

Are You Running With Me Jesus?

Malcolm Boyd (1965)

Malcolm Boyd, an Episcopal priest who had once worked in Hollywood, published Are You Running with Me, Jesus? in 1965. A series of prayers and ruminations on the relationship between Christianity and the current social and political scene, Boyd's book became a bestseller. He appeared on numerous college campuses and was active in the both the civil rights and antiwar movements. His book was only one of the more public expressions of the way in which Christians often attempted to rethink and connect their religious convictions with the issues of the era.

I cannot recall exactly when the idea, and way, of prayer began "to change radically in my own life.

Prayer, for me, used to stand as something separate from other part of life. But I have come to learn that real prayer is not so much talking to God as just sharing his presence, more and more, prayer and my style of life as a Christian now seem inseparable

During a Freedom Ride in the Deep South in 1961, one of my fellow Episcopalian priests said: "It seems to me this is really a kind of prayer—a kind of corporate confession of sin." Some people said the Freedom Ride was essentially a sermon. But my fellow priest well expressed my feelings about being on that bus. It was a prayer.

PRAYERS FOR THE FREE SELF

It's morning, Jesus. It's morning, and here's that light and sound all over again.

Where am I running? You know these things I can't understand. It's not that I need to have you tell me. What counts most is just that somebody knows, and it's you. That helps a lot.

So I'll follow along, okay? But lead, Lord. Now I've got to run. Are you running with me, Jesus?

I'm crying and shouting inside tonight, Lord, and I'm feeling completely alone.

The moment is all that matters; the present moment is of supreme importance. I know this. Yet in the present I feel dead. I want to anchor myself in the past and shed tears of self-pity. When I look ahead tonight I can see futility, pain, and death. I am only a rotting body, a vessel of disease, potentially a handful of ashes after I am burned.

The drinks are tranquilizing me, Lord, relaxing me and helping me take it.

But even when I'm being tranquilized, I don't want to be.

I'm having a ball, and I just want to thank you, Jesus.

This is a good day for me. Yesterday I was down, but today I'm up again. These people I'm with are the greatest. The sun has really come out for me. I see everything in bright reds and yellows.

I hated the dark reds and the crying blues yesterday. I was mean, Lord, and vicious, and I can hardly understand how anybody put up with me. But they didn't beat me down. They let me know what it is to be human because *they* stayed human. Now I'm human again. I feel good, and I want to get out with the people and swing with them, Jesus.

This record sends me, Jesus, but the magic doesn't last.

Why does it send me this way? What is it saying and doing to me? All right, I know I'm using it for the build-up, but isn't that understandable? I need the build-up now, and it's only a record—it's only music, so what's wrong with using it?

PRAYERS FOR THE FREE SOCIETY

She doesn't feel like an animal, Jesus, even though she's being treated like one.

She looks sixty but she isn't yet forty years old. She is a migrant farm worker. She's working in this field all day—and day here means sunrise to sunset. Afterward, she'll go back with her family to spend the night in a one-room tin shack most people wouldn't let their dog live in.

I've searched for community in many places, Jesus

I was often looking in the wrong place, but I don't think my motive was altogether wrong. I was looking futilely and hopelessly there for fellowship, belonging, and acceptance.

Now this moment, which many people would label "loneliness" or "nothingness," I want to thank you, Jesus. In this moment—in this place and with these other persons—I have found community where and as it is. It seems to me it is your gift.

What can I do about war and peace?

I mean, how can I do anything which will affect the power structures which hold the key to basic decisions about waging war or maintaining peace? I've marched in peace demonstrations, fasted in protest against nuclear experiments, signed petitions, and tried seriously to study the issues involved. But what have I been able to accomplish?

Three young children died in that room.

They tell me eleven people have died in this area of a few blocks, Jesus. All died in fires

when they were trapped and couldn't get out. The people in the area can't move away because there's no place for them to go.

It doesn't seem fair for some people to have nice homes with safety, Lord, while other people can't get out of a slum like this except in a coffin

PRAYERS FOR RACIAL FREEDOM

Blacks and whites make me angry, Lord.

I got very mad at a white guy today, Lord, when he came out with all the old clichés during a conversation we were having. He just sat there and with a damned grin on his face and started telling the old lies about Negroes. He never raised his voice. He was always a gentleman, you know, very respectable and proper, while he crucified Negroes; I felt the nails driven into me, too. I wanted to slug him, Lord, and smash his mask. I wanted to find out what was really behind it.

And the other day I got mad at a Negro. He was so ashamed of being a Negro that he had stopped being human. When I reached out to him for a human response he just burrowed farther inside his brown skin and wouldn't come out.

They hate everything white.

They're young Negroes who were brought up to consider white beautiful and black ugly. They never received an education in Negro history or culture, especially in terms of African origins and Negro contributions to American history. They were taught they had to make it in a white world in a white way.

Now they're mad, Lord, because they have learned they were taught lies. They know they're black—and also completely human and fully citizens, yet without authentic freedom or full civil rights. They don't want any part of white values, which, in the light of their experience, seem to be sick and corrupt. Now they feel white is ugly and black is beautiful. They just don't believe either white promises or white declarations about love and justice.

A litany for racial unity

We petition you to hear us, so that your Spirit will convert our intention, and we may cease being racial hypocrites and may commit ourselves to the cause of social justice which represents the working of love in the sphere of human life.

That you will lift up in spirit those who have been subject to loss of employment, to special criticism and isolation, and to personal pain because of their involvement in the struggle for social justice and human love; and those who have witnessed to their belief in your creation of man in your own image by participation in expressions of protest against injustice and inhumanity.

That you will instruct the hearts of those who actively hate in human relations, who are ignorant owing to their education or background, who keep alive the power of prejudice, and who are persecutors, jailers, racist leaders of public opinion, racist educators. Priests, rabbis, and ministers.

O God—you who are neither red, yellow, black, nor white, but who has created us in a marvelous variety of rich colors and marked us with your image.

We ask you to hear us, Lord

PRAYERS ON THE CAMPUS

They say he's rocking the boat, Lord

He keeps risking his security by sticking his neck out on controversial issues. He says the university can't side-step such questions. Many students love him, but others feel he's a kook and don't understand why he can't settle down and do his routine job.

They thought they were in love, Jesus, before they had sex.

He's a senior in college and she's a freshman, and last weekend they crawled into the sack together. I mean, all the barriers came down. Now they can't figure out what they should do.

She had made up her mind before not to go all the way with him, and now that she has, she no longer understands herself. Her self-image is shaken. She says she did it because she loves him so much and still does.

The boy's image of her is shaken, too, because it demanded that she wait. He enjoyed having sex with her, but now regards her as a stranger, maybe even a tramp. He can't reconcile the ideal image with the reality which his desire has produced. He says he's indifferent to her now.

How can sex shake people's lives so much, Jesus? What does it mean for love—now that they've "made love"? What *should* it mean for each of them, and for the two of them together?

She's a popular co-ed, but she doesn't know who she is.

But she dislikes herself, or, at least, the self she feels she was handed but can't figure out. She thinks she must be two different selves, the operating one and another which is hidden under layers of complexity she can't get to. She wants to find out who that other self is because she believes she should like to be it. She simply doesn't know the self everybody seems to be relating to.

Here she comes now, Lord, smiling her way across campus. Help me to smile back-at

her *other* self.

PRAYERS FOR SEXUAL FREEDOM

The young girl got pregnant, Lord, and she isn't married.

There was this guy, you see, and she had a little too much to drink. It sounds so stupid, but the loneliness was real. Where were her parents in all this? It's hard to know. For the girl, they probably seemed indifferent, absorbed in their familiar routines, uninterested in her real life. But did she ever try to tell them about it? And would they listen?

There's nothing ahead for her with the guy. She tells me he's really in love with somebody else. She's not in love with anyone; she's sure of that. And she's honest enough to admit, even knowing what she does now, that she'd go back to sleeping with the guy. Does she really think that's all she needs? She admits she's thought of suicide, but she says she doesn't have the strength to make any real decision, let alone that one.

What am I going to tell her, Jesus? How can I help her understand the nature of the love she's looking for?

This is a homosexual bar, Jesus.

This isn't very much like a church, Lord, but many members of the church are also here in this bar. Quite a few of the men here belong to the church as well as to this bar. If they know how, a number of them would ask you to be with them in both places. Some of them wouldn't, but won't you be with them, too, Jesus?

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE

God:

Take fire and burn away our guilt and our lying hypocrisies.

Take water and wash away our brothers' blood which we have caused to be shed.

Take hot sunlight and dry the tears of those we have hurt, and heal their wounded souls, minds, and bodies.

Take love and root it in our hearts, so that brotherhood may grow, transforming the dry desert of our prejudices and hatreds.

Amen