel, *In Search of Maturity* (New York: Scribner’s, 1951) 216.

us by his Holy Spirit. As Christ died and rose again to accomplish this reconciliation, so also reception of it through the Spirit means the death of the old in our person and the resurrection to the new—to new life. The critical question is whether the old man—the ego—pride—is really dead or merely wounded. A wounded ego, like a wounded animal, can be dangerous as it desperately attempts to survive. There is no openness for change, no resurrection to the new, until the old dies—until the ego’s need to believe in the illusion of its sufficiency is surrendered to the love that receives us in our inadequacy and unworthiness.

Not only the shadow is frightening; so also is entering into whatever is new—including

especially the new life. The old brings with it a pseudo-security. Karen Horney calls it “the security of the familiar.” We may not like the old; we may even detest it, but it is familiar and this reduces our anxiety. On the other hand, whatever is new has no history for us—there are no marks that tell us comfortingly that we have been this way before—and this heightens our anxieties.

“Taking anew step, uttering a new word, is what people fear most,” wrote Dostoevski. Yet it is precisely the opposite that they should fear. Kierkegaard would say that we shudder at that which is not dreadful while being ignorant of what truly is dreadful.² If God in Christ is making all things new, how can we receive the new when we fear to leave the old? It is the function of the Holy Spirit to overcome this resistance. He is the One who facilitates this transition from the old to the new in our lives—again and again and again. Our concern in this article is the role of pastoral care in this function, or specifically, of caring relationships in the name of Christ, whether this ministry be carried on by clergy or lay persons.

II. MINISTRY CENTERS IN COMPASSION

Ministry centers in compassion—suffering with the sufferings of others. The model, of course, is the compassion of Christ. “When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her” (Luke 7:13). Repeatedly the Synoptics describe Jesus’ motivation for his ministry in this manner, using the verb *splangnidzomai*—to be moved in one’s intestines. The intestines were considered to be the seat of compassion and affection. Interestingly enough we still use this visceral symbol, only in the vernacular, “guts.” We might best preserve the *physicalness* of compassion by updating the King James’ use of the word *bowels* by saying, “When the Lord saw her, he hurt in his guts for her.”

It is significant that after all of his clinical testing of Client-Centered Therapy, Carl Rogers concluded that attitudes rather than techniques were fundamental to healing. One of the attitudes or personal dispositions necessary in a counselor for a healing relationship, says Rogers, is in essence compassion. Rogers calls it by the more clinical term, *empathy*—suffering or feeling in or into—“an empathic identification with the inner world of the counselee *as if* it were one’s own.” The qualifying words, *as if*, are important, since it is not one’s own.

²Soren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death* (Garden City: Doubleday 1954) 145.

The other two qualities of the counselor that facilitate a therapeutic relationship, according to Rogers, are congruence and a positive regard for the counselee without reservations.

Some fear to have compassion because they fear their own impotence. If one can only feel with the other in his or her pain, of what value is that? It is frustrating not to be able to change the lamentable situation, to right the wrong, to take away the pain, or bring back the dead. So out with compassion since it only leads me to despair. Not so! Compassion itself, while not *doing* something for the other, is *being* something to the other. Without it there is a barrier to relationship. Denis Goulet states the case clearly: “Emotions which are real for those who experience them are not real for those who merely observe them.”³ Compassion is a spiritual reaching out; it is being sensitive to the pain of the other. Paradoxically, as Henri Nouwen says, “the beginning of healing is in the solidarity with the pain.”⁴ Compassion builds the bridge from isolation to community.

But one can over-identify with the pains of another as well as under-identify. Perhaps we know of well meaning pastors who have become immobilized by the intensity of their empathy. Their empathy then overcomes their objectivity. This is why parents and other family members or even close friends may make poor counselors. They so over-identify with the inner world of their child, spouse, friend, that it becomes their own. The boundary between them fades until two need help instead of one.

Besides empathy the counselor brings to the counselee objectivity. When one is under stress one becomes overly subjective in one's perception of reality. One can't see the forest for the trees. He or she needs to share with someone who is able to see things more objectively. Therefore, the counselor is required to place one "foot" in the subjectivity of the counselee while keeping the other on the solid footing of objectivity. The counselor needs to identify—feel with—the counselee in his or her imbalance to establish the rapport that enables the counselee to identify with the counselor in his or her relatively more balanced position.

The purpose of this ministry of compassion is to enlighten the darkened consciousness of the sufferer. In one's unresolved conflicts and pains one can easily become discouraged, and where heretofore one may have seen several options in coping with problems, as discouragement takes over he or she may perceive only an unsatisfactory either-or, if even that. Dialoguing with another tends to halt this closing in of despair and futility—this specter of being imminently crushed and destroyed. Through the pastoral counselor hopefully the hidden God will be revealed to the counselee as he or she is assisted by the pastor to identify with Christ in His sufferings and with the God in Christ who cares for us and feels our pain. Where before there may have been only darkness for the despairer, there is now a light at the end of the tunnel. The pastoral relationship, grounded thus in a theology of the cross, brings with it the hope of Easter and the inspiration to affirm life rather than death.

³"The Authority of Suffering," *Sojourners* 6 (December, 1977) 8.

⁴Henry Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975) 43.

III: MINISTRY UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

This ministry of pastoral care and counseling is under the direction of the Holy Spirit—a structure built into the definition of "pastoral." The realization of this helps us in our caring relationships to respect the boundaries between ourselves and others as a result of respecting the boundary between ourselves and God. We are *under God*, and not *as God*. Elihu, Job's fourth counselor, noted this boundary when he said to Job, "I am before God as you are. I too was formed from a piece of clay" (Job 33:6). When the counselor is aware that both he or she and the counselee are together before God, he or she is moved to respect the freedom as well as the responsibility of the counselee.

There is a natural temptation for one in a position of authority to assume too much responsibility for the person to whom one is ministering. Consequently he or she may end up doing for others what one should be assisting them to do for themselves—such as making contacts or other arrangements for them or even making decisions for them. This constitutes an invasion of the other's boundaries—or space—even though the counselee invites such invasion. Dependent persons are often quite seductive in getting others to take over their responsibilities. This sort of dependency relationship works against the development of the counselee's own

priestly capacities under God. By the same token helpers who are adept at counseling techniques may use them ever so subtly as means for manipulation and control rather than for stimulating dialogue.

To guard against this invasion of boundaries, whether initiated by counselor or counselee, we ask in today's counseling jargon, "Who owns the problem?" The purpose of raising this question in any interpersonal transaction is to prevent the one who has the problem from either projecting it on to another or having it usurped by the other. St. Paul evidently shared this concern in regard to people overcome by their own weaknesses and faults. On the one hand he says to his readers concerning such, "Bear one another's burdens (*barē*) and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2); on the other hand he protects the boundaries of such caring by stating "each man will have to bear his own load (*phortion*)" (Gal 6:5). How can we bear the burden of those whose responsibility it is to bear their own? Obviously by providing them with the support they need to bear their burdens.

When we are conscious of the fact that our caring relationships are under the direction of the Holy Spirit we develop a lighter touch as well as a greater trust. The *kairos* moment—or moment of change—is in the hands of God rather than in the counselor's hands. Consequently we who minister need to accept the possibility that we may only sow the seed in any ministering situation. Another may water, and still another may reap. Without this trust, we may be driven to sow, water, and reap all in one encounter, failing to realize that it is God who gives the growth. Under such pressure to "succeed" the temptation to force a *kairos*—to invade the other's space—is intensified. Although an egocentric frame of mind may not prevent one from being the reaper, it may prevent one from being aware of the likelihood that others under the Spirit's direction may have done the sowing and the watering without ever witnessing the effectiveness of their caring.

When we who minister are conscious that we are under the Spirit's super-

vision we can reach out to the troubled even when we ourselves are troubled. Since we are accepted by God in our brokenness, we can be used by him also in our brokenness. Instead of taking comfort from the familiar claim that we have done or will do our best—who can possibly know this?—we can take comfort from the more realistic assurance that we live in the covenant of forgiveness. The Spirit can still be able even when we falter. Faith in the power beyond our own is not only vital to the perspective of the counselor, but also to that of the counselee, if either is to be open to receive.

IV. WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED

Obviously the one-to-one pastoral relationship is not simply two persons in dialogue. The counselor's awareness of being under God is related to Jesus' familiar words, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt 18:20). In one sense we can say that God is present in all caring relationships. In a *pastoral* relationship, however, his presence has a specific role, since the activity of prayer is intrinsic to its structure. While prayer as a pastoral activity may not occur in any particular pastoral relationship, the fact remains that were it used, its appropriateness with a pastoral function could be assumed. The only question would concern its appropriateness to the particular situation and the particular

moment. Prayer in this sense is not simply a traditional way of concluding a pastoral visit, but rather an activity that decisively influences the direction of the dialogue.

As a hospital chaplain I was made aware many times of this decisive influence of prayer in the direction of a pastoral visit, but the relationship with Mrs. W. stands out. At eighty-six years of age she had come to the hospital to receive two new hips. She had her heart set on being able once more to be physically active. Her son intercepted me on one of my visits to her and informed me that the physician had discovered a congestion in her abdomen which he thought might be cancerous and that her surgery for the new hips was at least temporarily and probably totally out of the question. I entered her room and expressed my regret over her disappointing news. She appeared more irritated than deflated. "I don't have cancer," she said, "and I told the surgeon so!"

When I prayed with her that day I carefully avoided any specific petitions, praying one of those generalized prayers that keeps one close to the trunk. When I finished she looked directly at me and said, "You did not pray for my new hips!" After a moment of mental reeling I said, "You're right, I didn't. Let's do it again." This time I prayed specifically for her new hips. She left the hospital the next day and slipped out of my mind as other patients preoccupied it, until I noticed her name three months later on the new patient list. "I'm back," she said as I entered her room. "I told you I didn't have cancer." In a few days she received the first of her new hips and shortly thereafter her second.

The awareness of God's presence in the pastoral relationship should counteract whatever tendencies are present to create a dependency relationship. Since both counselor and counselee are together before God, the counseling process is implicitly a catalyst for exercising the priesthood of the believer. Not all are tended toward dependency, however; some are inclined to the opposite direction, having a need to be independent. They may resist any help even

when they are hurting badly. To admit they need help is to be dependent, and this they find intolerable.

The resolution to this dilemma is neither in independence nor dependence but in interdependence. It is not just that I have need of you, but you also have need of me. While I may be hurting today and you are the one who is ministering to me, tomorrow you may be hurting and I will minister to you. Each of us needs not only to be a giver or a receiver but rather to be both. In this milieu of mutuality one can be open and vulnerable without humiliation since the usual distance between helper and "helpee" is diminished by the awareness of a common humanity. Therefore it behooves those whose profession is that of helper—and/or whose psychological makeup is more secure in this role—to own up to their own interdependence and permit others to minister to them.

The pastoral relationship is more than two persons in dialogue also for other reasons than its focus on God's presence. The pastor represents a tradition, a message, which is inseparable from a witnessing and worshipping fellowship. His pastoral identity is associated with a body of believers who in effect are present by representation in pastoral counseling. The Pauline analogy of the church to the human body—composed of members who though quite diverse in appearance and function are nonetheless interrelated and interdependent—provides the context for the pastoral relationship. Were you and I to shake hands in the activity of greeting each other,

our arms and hands would perform the action. Yet they perform it as members of our bodies and representatives of our person. In a similar way pastoral counseling, though performed by specific members in any given situation, is an expression of the church and its ministry.

The local congregation is the microcosm of this body, and its pastoral ministries are connected with its identity as a worshipping and witnessing community. For pastoral counseling to fulfill its identity, counselor and counselee need to perceive the organic connection between what they are doing and the faith and life of the congregation. While it is a basic principle of pastoral counseling to begin where the counselee is and to accept the apparent limits to any particular relationship, the goals of pastoral counseling need nevertheless to reflect the perspective of ministry indigenous to this larger context in which it functions.

V. RESPONSIVE COUNSELING

A counseling situation comes into being when one person expresses a need to another in an apparent desire for assistance. Such persons are aware that alone they are not coping well with their shadow, their hurt, their sufferings, their conflicts, and in revealing this to another, are indicating their need. The very presence of the other can be helpful. Sharing with another, particularly one in whom one has confidence, breaks up the circles of subjectivity to bring both relief and anticipation. Studies have shown that people feel better after seeing a physician, for example, regardless of what he does. The same is probably true of pastors and other counselors. Someone is present with us who is not only competent but who also cares.

I still vividly recall a case study presented by Chaplain Howard Kellett of

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Charlestown State Prison while I was in graduate school that deeply impressed upon me the value of the presence of a caring person. The case was of a very withdrawn, probably schizophrenic inmate from whom no one could get a response. Not only did he answer no questions, he seemed oblivious to the fact that anyone was even asking them. Kellett visited him regularly and simply sat with him. After almost a year of this patient offering of his presence, the chaplain was astounded on one particular visit when in taking his usual departure he heard the patient say in a clearly audible voice—“Thank you.”

We need each other in our troubles and pains. Jesus was no exception to this need even though he came as the Savior of others. In that dark night of his life when the anguish of going to the cross was causing him to have second thoughts about his calling, he asked James, John and Peter to stay with him while he prayed. “My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death,” he said. “Remain here and watch (*grēgoreite*) with me” (Matt 26:38).

In our moments of anguish, when we are overwhelmed by our weakness and distorted imagination, we need to cash in on another’s strength and objectivity. A distraught husband called me after his wife admitted to him that she was having an affair. “I feel like the bottom has dropped out of my world,” he said. I gave him plenty of opportunity to express his agony and then said, “Tom, the affair hasn’t just happened; it has been going on, as you said, for some time. All that has changed is that you now know about it. I know this awareness has brought you great pain—and rightly so—but you are one step ahead of where you were when she was concealing it and you were unaware of it.” I was simply sorting things out a bit for him—putting them in perspective. “That helps,” he said—“it really helps to talk to someone whom you trust.”

When the burden gets too heavy and we are faced with a sense of futility, we need the support of others. Left to ourselves in this condition we may be seduced by our frightened *inner child* (in Transactional Analysis terms) to imagine all sorts of dire probabilities so that we despair of any hope. Sharing with another, particularly one who combines caring with competency, reinforces our *adult* to cope intelligently with our *child* so that we can deal realistically as well as wisely with the situation at hand.

When one reveals his pain to another one needs a response. One of the most damaging of experiences is to risk the sharing of our hurt and to be left stranded without the embrace of understanding and care. This was Job's experience when he broke his silence with his three friends to curse the day of his birth. They could not accept his despair and reacted with shock and rebuke. In contrast *responsive* counseling reaches out with words that communicate understanding and warmth. The responsive counselor closely follows what the counselee expresses, being particularly sensitive to emotional overtones. In this nonthreatening and accepting milieu counsees may experience the support they need to take a look at their shadow. Responsive counseling focuses on the shadow only as the counselee begins to share it. In other words the counselor reinforces the insights of the counselee, particularly those that reflect his awareness of this inner division. Once the doublemindedness is out in the open, the counselor can assist the counselee to cope realistically with it in the light of God's reconciling action, and to make those necessary decisions that will unite one in the direction one wishes to take.

VI. TAKING PASTORAL INITIATIVE

We have been focusing on the response of the caring person to one who in pain has taken the initiative to share it. A caring person is also one who *takes* the initiative to reach out to the sufferer. Taking this initiative is a distinctly pastoral function. One of my graduate students has his clinical assignment in a social agency, counseling with a disturbed family. His supervisor noted that the student had taken more initiative in contacting the family than the agency would normally have taken, largely due to the heavy case load. Yet as a pastor the student was not aware of this—since it is characteristic of the pastoral function to take initiative and make contact. While people can come to the pastor, the pastor also is one who picks up the phone or goes to them directly.

One can, of course, take too much initiative, tempting the other to depend on this initiative and to neglect his or her own responsibilities. Yet it often takes a great deal of courage to take the initiative, and when it is coupled with the necessary wisdom, this initiative is an expression of our caring.

Jesus was continually reaching out to others—to Levi as he sat at the seat of customs, to Peter in his guilt following his denial, to Paul on the Damascus road. In each instance lives were made new through the encounter. Clement of Alexandria has recorded a similar story regarding the Apostle John. After his return from exile John visited churches in the area of Ephesus and came upon a young man “powerful in body, comely in appearance, ardent in spirit.” Before John left the area he committed the new Christian to the bishop, charging him to nurture him in the Lord. The bishop, however, released him prematurely from his care and the young man gradually came under the influence of bad company, to the extent of participating in a robbery. Despairing over how far he had fallen, he plunged deeper into his evil ways and became the captain of a bandit gang.

When John later returned to the area he inquired of the bishop concerning the young man and when he heard what had happened he called for a horse and despite his age rode to the mountain hideout of the gang. There he confronted the young man who when he saw it was John, attempted to flee, but John pursued him shouting, “Why do you flee from me, your father, unarmed and old? For you I will surrender my life. Stand, believe, Christ has sent me.” The young man stopped, dropped his eyes, threw down his weapons, and embraced the old apostle, and was “baptized a second time with tears.”⁵

There is a certain wisdom in the saying that things may have to become worse before they become better. Following this line of reasoning, an alcoholic, for example, may need to hit bottom before he or she is ready to become sober. This is often the case. Yet the counselors at the Johnson Institute assist the family and friends of alcoholics to take the initiative in confronting alcoholics with the gravity of their drinking so that they catch a glimpse of the bottom to which they are heading, and hopefully through this care and concern will see the “handwriting on the wall” and enter into treatment before they actually reach that bottom.

⁵Clement of Alexandria, *Who Is the Rich Man that Is Saved?*

In the current imbroglio over whether or not parents have the right to deprogram their adult children who have joined one of the current religious cults, the *Minneapolis Star* featured pro-and-con articles by various people familiar with the problem. One of these drew our attention because he was a former student of my wife whom she felt she knew well enough to take seriously. The article is a tribute to his mother who intervened in his cultic life to have him deprogrammed. The son was careful to point out that his freedom was always preserved in his mother’s efforts to reach him. He wrote, “Without the intervention of my mother I would not have been able to escape from the clutches of the cult on my own. The cult had successfully destroyed my ability to think for myself. It was up to my mother to restore my freedom. She had me deprogrammed. I was not abducted. Instead I went voluntarily. I did not have to consent to the wishes of my mother, but I did. I was always presented with an alternative. After being spoken to and presented with proof, I decided the cult had successfully twisted my mind.”

It is important to note that his mother’s efforts stopped short of coercion. As Henri Nouwen points out, only God belongs in our space; others are invited in. When they, instead, invade our space, serious personal repercussions may result. Joan was an example of such repercussions. She could not tolerate having anyone touch her. The only time she did not react negatively when touched was in the Passing of the Peace during the Service of Holy Communion at church. What was different then? “It’s structured,” she said. “It’s under control.”

Otherwise—the touch could control *her*. Her fears had their roots in her family relationships where well meaning people under the guise of caring attempted to control her life. Because she would feel guilty if she opposed them directly, her resistance focused instead in a symptom. Touching had become a symbol of invasion—of possessiveness—of destruction, and she drew back instinctively as a protective device—to defend her identity—her space.

Those who over-identify with the problems of another to the point that it becomes their problem as well are also space invaders. The initial sufferer may actually feel guilty that his pains have caused the other to become so distraught. Like other less subtle guilt-coercers this would-be-helper simply lays an additional burden on the already burdened. Even their right to own their

own problem has been violated.

Much of the stress that we experience in getting up the courage to contact another is due to a subliminal impression that we have to succeed in getting the response we desire. Because we are not sure we can accomplish this, we tense up with anxiety. Actually this assumption that we must succeed is a move into God's role; so it is no wonder that we feel the weight of it. As a psychiatrist friend has impressed upon me, we can take all kinds of initiative providing we give to the other the freedom to say yes or no. This is what it means to respect the space of others in our expressions of care.

When we are open and honest about accepting the other's freedom to receive or reject our initiative, we will be direct in what we say. An indirect approach amounts to a subtle manipulation and, like open attempts to control, denies respect to the other's person. When we are direct in our overtures, nothing is concealed—even temporarily. No one need wonder what we really mean or what we are up to. Our respect for the space of the other keeps us in a

creaturely role. Invaders are intruding into the realm of God. Consequently our belief in God counteracts our perpetrating such invasions.

Once we have our parameters straight there is much that each can do in caring for the other. Alone we are like the physicist's rock sitting on top of a hill. All of its potential energy remains dormant unless it is kineticized—nudged off its perch. We need others to stimulate us—to challenge us—to inspire us—to nudge us—to move. Otherwise we may tend to question our worth, our competency, and withdraw into ourselves as a way of protecting ourselves. Each of us can offer others the encouragement, the support, the stimulation and the inspiration they may need to enter where normally they would fear to go—to gather the courage to leave the old and to enter the new. In the difficulties we encounter as finite, fallible, and sinful human beings, we tend to become locked into our own doublemindedness, and dissipating our energies in inner division, we become unable to decide and to act. If one who cares reaches out to reinforce the constructive side of our ambivalence, counteracting our destructive tendencies, we may do what we could not have done alone. Yet in our discouragement or even depression, we may not have had the incentive to ask for the help we needed.

I took such initiative repeatedly with a depressed woman who had lost all confidence in herself and found it extremely difficult to continue with her work. On the one hand, she wanted to continue, but on the other hand, she wanted to quit so that she could be relieved of the pressure. The shadow of failure was debilitating her potential. I continued to encourage her to “hang in there,” stressing that I knew the courage it took to do this, but that withdrawal could only exacerbate her condition. When after many months of suffering, her depression finally lifted, she thanked me—not for any counseling skills I may have possessed—but for encouraging her to stay involved in spite of her fears.

The initiative that the caring person takes in reaching out to another is analogous to the initiative a counselor may take in the actual counseling dialogue. Instead of following the counselee as one would in responsive counseling, one may confront the counselee with one's own observations and insights. The fact that the counselee has not already come to these observations and insights through responsive counseling is an indication that there is a resistance to acknowledging them. Consequently *confrontational* counseling may be dealing directly with

the counselee's resistance to facing the shadow. Again, as in making an initial contact, it takes a combination of caring and courage to confront. The counselor, in effect, holds up the mirror to the counselee—turns on the lights—hoping that one's sense of timing is accurate—hoping that the counselee will respond. If the counselee does, the counselor needs to follow the response so that the counselee will not lose the responsibility for taking initiative.

Even if the counselee rejects the import of the confrontation, the counselor is wise to accept the rejection, thereby placing no barriers through over-pressing a point, to the counselee's later acceptance of the possibilities he now rejects. Again one needs to be willing simply to sow a seed. Because of the weight of the counselor's authority, pressing his observations onto the counselee can be destructive to the counselee's self-esteem.

To retain the counselee's involvement in the confrontation, confronting is

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often done by raising questions which the counselee has apparently not considered. The question form protects the counselee's freedom, his or her space, giving him or her the opportunity to provide the answers, or simply to reflect further on the questions. The counselee knows that since the counselor raised the question, he or she obviously believes it relevant to the situation.

Those of us who reach out to another to give—may in that process also receive. One is caught up out of one's own world into the world of another, and this can be an expansive and exhilarating experience. As a retired president of the old American Lutheran Church, Emmanuel Poppen was a member of the pastoral conference in which I began my ministry. On one occasion when he was sharing with us some of his memories, he recalled the time when as a young pastor he had a recurring dream, night after night, of seeing himself laid out in a casket while the mourners passed by. It not only disrupted his sleep; it was also on his mind when he was awake. The fact that it occurred night after night was getting to him. He became anxious and depressed. His wife was concerned about him and suggested he get out of the house and make parish calls. He did—setting a record for himself for the number of calls per week. The result—he came out of his funk—the dreams stopped—and he lived into his eighties.

Like Emmanuel Poppen, we can reach out to others despite our preoccupation with our own problems, and in doing so we help ourselves as well. Our own brokenness need be no deterrent in assisting others in their brokenness. Not to reach out would be to succumb to *acedia*, which sounds like a terrible disease—and is! One of the seven deadly sins, *acedia* means literally *without care*—apathy, indifference, lethargy. It is the sort of spiritual torpor that overtakes us when we become preoccupied with our own pain. It is to our own interest as well as to that of others that we avoid withdrawal and remain involved—taking the initiative to care for others in spite of our own hurts and pains.

When devastated by my own suffering a few years back, I received much from specific persons who reached out to me. Intuitively I felt the need also to reach out myself. Actually it was more a need to be with suffering people where I could feel more at home. Fortunately there was a part-time hospital chaplaincy open and I took it. In that milieu my own healing was initiated as I ministered to other sufferers. It was an obvious example to me from my own life of receiving through giving.

Recently I was asked about a grieving mother who has retreated into her home after the death of her daughter, not for just a year or two, for that would be understandable, but for seven

years. Evidently her preoccupation with her loss has turned her into herself and her own lonely world has become her *whole* world. My suggestion was that she be challenged, perhaps through specific requests, to offer herself to other sufferers. She has much to give, for she understands what it is like to lose someone special, and in sharing this understanding she will receive. She will be drawn into other worlds and other pains, and life for her may yet become balanced and purposeful.

Taking the initiative in making contact is most risky when a criticism is implied in our overture. In these instances we may have a great deal of anxiety over making the overture. Persons to whom we are reaching out may not merely reject our overture, they may also become angry. We are jeopardizing whatever relationship we have had with them. So the hesitance! If we did not care about

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them or sense the direction of the Holy Spirit, we probably would let it go. For those ready to take the risk, St. Paul offers this counsel (I am quoting from the King James Version because I believe it offers the best translation of this verse): “Brethren, if a man be overtaken (*prolemphthe*) in any fault (*paraptomati*) ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness (*prautetos*) considering (*skopon*) thyself lest thou also be tempted” (Gal 6:1). In other words, the way in which we approach the person is most important. We reach out not as a judge, but as a friend, not arrogantly, but meekly, fully aware that we are capable of the very same fault. When the person sees that we are no threat to him, but rather that it took a great deal of courage to seek him out, he may well take our appeal to heart.

Did St. James know the ordeal that most of us go through in making such an overture? At least “he sweetens the pot.” “My brethren,” he writes, “if any among you wanders (*planethe*) from the truth, and someone brings him back (*epistrepse*), let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error (*planes*) of his way will save his soul from death and will cover (*kalypsei*) a multitude of sins” (Jas 5:19). The caring person sees the wanderer as hurting, confused, and seeking to meet his or her needs in unsatisfactory ways. Unless the wanderer changes direction he or she may be hurt even more. This kind of concern assumes, of course, that the carer knows the way of truth. It is a dangerous assumption; hence the counsel to humility. Yet if one cares, it is an unavoidable assumption; hence the counsel to take the initiative.

There are times when waiting rather than acting seems to be the best course. In all such overtures, timing is important. Should we decide to wait for the time being, this need not be considered a mark of weakness or timidity, although indeed it may be. Waiting can be a decision made from strength. It is, in a sense, waiting on the Lord. “For God only my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him” (Ps 62:5).

Despite its passive appearance, waiting can be very active. While we have decided that now is not the time for an overture, it is always the time for intercessory prayer. Prayer for others is also a way of reaching out. Since we are under the Spirit’s direction in our caring, we are aware that he may have other means than ours through which to accomplish his purposes. In intercessory prayer we support all of these. In the meantime we watch as well as wait—watching for an opportunity that may come even though not of our arranging—sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As a conclusion permit me to quote myself. “All of us need people in our lives who will

aggressively reach out to us and at the same time be receptive and open; who can confront us gently in our faults, and yet be accepting and caring; who can challenge us to fulfill our calling and yet comfort us in our hurts; who are physically affectionate and yet are sensitive in their spiritual awareness.”⁶

Our calling under the Spirit is to be such a person—and to be open *to* such persons.

⁶William E. Hulme, *The Fire of Little Jim* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976) 158.

