

Physician Priest

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Recent articles in The Monthly Aspectarian have told of the return of spiritual practice to the Medical institution. This is still young, but very hopeful.

The following is an excerpt from a book, soon to be published, called The Soul Also Rises - Adventures in Self Realization. It, too, is carried along by the message to return to medical-spiritual practice.

In the beginning, the priestly function was also the healing function; the physician and the priest were one. The shaman was the great religious spirit, the healer, the foreteller, the one who allied with and contended with the devas and forces of nature. He/She was the channel between the flock and higher forces, connecting with the Divine. Through this, their power was acquired from both above and below. The pharaohs exercised the authority, power and healing of the physician-priest. Jesus was the physician supreme as well as the rabbi. Moses derived his power from God and performed miracles.

There have always been wise women healers as well as male, and they have been abundantly present. Not only have shamans been female as well as male, but the great goddesses (Kali, Shakti, the Great Oracle, Demeter, Athena) have hovered over the scene. They have guided, led the way to Truth, given protection, and provided a view of the higher powers.



Recently more great feminine personages have appeared on the scene, sometimes as partners, at other times alone. The "Mother" was partner to Sri Aurobindo, a healer in her own right and a teacher-adviser who succeeded him.

Mother Theresa lives the life of a saint while yet incarnate. A recent avatar, Madame Blavatsky, dedicated her strength and failing energy (to her dying day) to the effort to heal the world through the dissemination of ageless wisdom from the Masters of the East. Maria Van Sievers was companion and perhaps twin soul to the great genius of the nineteenth and twentieth century, Rudolph Steiner. And now we have advanced women-healers in Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Jean Houston and the high intuitive, Patricia Joudry.

Perhaps the eternal example of the wisdom and healing power of the Divine is shown in the matriarchal grandmother: chicken soup, a hug, a kiss on the bruise, will make things well. Her bounteous, all-enfolding protection becomes manifest.

Even in the early twentieth century, the physician was viewed almost as a priest, revered and called upon. He, in turn, exercised the priestly attributes of idealism and self-sacrificing concern for his patient without consideration of or care for money.

Sadly, this now has been degraded, contaminated by the rise of organization, materialism, and business-like bottom line, until today we are faced with a "gerry-meandered" outline of physician-function, which has grown like Topsy until it has burst its bounds. Insurance, originally created from idealistic and creative instinct to spread the cost has become the giant who devours its own children, suffocating the energy of the physician while creating more and more disparity in medical care. Medicare, once a great idealistic adventure, has almost destroyed the home of its birth, threatening the very existence of the system it was designed to serve. Medicine has become big business, and sadly, the doctor (all too often) has become a consummate businessman. Reverence for the physician-priest has given way to distrust, distance, misanthropy, separatism.

These failures in medicine are not misfortunes alone. They are part of the disease and decline of our society; they are reflections of a similar debasement in business, in law, in politics, even in the religious organizations themselves. All too often these institutions have lost the spirit and message of the God-instructed avatars, and have become ruled by ritual and the self-serving, self-sustaining power of the organization.

However, there is also a "return" taking place. More and more people are turning to spirituality rather than to religion. More and more people are finding, within their own hearts, the Christ message, the God-infused spirit, the conjunction with all mankind, with all Nature and with the All Itself. Small groups are springing up here and there: A Course in Miracles groups, self-help groups, addiction groups practicing the twelve steps (themselves of spiritual origin). All of these are pursued as a way out of existential despair into something more and more meaningful. All of these groups are rising; and as they rise, they draw toward each other. One day, not too distant, they will aggregate and will create a critical mass, and then the message of God will be spread to all. Hopefully, the physician will have become a priest once more and will spread the message through his/her example. The message begins with the return of the physician to the physician-priest, the return of the physician to priestly functions, the return to those to whom he or she ministers in a physician-priestly way. This will be far from and far beyond the physico-chemical, laboratory-minded principles which now dehumanize both the caretaker and the cared-for.



The essence of the transformation of the doctor in the return to the physician-priest will be the personal transformational experience.

This introspective change was inaugurated by Freud who instructed that the basis for understanding psychoanalysis was the personal analysis of the aspiring psychoanalyst. Jung brought out the same thing in his biography (*Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, page 132):

"The psychotherapist, however, must understand not only the patient; it is equally important that he should understand himself. For that reason, the sine qua non is the analysis of the analyst, what is called the training analysis. The patient's treatment begins with the doctor, so to speak. Only if the doctor knows how to cope with himself and his own problems will he be able to teach the patient to do the same."

The idea of the transformational experience of the doctor (psychiatrist or family practitioner) will be achieved through a courageous self-exploration. This can be much enlarged by the assistance of the psychiatrist/psychologist employing some of the newer techniques such as transpersonal breathwork. This will bring him to higher realms than will the conventional training analysis alone. Needless to say, the leaders and teachers in these self-development exercises must themselves have advanced to a spiritual orientation.

Transpersonal breathwork is a modification of a technique originated by Stanislav Grof. It combines controlled deep breathing with select powerful music, which releases important emotional material and often transports its constituents to beatific, transpersonal realms.

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