

"The Wounded Healer" by Henri Nouwen

This book looks at the problems of ministry at the end of the 20th century; the author sees his book as offering four doors through which the reader can enter into problem areas he, the author, has identified:

- FIRST DOOR- this door represents the condition of a suffering world
- SECOND DOOR- this door represents the condition of a suffering generation
- THIRD DOOR – this door represents the condition of a suffering man
- FOURTH DOOR- this door represents a suffering minister

The brilliance of this book is in its unifying element, the image of the wounded healer; the wounded healer is an authentic minister, because the servant role of this person is informed by a heart wounded by suffering, which reaches out to the person being served and lets that person know they are not alone

This means that the wounds of the healer are the main resource available in healing those being served.

Let us now look at how these four rooms have been furnished by the author:

ROOM ONE

Nuclear man

- the boundaries that in the past gave structure and meaning to life have disappeared, or are seen as irrelevant
- line between reality and fantasy increasingly indistinct
- history has been rejected, so there is no past, the present is difficult and the future is largely unknowable
- he no longer believes in anything, especially a universal truth
- he is primarily looking for experiences that give him a sense of value

The solutions proposed are:

- (a) the mystical way
- (b) the revolutionary way
- (c) the Christian way

ROOM TWO

- *The Inward Generation* – personhood is the priority, resulting in absorption with self. (Concentration, contemplation and meditation are favoured activities for such self –centred people, who are obsessed with material comfort and the instant gratification of needs and desires)
- *The Fatherless Generation* – parents, but no father. (The concept of a father figure is rejected, the family unit is rejected, very few people have a role model to relate to in fathering or mothering their children. With these rejections, has come another rejection, the rejection of authority, of discipline and a strident call for 'self –government. For some, their peer group is the new authority)
- *The Convulsive Generation* – isolated, disconnected, alienated. (Amongst this group, there is a very deep seated feeling of isolation, of unhappiness, which leads to despair and depression. The pain caused by these feelings is intense and many lash out in a violent, anti–social behaviours, in a vain effort to relieve the pain.)

The remedy offered:

- Minister as articulator of inner events
- Compassionate, non –judgemental, understanding
- Minister as contemplative

(This form of contemplative results in a very active, engaged, action research oriented person, who can evocatively communicate with others.)

ROOM THREE

Here we find *the problem of waiting for tomorrow*

- Who is to exercise leadership ?
- In what context do they exercise it ?
- How is "tomorrow" defined ?
- What will tomorrow offer ?

There are two possible solutions to this problem offered:

LEADERSHIP IN FACING REALITY

- (1) discovering where you are and where the person you are serving is
- (2) allowing the context to speak for itself

(3) addressing the fear of death versus the fear of life

MOVING FORWARD

(A) Personal interaction

(B) Fortification, not debilitation

(C) Offer hope, not despair

(These six actions should provide a basis, a means, of articulating the faith of the speaker in the value of human life)

ROOM FOUR

This is where the "wounds" cupboard is kept; this cupboard contains four types of wounds:

- Alienation – offer hospitality
- Separation – offer concentration on others
- Isolation – offer community
- Loneliness – address both personal and professional issues

ABOVE ALL - these wounds should be seen as a gift, as an opportunity, as a primary resource to use in the healing of others