

P a u l T o u r n i e r A w a r d

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Introduction to Paul Tournier and his legacy

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Mr President, Mr Chairman,
dear colleagues,
ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to say some words in honour of Paul Tournier and his work he dedicated to „Médicine de la Personne“ on the occasion of this first awarding of the Paul Tournier Prize.

- ▶ 1900
- ▶ Orphan with 6 years
- ▶ Grown up in uncle's house



Paul Tournier ...

was born in 1898, two months before the decease of his father, a pastor at Geneva Cathedral. His mother also died when he was only six years old and he grew up in his uncle's home.

Being an orphan has shaped his youth and his life. The experience to lack maternal love and the presence and safety of a father gave him a special sensibility for persons who had to renounce to things that are "normal" and essential for a human being: community, love, family, security, but also health, a sense of life or just food and clothes.

After the First World War he was appointed by the Red Cross for two years to help in the repatriation of refugees. He studied human medicine in Geneva and opened a GP practice there in 1925.

Paul Tournier soon realized that the fast growing medical science, although having a great importance for the treatment of physical damages, did not respect the needs of human beings as a whole. Psychosomatic medicine wasn't known and nobody connected spiritual problems with physical illness at the time.



President of the Zofingia student association (in the middle)



- After the First World War
 - ▶ employee of International Red Cross
- In the Second World War
 - ▶ military doctor



During his military service in the Second World War Paul Tournier wrote his first and basic book "Medecine de la Personne", the first of 25 books that have shaped the medical attitude of many physicians and other caring persons in the second half of the 20th century.

What does Paul Tournier mean by 'Médecine de la Personne' – medicine of the person?

Médecine de la Personne

"Number"

- ▶ Anatomy
- ▶ Physiology
- ▶ Biochemistry
- ▶ Psychology
- ▶ Sociology
- ▶ I - it - relation



"Head"

- ▶ Relationship
- ▶ Communication
- ▶ Meaning of life
- ▶ Spirituality
- ▶ Face to face
- ▶ I - thou - relation



Let us hear his own words: "Like a coin may be seen from two sides – number or head – human beings have two faces: number and head – head is the person. And this person needs community, an authentic community from face to face. Anatomy, physiology, psychology and all the sciences are necessary but they are showing only one side of the world. There are two ways of finding awareness – that of intelligence and that of the heart."

The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber used the difference of the two relationships "I – It" and "I – Thou" to demonstrate these two ways to approach the world. The objective observing – and – the personal commitment for another I.

As a scientist, I can examine, observe, analyse and describe a tree, his leaves and his functions. But I may also speak to it, say "you" to it and make a person of it and bind me personally to him.

By the personal encounter one becomes a person and makes the other a person. Already a child is conscious to be a person when the parents are asking him: "What do you think about it yourself?" Instead of saying "One does this or that". He realizes that he has to face life as a responsible person and not to let it pass passively.

We know that we are at risk to become an anonymous little wheel in the great socio-economic machine, just a factor of production. When we are suddenly confronted with doctors, nurses, social workers, laboratory results, X-ray images, technical interventions because of an illness, it is normal to feel more as a case rather than a person.

But also as physicians, nurses, psychologists or other caregivers we are sometimes



Double task of the physician

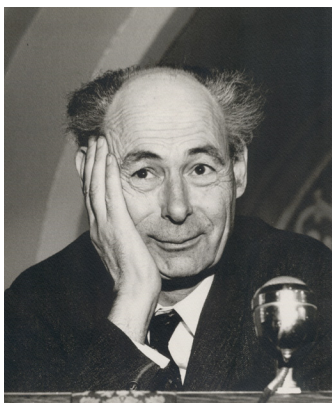
Optimal technical practice

- and* ... take the patient seriously
 ... understanding
 ... accompanying
 ... help to accept
 ... help to grow as a person
 ... not avoid difficult questions

limited to our best technical behaviour and routine, and untrained to return to be just human, a person.

So facing each patient, or each human, we have a double task. Of course, the first thing to fulfil is the technical job with all its possibilities. But the patient has a double need: First, to be treated corresponding to the best medical practice and second, not to be alone in the complex situation. Each illness or handicap is tied to plenty of losses and renunciations. Each revolt against it is a factor of aggravation and each acceptance one of healing. But acceptance is hard, to be understood, however, helps to accept.

Medicine of the Person is this double thoughtfulness of the case and of the person. The mission of the physician is to heal the illness but also to help the patient to grow as a person.



It signifies not only to console him in the difficult situation but to help him to be not only a little object pushed from one specialist to the other, but to challenge his own responsibility and cooperation to stay a person.

But also the physician is a person with his joys and sufferings, conflicts and preferences, successes and failures, faith and doubts. To be a partner in a dialogue signifies to accept to speak about personal problems.



It is rare that sooner or later the dialogue would not touch problems like 'why do I have to suffer? what is the meaning of life? What is justice in life?' C.G. Jung said "I have never treated a patient who did not feel spiritual questions to be important for him." Not to accept to speak about these questions would signify to reduce the

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- ▶ General practice from 1925 – 1937 in Geneva
- ▶ From 1938 – 1945 military physician
- ▶ 1940 "Médecine de la Personne"
- ▶ 1947 Medical association of German, French, Swiss, British, Dutch, physicians in Bossey
- ▶ 25 books translated into more than 30 languages
- ▶ Conferences all over the world

personal human dialogue and to avoid the assistance for central and personal questions.

Paul Tournier emphasizes that he doesn't mean proselytism in any direction but only to accompany the partner in all his sorrows and to share with him our thoughts as a response to his cry for help to the knowledge and to the heart. He says: "Médecine of the Person isn't a new method or technique, it is another attitude of the physician that respects in each medical relation the psychological, spiritual and sociological aspects too and is ready for a personal relation."

With his 25 books and other publications translated in many languages, by holding his conferences and in the annual meetings of the international association for the medicine of the person, Paul Tournier had a great influence on the understanding of person centered medicine since 1940 in Europe and all over the world.

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Médecine de la Personne
International Group

- ▶ Annual meetings in Europe
- ▶ Personal discussion groups
- ▶ Practical exchanges
- ▶ 2017 in Switzerland

www.medecinedelapersonne.org



We still continue the annual international meetings of the association. This year it will take place in Switzerland from 16th to 19th August 2017 and the topic will be "When medical care prejudices quality of life."

With the Paul-Tournier-award, we like to honour persons who contribute to make medicine human, to respect these two sides of the human being: the analysable part which is the object of science and the personal part, the side of relationship, meaning of life and spirituality, where doctor and patient meet on the same level face to face.

Thank you for having listened to me