

The Man in Prison and the South Forty Model

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I. INTRODUCTION

When we reflect on the problems of the man in prison in our time, it is crucial that we see him in the larger context of contemporary society. He is part of the problems that are centered in our cities today, and these urban problems must be seen as a reflection of the much larger struggle that is taking place in our world. The human problems that face the man in prison are so overwhelming in number and complexity that we can hardly stand before them. However, before we can bring any significant remedial action to deal with these problems, we must first sharply define the problems and the underlying issues on which they are based.

II. THE UNDERLYING PROBLEMS OF THE MAN IN PRISON

After a significant period of research and listening, we have arrived at the conviction that there exist three basic areas, or underlying problems, of concern that face the man in prison. These are foundational problems that often a man might only feel, and not clearly comprehend, because they run so deep.

The first, and by far the most basic, is the image of self-depreciation that haunts the man in prison. The second is the absence of significant social structures that prevent the man in prison from having available to himself the opportunities which life has to offer in our time. The third, and the last basic underlying factor, is simply that the man in prison has no access or way of participating in the public sector, that realm where his practical destiny is determined and decided. It is our belief that any effort to work with the man in prison which neglects these three areas, is simply a waste of time and effort.

1. THE INTERNAL SELF IMAGE

The problem of the man in prison which underlies all other problems is not the fact that he needs a good job or education. It is not that he has been mistreated or is denied the due

process of justice. You could change all these tomorrow and not really deal with the basic issue faced by the man in prison. The primordial problem is internal and symbolic in nature.

Every man and every people operate out of primordial images that result in the practical action of their lives. The man in prison has an interior image, a self-talk, a self-understanding that tells him that he is a second-rate human being. All our benevolent "up-grading" gifts—private or public—will not alter this state. Most men in prison see themselves as most of the middle class see them. They are the "cons", the dispossessed, the unwanted of our society. Every thing in their environment tells them of this and the crucial fact is not that society looks upon them in this manner, but that this is exactly the way they see themselves. The man in prison lives and acts out of this metaphor. He senses himself as a sub-citizen, doomed to a revolving door existence, the victim of social forces beyond his control, incapable of altering his inhuman condition. This victim image of the man in prison is the first and most fundamental problem.

2. THE NEED FOR SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

The second most discernible problem that the man in prison faces is that, both while he is in prison and when he leaves, there are few structures available to him that provide passage to a new kind of lifestyle. Even if he has wrestled with the deep image problem, he stands before a wall of closed doors that do not open from his side. The scientific and technological advance of our time has provided the means for human development beyond description. Yet these benefits have not been, and are not being, made available to the man in prison.

If, indeed, social structures do exist for him, they are usually limited to nine to five, five day a week operations and not there when the ex-inmate needs them most. Too often they are staffed by people who have little understanding of the ex-inmate's basic needs. A social construct, or model, must be created that is available to the man in prison or when he leaves prison. This construct must make available to him the care and concern that he needs, and act as a channel for the care and concern that he is willing to invest in others.

3. THE NEED FOR PARTICIPATION

The third underlying problem area relates to both of the first two that have been mentioned. The man in prison has few means available to him to significantly participate in society. He has little concrete opportunity to participate in decision-making processes by which his own destiny is determined.

Any model that deals seriously with the ex-inmate must provide channels that give the man the opportunity to be creatively involved in the public sector. He must be enabled to move from being a part of the problem to being part of the solution.

The creative results have been well tested. The structures remain to be built. We must come to fully realize that a man who is cut off from destiny and the opportunity to participate in the decisions which control his life, will revert to anti-social activity to find his participation and authenticity. We are dealing with men whose futures are cut-off from the mainstream of society, and no amount of counter force is going to help in any way—it only serves to intensify the hopelessness.

III. FUNDAMENTAL PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR THE MODEL

The South Forty Corporation is firmly convinced that the only viable approach to the man in prison is to be a comprehensive approach. Any other approach will only, in a final sense, be harmful to the situation. Our society today is covered with a wasteland of efforts that have been fragmented and unrelated. Some have achieved a sophisticated benevolence. But few have reached the real issues. Many of these efforts have only put flesh over deep wounds and have added to the problems.

The following presuppositions to the model are the result of much research and observation on the part of the staff of South Forty Corporation. It is out of our experimentation and observation that the following concepts have been developed:

1.

The model presupposes, first, that there must be a limited area of concern. In some cases this will be geographical in nature, in others it will be defined as an area of social distinction.

The area of concentration must be set apart with clear definition. Once this is done, we know where we are working. Such definition reduces the sense of chaos created by the seemingly impossible task of a large group or area. It curtails dissipation and duplication of effort. It enables penetration in depth that reaches to the very last individual. It makes possible a clearer picture of the maze of problems that paralyze those involved. Without this kind of limitation and concentration, we could not begin to be comprehensive in scope.

2.

The second presupposition demands that the model deal with the depth human problem. This problem must be filtered out and radically dealt with. This is critical to working in any comprehensive way with men in prison. All other aspects of our work rest directly on this foundation. With men in prison, the key issue, as indicated above, is the self-depreciating image. Unless the imagination of these ex-inmates is refurbished, nothing else can lastingly be altered toward a new lifestyle. Throughout our entire program we are deeply concerned with the question of internal self-image.

3.

The third presupposition states that all the human problems of the man in prison must be dealt with at the same time. This is a very crucial point if we are to be comprehensive. Piecemeal approaches never get at the real issues and cannot create the needed morale for creative action. Indeed they tend to cultivate the victim image. Though staggering amounts of money might be involved, the benevolence concept is devastating to the human spirit. The most crucial fact, however, relating to the need to deal with all the problems at one time is the reality that one problem tends to reinforce another. In order to move one problem toward a significant solution it is finally necessary to move them all. The educational, economic, social, participatory, and cultural problems cannot be radically disjoined from one another if effective resolution is intended. Men in prison are total human beings and must be dealt with as such.

4.

The fourth presupposition is this—all age levels must be dealt with at the same time. Just as the problems reinforce one another, the postures of various men in prison have a deep effect on one another. If the older prisoners are neglected, they will unintentionally communicate their images of self-depreciation to the young. Also, if human hope is available to one, it must be available to all, otherwise, comprehensiveness falls short of its goal.

5.

The fifth presupposition, the use of symbols, could well be the most important, even though its function is also the most difficult to articulate. One difficulty is that it is a vital part of everything wise that is done—including every part of the model, every presupposition, strategy, and structure. Every human being and community is deeply dependent upon symbols for its very life. The "New Man's" power is founded on the belief that he is a symbolic man. And when he walks through the corridors of his former life, he becomes the power of possibility to all who still live there. Symbols are foundational to significant change for the man in prison.