

The Emergence and Impact of Helping Behavior in Young People: Impressionistic Self-Reflections of Mennonite College Students Serving Frail Elders in Light of World Religions

Abstract

Throughout the spring term (2003) young adult students at Hesston College, Hesston, KS, in my Applied Religions of the World and Applied Introduction to Cultural Anthropology classes helped frail elders in the assisted living area at Schowalter Villa Retirement Community. This student help was part of the ongoing culture change at Schowalter Villa – that is, changing the Villa’s model of care from a medical model to a person-centered emphasis. Student work included feeding the very frail and taking part in the daily activities of Villa residents. In this paper, students reflect upon their involvement in terms of: the emergence of their own helping behavior; how might their services at Schowalter Villa influence their career choices; and their work in the light of the teaching from six world religions. In terms of the last point, this paper attempts to show how love and compassion as seen in these religions are part of the students’ work. Indeed, love and compassion, despite the many differences in religions of the world are quintessential virtues in the scriptures of these systems of belief.

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Wednesday, June 4, 2003

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“One thing I teach is suffering and the end of suffering. It is Ill and the ceasing of Ill that I proclaim” (Buddha as seen in Wodward, 1939, p.283).

Background

Definition of key terms

Frail elders: Individuals 60 years of age or older who are limited cognitively and/or physically to the extent that they require assisted living.

Religions of the world: These are religions with membership in the millions – those covered in this study include Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Mennonite: This is a Christian denomination that emphasizes pacifism and service to humanity – the type of Mennonite focused upon in this paper is the most progressive group within this religious genre

Much of the post-modern society in which we live runs counter to the quintessential teachings of world religions. These universal teachings suggest that we are to love and serve other human beings. By way of contrast, books such as *Common Fire: Living Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Parks Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks. (1996) provide insight into the individualism of our time. One area of American culture that typifies this individualism is in the way negative way frail elders are treated although this is in a state of flux as seen in "culture change" (Bell and Troxel, 2003). For the most part, elders in nursing homes are treated via the medical model – care of the elders is focused on biological needs. Culture change is a movement in the United States in terms of how we see and care for frail elders in institutional settings. This movement seeks to care for residents in a holistic manner – meeting as many needs of residents as possible. To some degree culture change is about cost saving

measures and the anticipation of the aging of the baby boomers. It is also a matter of social justice – a call for seeing elders in assisted living settings as having a wide variety of needs and making these areas more humane places in which to live.

As part of the culture change movement, students, aged 18-21, in my Applied Religion of the World and my Applied Cultural Anthropology classes at Hesston College, Hesston, Kansas (owned and operated by the Mennonite Church, USA) have opportunity to serve frail elders two hours a week at Schowalter Villa Retirement Community located in the town of Hesston. The Villa is about 500 yards from the college. The service of the college youth includes activities from feeding elders to involvement in small group discussions focusing on philosophy. This paper will analyze the helping behavior of young adult Mennonite college students in their work with elders during this past spring term, 2003.

The majority of this paper focuses upon students' self-reflection upon their work in light of teachings about compassion and service as seen in teachings of religions of the world. This will look specifically at the impact of their work upon themselves at the end and upon the elders they interacted at the end of the term. Prior to examining this concept, other self-reflections include student ideas in terms of the emergence of their own helping behavior and self-reflections in terms of how their work at the Villa might influence their careers. Before looking at these self-reflections I will describe the service of students with the frail elders and comment on ideas about age, aging, and the meaning of frailty.

Examples of Student Helping at Schowalter Villa

Students helping at the Villa included feeding and pushing the wheel chairs of the very frail. This type of service was often reciprocal – the students grew as they helped the elders. The students often took themselves beyond their comfort zones, learning about themselves and the reality of aging. In small group discussions involving the elders and the students both age groups served each other. One example from this past term typifies this mutual service. Three women over age eighty and three young adult college students were reflecting on their lives. One of the elders said, “Here I am in my eighties. I won’t live much longer. My life has accounted for very little.” Within a second, one of the students responded, “Wait a minute, over the last four weeks in our group discussion you have taught the young people in this group an awfully lot. Long after you are gone from this earth, when we are your present age, we will remember the valuable things you have told us.” The wise elder could only smile and say, “Thank you”. The college students often attended activities that are part of daily life for Villa residents. For example, students joined the elders in hymn sings, playing bingo and celebrating Valentines Day with twelve dozen red and white carnations.

Age and Aging

Today the meaning of age is unclear. The demarcations between middle age and older adulthood are blurring. We now know that different people age in very different ways. The differences in people in their late fifties, the young old and the old old in their eighties is generally significant. And, within these specific age groups much diversity is found (Roth and Jackson, 2001).

To complicate these ideas, Eugene Bianchi (1986, p.54) reminds us that the

different age groups contain each other.

For there is within each of us at every reflective period of life a coexisting presence of the *puer* and the *senex*, the archetypal images of youth and age.... In the depths of our psyches live an assortment of child images: the pouting, demanding, spoiled, or hurt child, the spontaneous, resilient youth who is ever leaping beyond the confines of linear history to probe the transcendent and eternal. We also carry within ourselves the *senex*, the wise old (person), awakening in us by our experience as elders, as well as by own immersion into the historical process of aging (which can provide wisdom or meanness of heart).

This doesn't mean that youth and people in the second half of life are the same.

Youth and older adulthood constitute different stages of life. Neither are these stages completely opposite from each other. Each contains each other – much like the Chinese symbols of yin and yang suggesting the forces of nature contain complementary, rather than antagonistic opposites. Whatever the case, the two age groups need each other.

Youth needs the insight and wisdom of older adults. The latter need the energy, vision and excitement of young people.

Frail elders

There are various definitions of the term frail elder. In *Adult Development and Aging*, William J Hoyer and Paul A. Roodin (2003:213) suggest this term refers to “....a wasting of the body and is associated with general muscular weakness and poor nutrition”. As seen at the beginning of this presentation, I choose to use a broader definition for this concept. By way of review, I see frail elders as older adults who are limited cognitively and/or physically to the extent that they require some form of assisted living. In the case of this paper, that form is within a nursing home.

While older adulthood has generally been honored and given respect throughout history and across cultures, very frail elders are almost universally seen in negative ways. Negative feelings about extreme decrepitude seem to be built into the

human psyche. Such decrepit elders historically and throughout many societies sometimes have been abandoned or killed (de Beauvoir, 1972).

By way of contrast, Henri Nouwen and Walter J. Gaffney (1976: p.14) suggest “(The frailty of)... aging does not need to be hidden or denied, but can be understood, affirmed, and experienced as a process of growth by which the mystery of life is slowly revealed to us.” These same writers (1976: p.153) anticipated the coming of culture change as seen in the following statement written over 25 years ago.

As long as we continue to divide the world into the strong and the weak, the helpers and the helped, the givers and the receivers, the independent and the dependent, real (helping) will not be possible, because we keep broadening the dividing lines that caused the suffering of the (elders) in the first place.

We turn now to the self-reflections of students regarding their work with frail elders at Schowalter Villa. By way of review, these self-reflections look at:

- the emergence of their own helping behavior;
- how might their service at Schowalter Villa influence their career choice/s;
- their work in light of the teachings from seven world religions.

Self-reflections: the Emergence of Helping Behavior on the Part of Young Adult Mennonite College Students and Mennonite Theology

Mennonites are a Christian denomination within which there are a various types. Students referred to in this paper are members of the most progressive group in this religious genre. The history of Mennonites dates to the 16th century Protestant reformation in the context of the Anabaptist movement. Anabaptists were distinct from both Roman Catholicism and the emerging Protestant Christianity. Ideas that permeate Anabaptist theology include: separation of church and state; adult baptism; emphasis on the church community as part of ones salvation; pacifism; and a strong ethos regarding

service to others. A quote from Menno Simons (for whom Mennonites are named), an early Anabaptist leader, summarizes this emphasis on service, “True evangelical faith cannot lie sleeping, it clothes the naked, it comforts the sorrowful, it feeds the hungry, it shelters the destitute, it cares for the sick, it becomes all things to all (humanity)” (Simons, 2003).

This Anabaptist sense of service today is epitomized in Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) -- a relief and service organization supported by most Anabaptist based groups.

The following is from a MCC webpage.

MCC service is motivated by two things: The Bible and Mennonite experience. The Bible calls Christians to serve people who are hungry, thirsty, sick, in prison and strangers (Matthew 25:35-36). Mennonite experience is also a strong motivator. Many Mennonites living in North America today have experienced war, hunger and refugee flight in the former Soviet Union and Europe. This experience causes them to respond compassionately to others who are hungry, caught in war or refugees. One woman sent a check to MCC with the following words: ‘This donation is given in thanks for help we received many years ago. When I was a child in Russia, I was fed by MCC. When my husband was a prisoner of war after World War II, he received help from MCC. We never forgot’.
(A History of Mennonite Central Committee, 2003)

Self-reflections: What Part of Your Socialization has Prompted You to Help Frail Elders at Schowalter Villa?

The following quotes are responses from students in my Religions of the World and Cultural Anthropology classes to this question. (As seen in the rest of this article, I put the indented quotations from students in *italics* to distinguish them from quotes from other sources.) Student names are identified by initials.

H.R.:

Throughout my life I have been shown through my parents that service is a very important part of our Christian lives. The reason I feel that my parents have the most significant influence on my desire to serve is because of the experience our family had in Haiti with a Mennonite service organization when I was in first grade. As a child, I was able to see the world through the eyes of a child. It became apparent to me how other children live

and how their environments influences them.

W.P.:

Throughout my childhood my father always made me volunteer for church functions. This taught me, to take some of my time to give to someone else. I have contributed to volunteer work in Texas, helping with the Mennonite Central Committee meat processor (used for world hunger) and now at Schowalter Villa. In helping at the Villa, I know that I can make a positive difference in the life of someone else. I have been taught my by church that God works through me in helping others. I hope you continue to give students chances to help at the Villa because this a time for them to notice God working in the world

J.N.:

When I was in high school I joined a community service group at school. I became extremely involved and was president my senior year. Taking part in this was a huge blessing in my life.

L.D.:

The most influential agent for me is the teaching of Jesus. Jesus calls us to love one another. When I serve others I am showing Christ's love to them.

D.E.:

A number of my friends have influenced my sense of service. For example, one of them has been in many areas around the world. You will never see a more grounded kid who enjoys every moment of serving others.

B.A.:

My church also has had a large impact on my service orientation. Everywhere I look service plays a part of the life of the church. I have taken my Mennonite raisings and desire to do service in the name of God.

Self reflections: How Might Your Helping Frail Elders at Schowalter Villa Influence Your Career choice/s?

One of my aims in having students involved with elders at Schowalter Villa is to see if this experience might influence their career choices. The following statements are representative of student thought regarding that idea.

C.R.:

When I started to serve older adults at Schowalter Villa I didn't think that I could use my career choice to be a graphic designer to serve others. Now, I know I can take opportunities to incorporate art and service to show the world how a single person can make a difference in the lives of frail elders.

F.G.:

The work I have been doing at the Villa hasn't been influential to my career choice but it has opened my eyes and made me see that I can do something like that outside of work.

R.A.:

My studies of Islam in Religions of the World could possibly be significant in my future. I do plan to do some kind of humanitarian service and this knowledge along with my work with the elders at Schowalter_Villa may be helpful in my work.

Y.T.:

I have always wanted to do something in the medical field and since helping at the Villa I have felt the need for nurses. I have realized the great impact which nurses can have on their clients; I feel that is one of the best ways that I can share Christ's love.

Self-reflections: Impact of Helping Behaviors on Students Serving Frail Elders in Light of World Religions

This impact is in terms of what students learned about who they are, about frail elders, and what more generally they learned in their interaction with the elders in their work at Schowalter Villa. In this section these self-reflections are presented with my reference to concepts of love, compassion and service from the perspective of six religions of the world. These religions are -- Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Student reflections are presented in response to my question asking them to comment on their work with elders.

Hinduism

Houston Smith (1991, p.26) in assaying the complexity of multi-faceted Hinduism suggests:

All of us dwell on the brink of the infinite ocean of life's creative power. We carry it within us: supreme strength, the fullness of wisdom, unquenchable joy. It is never thwarted and cannot be denied. But it is hidden deep, which is what makes life a problem. The infinite is down in the darkest, profoundest vault of our being, in the forgotten well-house, the deep cistern. What if we could bring to light and draw from it unceasingly?

It is my impression that when students worked with frail adults at Schowalter Villa both groups are at least scratching the surface of the ocean of life's creative power, strength, wisdom and joy. In relationship to this, Hesston student G.S. said:

During my time at Schowalter Villa, I had the opportunity to capture, by way of photographs the everyday lives of the residence that are currently living there. I have volunteered to serve others before but never in this kind of way. At first, I was not sure how I would feel spending one hour a week at the Villa. I now can honestly say that this time has gone by quickly and gave me a feeling of accomplishment. Through working at the Villa, I have learned that this simple act can make a masterpiece of memories. I also learned that one hour a week is not much time taken out my schedule and the amount of self-satisfaction I have experienced is well worth it. Through volunteering I have grown in many ways, including spiritually. This project has been a great help to me through God's heart. Throughout this experience, I felt nothing but compassion for the elders I worked with.

Hinduism suggests that reality is one – duality as assumed in most of western thought does not exist. Yet, within Hindu reality there are millions of gods. Within this pantheon there are a few gods that are more significant than others. One such god is Krishna. Hindu belief suggest this god has been incarnated in different forms at different times in human history. One example of his life on earth is recorded in *The Song of God: The Bhagavad Gita* (Prabhavananda and Isherwood, 1972). As seen in this text (p.50) Krishna says:

When goodness grows weak
When evil increases,
I make myself a body.
In every age I come back.

Perhaps the students in their excellent work with the frail elders at Schowalter Villa are expressions of Krishna.

In *The Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna is talking to the mortal, Arjuna. Set in a battlefield of closely related kin groups, the deity is telling Arjuna that the latter must be involved in the battle of life. While this story may be used for justifying war, others,

including Mahatma Gandhi, see it as a parable for the struggle that occurs within the human mind. Krishna tells Arjuna that he must be active, that is practice Karma Yoga, in a positive way in the struggle of life. Karma yoga includes compassionate service to others. Moreover, this action is to be done for the sake of itself. Nothing is to be gained for oneself (May 1988).

In a series of “I am” statements, Krishna (Prabhavananda and Isherwood, 1972, p.82) says:

I am the end of the path, the witness
the Lord, the sustainer:
I am the place of the abode
the beginning, the friend and the refuge.

In their interaction with each other, I believe Hesston students and Villa elders provide a path of mutuality, a path for understanding life and the Transcendent. This past term one example of this reciprocal path of understanding involved elder M.E. and college student S.D.. M.E. has advanced Parkinson’s Disease and is developing dementia. He is a retired space engineer, a brilliant man who seldom complains about his lot in life. During this past term S.D. visited M.E. at least one hour a week and they developed a strong bond with each other. S.D. is a young man who has experienced more pain than most young adults. M.E. and S.D. seemed to understand each other in an unspoken, compassionate way. Their weekly meetings were often a time of mutual refuge. Ultimately there is only one place of refuge on this planet for any (person) – “That is in another’s (person’s) heart. To love is to make of one’s heart a swinging door” (Spencer-Thurman, 1984, p.88).

In the interaction of youth and age there are lessons about beginnings and endings, life and death, friendship, and becoming a refuge. Youth provide lessons for

the elders – lessons about what it means to be young today in the early years of the 21st century. These lessons suggest that there are young people who focus outside of themselves in interacting with and caring of frail elders. More often than not, accounts of Hesston students at the end of this term note what the elders did for them.

L.W.:

I think that the main thing I learned in working at Schowalter Villa this semester was that frail elders are just as human as anyone. Before this assignment I thought older people in nursing homes were boring because all they did was sit in wheelchairs all day long. When I thought of old people, I thought of mean people who didn't want help. I have always thought them to be less than anyone else because they seem so helpless and dull. Going to the Villa for 11 straight weeks changed that. Older people have lots to offer younger people. We can go to them and listen to their stories they have to offer and see how it impacts our lives. Our elders have wisdom simply because they have lived so long. We should consider ourselves lucky by being able to take in so much information, insight, and knowledge from them.

Buddhism

Buddhism is sometimes seen as a religion of infinite compassion based upon the enlightenment experienced by Buddha close to 2500 years ago. Soon after his enlightenment, Buddha understood he was to serve those whose “souls whose eyes were sorely dimmed by dust”.....humanity -- desperately in need of help. Buddha knew he was born for the good of the many, for the compassion of the world (Pratt, 1928, pp.8 and 9). Many frail elders are dimmed by this dusk, they are desperately in need of help. Very frail elders, demented elders may be said to be the lepers – the wretched of this earth in our society.

As seen in an interview as part of the PBS video series, “Searching for God in America”, His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama, suggests that one way to exercise compassion is to receive and welcome the suffering of the other person. “The (office) of

the Dali Lama is a receiving station toward which the compassion-principle of Buddhism in all its cosmic amplitude is continuously channeled, radiate thence to the Tibetan people most directly, but by extension to all sentient beings” (Smith, p.144).

I see students who help at the Villa being receiving stations for the pain felt by frail elders. Sometimes I am amazed by the nature of this reception. It has the essence of “cosmic amplitude”. And, again, students often are also on the receiving end of such compassion.

P.T.:

One of the things I learned in my work at Schowalter Villa is how much frail elders have to offer us. They have such a vast amount of experience to draw from that they could give you good advice on any subject. I think that younger people don't realize the resource they have because they think they can get through life on their own. They don't realize that it would be much easier to make a decision if they had something to draw from like the advice of older people.

There are two main strains of Buddhism – the Theravada and the Mahayana. The former is more conservative than its' counter-part. Theravada takes more literally Buddha's atheism and adheres to his de-emphasis on religious creed and ritual. Mahayana Buddhism allows for a wide diversity of theism and religious practice. The Mahayana sees the ideal person as a bodhisattva. The latter is seen as an individual who puts others' happiness before his or her own. (For Theravada Buddhist there is a very limited number of bodhisattvas, while for Mayhayans the number is almost infinite).

In our usual ignorant state we look after ourselves as 'number one' and concern ourselves with other sentient beings as a secondary matter. The bodhisattava practices the reverse of this.....putting off one's own nirvana (full eternal bliss) even though one has become pure enough to attain it, for anything approaching the imaginable future. The bodhisattava dedicates his or her practice, in this and all subsequent lives, for the good of all sentient being, 'until samsara (the many passages of all life forms via reincarnation) is emptied' (Corless, p. 1989, p.40-41).

A poem by Mayhayyanist poet-saint, Shantideva, reflects the nature of the bodhisattava.

May I be a balm to the sick their healer and servitor until sickness never comes again;
 May I quench with rains of food and drink the anguish of hunger and thirst;
 May I be in the famine of the *age's end their drink and meal* (my italics)....
 My own being and my pleasures, all my righteousness in the past, present,
 and future, I surrender indifferently,
 That all creatures may win through to their end.
 (Smith, 1991, p.123)

I have italicized the words “*the age’s end their drink and meat*” because it represents both literally and figuratively what Hesston students did in feeding the very frail – students gave drink and meat to the elders near the end of the elders’ life. Feeding the very frail is not easy, nor a pleasant task. The elders sometimes say unkind words to the person feeding them or vomit on the person who is helping them. After an elder vomited on one of the students, the latter said, “Why should I be upset about that? Vomiting is a just a natural act”. Sometimes the elders fall asleep when a spoon full of food is placed in their mouth. Occasionally, the elder will choke on a piece of food. Seeming disinterest on the part of the elder is not unheard of while they are being helped to eat. Giving this help is not for the faint of heart. I am proud of the students providing this function for the elders. At first glance, its seems like work that has no immediate pay-off. Yet in writing about his helping elders, B.T said:

In serving elders at the Villa I learned an incredible amount about myself and helping others. I learned that it doesn't matter who we help, people of all ages need help. Going to the Villa gave me confidence in helping those around me without expecting anything in return. To help in that way and give of my time was something I thought I would never do. But it was something that grew on me and showed me a lot about my character. I learned what you think might be the worst for you might be the best for you. I was able to learn who the elders are and what they miss about their earlier lives. I was able to talk about the similarities and differences between today and many years ago.

While other religions implicitly or explicitly refer to the idea of agape, it is only in the

concept of the bodhisattva that the one providing agape, wants to stay in this earthly life until every life formed is saved. Agape in itself is a radical concept. The Buddhist bodhisattva, radicalizes this radical concept. A Hindu adoption of the bodhisattva as seen in the Hindu devotional classic, the *Bhagavatam* by Santi Deva says:

I desire not of the Lord the greatness which comes by the attainment of the eightfold powers (containing the essence of Buddhist teaching), nor do I pray him that I may not be born again; my one prayer to him is that I may feel the pain of others, as if I were residing within their bodies, and that I may have the power of relieving their pain and making them happy (Smith 1991:148).

Confucianism

The primary concern of Confucius was social ethics rather than religious thought although he did not rule out the possibility of the Infinite. Key words in this ethical system as seen in *The Analects* of Confucius are *Jen*, *Ren*, and *Li*. *Jen* may be translated goodness, benevolence, and love. It focuses upon the ideal relationship between two people. *Ren* refers to "benevolence, charity, humanity, love," and kindness. This is the fundamental virtue of Confucianism. Confucius defines it as *Ai ren*, "love others." *Li* refers to "propriety, good manners, politeness, ceremony, worship" (Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary, 1972) <http://www.friesian.com/confuci.htm#text-2>).

It was out of this ethical system that the Chinese concept of filial piety (or literally in Chinese, "honoring your parents") developed. The English denotative definition for this piety is broader, referring to respect for elders in general. Chinese filial piety was especially for old men, in part because this culture was dependent on agriculture and old men knew most about this subject. Older women gained from this cultural reality. "Even the bitterly oppressed women profited from the rise in status that came with age; an old woman had a much higher status than the young of either sex, and she controlled the

bringing up of grandchildren.” (deBeauvoir 1972:91-92)

S.B., a student, in referring to the writing of Confucius commented

*I found a verse in The Analects (1:6) where Confucius said:
‘A young man should serve his parents at home and be respectful
to elders outside the home. He should be earnest and truthful, loving
all, but become intimate with jen. After doing this, if he has energy
to spare, he can study literature and art’.*

(Confucius,2003).

<http://www.human.toyogakuenu.ac.jp/~acmuller/contao/analects.htm>

*I think that this scripture relates to my helping at Schowalter Villa
because working there we needed to be respectful of elders and love
them. From the Villa project, I learned to care for and respect frail
elders. This reminds me to care for my parents in the same way.*

In reflecting upon her experience A.P. wrote:

*I have learned how lonely many elders can get sometimes while
living in an institution such as the Villa. Their families are so far
away or the relatives live close by but never get to see the elders.
It is easy to understand that they feel unwanted sometimes. When
I helped at the Villa it seemed like the staff worked very hard to
care for the elders but I detected in the elder eyes that they would
have preferred family members to be with them. It really did them
good I think when college kids would and go and visit with them.
We might have reminded them of their own grandchildren or even
their kids when they were our age. Whatever the case, the college
kids seemed to bring a sense of joy to the eyes of the elders. I
learned quite a bit from my service at the Villa.*

A.P.’s comments remind us that American society doesn’t possess a high degree of filial piety. This concept to the degree that it is implemented in our society is typically institutionalized. The culture change movement noted earlier in this presentation is trying to restore filial piety to a greater extent within assisted living areas for frail elders.

Judaism

The Hebrew prophets seen in the Bible developed in bold terms the ideas of social justice. These individuals spoke words the world will never forget. While the

prophets Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah and other prophets came from a wide variety of backgrounds they shared one common belief. That is:

.... the conviction that every human being, simply by virtue of his or her humanity is a child of God and therefore in possession of rights that even Kings must respect....So it is that wherever men and women have gone to history for encouragement and inspiration in the age-long struggle for justice, they have found it more than anywhere else in the ringing proclamation of these prophets. (Smith 1991, p. 292)

The prophet Micah(6-8) said:

(The Lord).....has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justice, love kindness
And walk humbly with your God
To love God, walk humbly with thy Lord?
(*New American Standard Bible*, 1973, p. 1299)

Amos (5:24) reminds us to “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (*New American Standard Bible*, 1973, p.1283).

The ideas seen in Jewish scriptures are reflected in the following statement by T.L.:

The work I have done at the Villa has been very rewarding and I feel that The people I have worked for have appreciated my work and were glad to have me there. The people that I met during this project were people that I would not have met otherwise; they were very kind and needed my help By doing this project, I have learned that we have a responsibility as Christians to serve those that need our help;. I also learned of the great need that the frail elders have for someone to care for them. I have learned that sometimes the people who need the most help are those right next to our campus.

I learned a great amount of the wisdom that elders have and of the great history that is never taught in schools. I have learned that the last stage of life can be very difficult or very pleasant where there is some one who cares. I learned that there is still a great amount to do in culture change (social justice to be done in the name of frail elders) and what we students helped with at the Villa is just the beginning of something significant in terms of how frail elders are cared for.

S.O.'s comments reflect her change in attitude about frail elders. She sees their humanity – not their frailty. Sharon's thought reflects ideas seen in the Hebrew prophetic voices:

I learned a lot throughout my time of working at the Villa. One of the main things that I learned is about myself. I have never been comfortable around older people. Working at the Villa has been a humbling experience for me. All of my life I have been somewhat of a shy person and it is hard for me to strike up a conversation with people. Going to the Villa I have somewhat overcome that. I have learned that I can have a conversation with someone I don't know very well. Also, this experience shows that frail elders are normal people. I have always been a little of afraid of them. And by my going over to the Villa and having to interact with elders it has helped me overcome this fear. This is an experience I will never forget. It has helped me develop as a Christian. This is one of the first times that I have given up my time for someone else. It helped me overcome some of my pride.

Christianity

The Christian New Testament is replete with emphasis on compassion and love. Matthew 25: 31-46 is a classic scripture in terms of this subject. In this text, Jesus suggests that when we help the homeless, the naked, the poor, the outcast, we are serving him. In developing the theme of compassion Henri Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglass A. Morrison (1976, p.4) write:

The word *compassion* is derived from the Latin word *pati* and *cum* which together mean 'to suffer with'. Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish.....Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.

In commenting on Matthew 25, J.T wrote:

..... In (this scripture), Jesus talks about the importance of helping the hungry, the oppressed, the naked and the prisoner. He could just as well have been talking about the millions of frail older Americans who live out the last years of life in a nursing home. It is my impression that these elders often represent modern day lepers. I have learned that

patience is a virtue and this is a quality that I need to continue to work on. Frail elders need the same kind of treatment that we all do. They need to be accepted, appreciated, and feel like they are needed.. There were residents at the Villa that would talk to me about when they were in college or on the job and I really saw pride in their eyes when they talked about these things. Basically as a result of my time at the Villa I feel like I have a better, healthier understanding about frail elders.

Another Christian scripture which touches on the subject of this type of compassion and love is that seen in I Corinthians 13. The following are verses from this chapter.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I will become as a noisy gong or a clanging symbol (verse 1).
 Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous, love does not brag, love is not arrogant (verse 4).
 (Love) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (verse 7).
 Love never fails; but gifts (of all other types) will be done away (verse 8).
 But now abide faith, hope, and these three, but the greatest of these is love (verse 13).
 (New American Standard Bible, 1973, pp.268-269)

This scripture talks about the importance of love and how we are nothing without it. As someone said, this scripture reflects a theology of zero. Without this unconditional love), we are zero, nothing. Referring to this scripture as it relates to student work at the Villa, A.W. wrote:

I believe this relates to our work at Villa because we did it out of love. We helped out people who couldn't help out themselves. Love is what makes the world go round. I know from personal experience that when we went to the Villa, it was something the elders really looked forward to, it was one of their bright points of the day.

Islam

As with other world religions, compassion is at the heart of Islam. In the website "Compassion: Islamic Perspective", Asghar Ali Engineer (2003) writes:

Compassion represents the true spirit of Islam and is vital to Islamic teachings. Compassion means sensitivity to the condition or state of all creation, ie: human beings as well as animals and plants. A person cannot be compassionate unless he/she is sensitive to others' needs and conditions. There are certain key words in the Qur'an that are often repeated i.e. rahmah (compassion), ihsân (benevolence) 'adl (justice), and hikmah (wisdom). Rahmah (compassion, mercy) and its roots abound in the Holy Qur'an. Among Allah's own names are Rahmân and Rahîm (Compassionate and Merciful). A Muslim begins everything by reciting Bismillah al-Rahmân al-Rahîm (i.e. begin in the name of Allah Who is Compassionate and Merciful). Thus a Muslim is supposed to invoke Allah the Compassionate and Merciful at every step.
http://www.crescentlife.com/spirituality/compassion_islamic_perspective.htm

The Islamic holy book the Qur'an (1998) in Surah 4:36 reads:

Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good – to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are of kin neighbors who are strangers, the Companion by your side, the wayfarers (ye meet), and what your right hand possess: for Allah loves not the arrogant, the vainglorious;

In reflection on this scripture, J.C. said:

This scripture relates to my service at the Villa in several ways. It states that we need to do good to others. This verse tells us it doesn't matter if someone is old, rich, or poor, we should treat everyone equally and be good neighbors to all our neighbors. That is what I did helping frail elders and showing them the respect they deserve. It was not a service for money but a service based in a good cause. Indeed the Qur'an supports the idea of helping people who are in need and share what we have with the rest of the world.

In Surah107 in discussing neighborly needs the Qur'an (1998, p.579) states:

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

1. Seest thou one who denies the Judgement (to come).
2. Then such is the one who repulses the orphan,
3. And encourages not the feeding of the indigent.
4. So woe to the worshippers
5. Who are neglectful of their Prayers,
6. Those who (want but) to be seen,
7. But refuse (to supply) (even) neighborly needs.

Regarding this passage from the Qur'an, R.T. wrote:

I see this as saying woe to those who refuse to help others. This relates to my work at the Villa because what I was doing there was helping others who are in great need.

Summary

Throughout the spring term (2003) young adult students at Hesston College in my Applied Religions of the World and Introduction to Cultural Anthropology classes helped frail elder adults at Schowalter Villa. Student work was done within the context of culture change - changing the paradigm of care of elders within long term care facilities from the medical model to a person centered care model. This help included feeding the very frail and being a part of daily activities for Villa residents. Students reflected upon this involvement in terms of :

- the emergence of their own helping behavior;
- how might their services at Schowalter Vila influence their career choices;
- and their work in the light of the teaching from seven world religions.

In terms of the last point, this paper has attempted to show how love and compassion as seen in these religion are part of the students' work. Indeed, love and compassion, despite many differences in religions of the world, are quintessential virtues in the scriptures of these belief systems.

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