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Introduction

In recent years there has been an increase of writing that attempts to show the complementary and interdependent nature of the psychological and spiritual dimensions of the human person. These dimensions are not two separable aspects, but are interwoven within the human person. Each person is a psychological and spiritual being, even though the spiritual is frequently not recognized—or developed. To stress one dimension and disregard the other is to limit the understanding of both. The search for meaning and healing in our lives, indeed our ability to function in a fully human way, occurs in both parts as one influences the other. In the climate of moral confusion today, many human problems have a deep spiritual dimension, and many psychological disorders will find genuine healing only within the context of the spiritual.

For example, whatever form addictions take, they can ultimately be controlled only by a spiritual approach. Whether that spirituality involves recourse to a “higher power” or to a more defined personal God, recovering addicts attest to “the spiritual” as their only hope of survival. That is why the spiritual program of the “twelve steps” of Alcoholics Anonymous enjoys such popularity and success with all addicts.

On the other hand, many spiritual-religious problems can be solved only with the assistance of psychological knowledge and information that can deal with spiritual immaturity and enhance spiritual growth. For instance, it is helpful to realize the importance of allowing one’s emotions to flow freely dur-

ing prayer. This means that a person needs to be in touch with his or her feelings and not feel guilty about the presence of negative feelings, even during prayer. It also means that prayer is valuable even in the absence of any positive feelings, an absence felt particularly by depressed people. With proper psychological information and understanding, people can avoid unnecessary spiritual obstacles and grow in their spiritual life.

The task of harmonizing the spiritual and the psychological is frequently difficult. One explanation is that many clinicians trained in the behavioral sciences lack knowledge of and formation in the spiritual realm, while those versed in the spiritual often lack sufficient knowledge and understanding of the psychological. At times some in both professions simplistically consider their own approach a panacea for all problems. There can be no spiritual healing without being in touch with the emotional, and no fullness of emotional healing without the spiritual. The human person must be perceived holistically: emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

Psychiatrist Scott Peck in his best seller, *The Road Less Travelled*, has made a significant contribution to integrating the psychological and the spiritual. Also, many moral theologians today have made a further contribution by integrating the spiritual with the psychological as a help to understanding many moral dilemmas.

These two dimensions may be thought of as the psychological and spiritual eyes of the human person, which complement each other. One serves the other in the perception of a total view of life and of oneself. But if one eye is not functioning properly or is closed, it's difficult for one to get a realistic perception of life and an understanding of the human person. If healthy, the two eyes assist us in forming a more holistic view of the person. However, due to the occasional blindness of these eyes, we experience unnecessary human suffering. Psychological blindness results in ignorance about the person; spiritual blindness fosters a profound ignorance in religious areas. It is distressing enough when people lack common sense,

but when this is further complicated by religious nonsense it then becomes a case of the blind leading the blind.

In my 27 years as a priest-therapist, I have heard too many stories of needless suffering, *needless* since it was caused by an erroneous understanding of some fundamental emotional or spiritual aspect of the person. At times I have been amazed and alarmed at the breadth and depth of such misunderstanding and at how pervasive it is among people from all walks of life. Hence this book.

The following chapters are a direct result of dealing with such misunderstandings. They treat the basic ideas repeatedly misunderstood by a vast number of people: anger, self-forgiveness, compassion, depression, change, guilt, etc. These concepts seem so common to human functioning, but precisely because of this we can take them for granted. They also seem so basic to our experience that, ironically, we find them difficult to explain and even more difficult to comprehend.

In the Bible (more pertinent for me in the Jesus of the gospels) we find a blending of the human and the spiritual. In fact, the two are often so uniquely interwoven that we are often not even aware of the blending. We find human weakness and failures overcome by spiritual strength, as in the case of a fallen David, who rises because he reaches out to a forgiving God. We see Jesus, who is utterly human and therefore emotional, crying, sad, compassionate, angry, hurting, disappointed, praising, touching, affirming, and affectionate. His feelings are all part of his “spiritual” teaching about hope, love, faith, forgiveness, praying to God as Father, healing, and rising above the material to values of simplicity, mercy, chastity, obedience, love of enemies, peacemaking.

Jesus is the master of spiritual teachings and also the doctor of human behavior. He says, “Follow Me. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the light.” He calls us to follow him emotionally and spiritually, and very frequently we fail to recognize that his spirituality is part of his humanity.

The aim of *Healing Wounded Emotions: Overcoming Life's*

Hurts is to foster a better understanding, a deeper realization that our human and our spiritual dynamics should complement and be in rhythm with each other as much as our imperfect human condition allows. In all of us there lies a wealth of human and spiritual potential often untapped because of the layers of misunderstanding that obscure it. If this book can show the connection between the two dimensions, and thereby eliminate some of the unnecessary suffering that arises from misunderstanding it, which happens not only to the uneducated but to the educated as well, I shall be content.

God is working in the human condition. But God expects that in our own way we try to cooperate by understanding and using the psychological and spiritual dimensions of our lives. In this way we shall help ourselves work out what God wills for each of us, our sanctification, in a thoroughly human fashion.

Problems

IS ANYONE EXEMPT?

We all have problems. They may differ with regard to number, variety, and intensity, but if we are living in this world, then we share this common inheritance and experience.

What's the difference among us when it comes to problems? Simply, some people are troubled and overwhelmed by their problems while others cope and manage them. Often some people handle their problems so well that they are mistakenly judged not to have problems.

One of the primary goals of any counselling and psychotherapy is to help troubled individuals, marriages, and families to help themselves. This means that they are to acknowledge and get in touch with their problems, begin to deal with them and examine the alternative actions to be taken, make a decision and follow through—to go on with life.

Usually within the individual, marriage, or family system, there has been a breakdown in functioning and some corrective action should be considered. Confusion and loss of confidence undermine the built-in potential for healing and func-

tioning. People are overwhelmed by their problems, lose control of themselves and are controlled by the problems. With the loss of control, they begin to feel helpless and hopeless. Anxiety and depression set in, further blocking sound reasoning. They begin to panic and seek immediate and rapid solutions. There are none, of course, and they thus despair.

Human beings are ingenious at devising all kinds of methods to avoid or escape problems. Occasionally we push our problems aside, which is sometimes necessary, but when that becomes the rule rather than the exception, we are headed for trouble. People, otherwise quite rational, make irrational decisions at such times, usually compounding one bad decision with another. Negative thinking and feelings dominate and we act in an irrational and distorted manner. We consider such behavior neurotic.

In many of these situations problems intensify into deeper personal troubles, often because there were warning signs that were not heeded. For example, individuals experiencing unhappiness with themselves and with life in general may blame others, suffer depression and psychosomatic ailments like frequent headaches, ulcers, and chest pains, reflecting that these persons are not handling the stresses in their lives. We may notice husbands and wives, restless in their marriage because of marital dissatisfaction, looking toward other people or becoming overinvolved in other causes, even holy and wholesome ones. Children who act up in school or do not relate to their peers or are withdrawn or rebellious reflect not only their own troubles but those of their family as well, which may be subtle, covert, or denied.

So the difference between those who cope and those who do not will often be the difference between those who face their problems and those who do not. When we avoid problems, they will usually end up controlling and overwhelming us, sooner or later. When we face our problems, we come to grips with reality, and reality, no matter how harsh and painful, keeps us mentally, emotionally, and spiritually sound.

Of course, it is always important to remember that pain is part of the process of growth. As Alcoholics Anonymous says, "No pain, no gain." Whether physical or psychological, pain is really positive because it indicates that something is wrong, something needs to change, a problem needs treatment. If we failed to experience pain, we would lack a system to detect problems. We would not be challenged to change and we would rot.

Because we all have problems, we all have anxiety, depression, and frustration. But are we handling them and in control of them at least most of the time, or are they controlling us most of the time?

It is the same with our insecurities. No one is fully secure. We may have temporary periods of stability, but that's frequently disturbed as we search for another level of stability. Our insecurity helps us to realize our finiteness and the limitations of this world. It forces us to contemplate, beyond the limited realm of human security, a lasting place of security we Christians call heaven, where final peace and security reign with God.

But recognizing and relating to our insecurities help us to know ourselves and stimulate us to further growth. Insecurity and uncertainty are part of our normal existence; we cannot escape them. What counts is how we deal with them and manage to develop and mature through them. Since life is a dynamic process, our grappling with insecurity generates new life within us; not to do so is to stagnate, regress, and become troubled.

In Jesus' parable of the talents, the master gave five to one servant, two to another, and one to the third. Later, when he returned from a journey, he demanded an accounting. The servant who had five gained another five; the one with two increased his to two more; but the servant with one talent buried his and gave the master only the one because he was afraid of losing it. The master praised the first two servants, but he rebuked the third for not earning more. When we fear to face life, we stand the chance of losing it.

If insecurity controls us, we run from life, avoiding risks and refusing to be involved with people; we take no responsibility

out of fear or failure. The result is that we become more inadequate, losing our self-confidence as well as self-respect.

In all our problems it is always important to be aware of God's presence within us. We should not, with an immature and infantile religious attitude, presume that God will miraculously remove our problems, but we should rather recognize that God leads us through them, supporting and strengthening us on the way. We should also keep in mind that God brings good out of evil, that confidence in God engenders confidence in ourselves to deal with our difficulties, that God has endowed us with the potential to manage our lives if only we use it. Our insecurity can be either the stimulant to activate our potential, or a deterrent because we refuse to respond to it.

Christ became human not to take away our problems but to teach us to cope with them and so live more responsibly. This is the rich spiritual dimension that we inherit. When we grasp this clearly, we find a deeper meaning in our lives and in our problems, and we can be more in control of our destiny and salvation.

In conclusion, one fact becomes increasingly more evident to me after my years of counseling troubled people: those having a sound and mature faith have an additional support system to cope with their problems; they use not only their human potential but their spiritual as well.

Sometimes we tend to neglect that spiritual dimension. When we do, we short-change ourselves. Frequently, sorry to say, religious ignorance or neurotic religious views sabotage our spiritual powers. Instead of bringing healing, religion brings distortions aggravating our problems.

A strong criticism I have of many psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors today is their neglect or even denial of that spiritual dimension, especially if it is a concern to the client. I hope more professionals are beginning to acknowledge and encourage the spiritual aspect of their clients. Indeed, we all have problems, but a living faith can make a difference in managing them.