

# The Wisdom of Howard Thurman

## A Biographical Sketch

Dr. Howard Thurman was born in 1900 and died in 1981. As a black man growing up in the South in the early part of this century he encountered racism in its most raw form. Raised by his mother and grandmother he was taught to "lean on the Lord." From these roots he entered on a distinguished career in ministry and also became a noted author. A spiritual companion to many, he particularly raised up the good news of Jesus' mission to the disinherited.

## The Challenge of a Prophet

"The significance of the religion of Jesus to people who stand with their backs against the wall has always seemed to me to be crucial...Why is it that Christianity seems impotent to deal radically, and therefore effectively, with the issues of discrimination and injustice on the basis of race, religion and national origin?"

## The Fear of the Poor

"The ever-present fear that besets the vast poor, the economically and socially insecure, is a fear of still a different breed...It is nowhere in particular yet everywhere. It is a mood which one carries around with himself, distilled from the acrid conflict with which his days are surrounded. It has its roots deep in the heart of the relations between the weak and the strong, between the controllers of the environment and those who are controlled by it."

## Coping Through Deception

"Deception is perhaps the oldest of all the techniques by which the weak have protected themselves against the strong. Through the ages, at all stages of sentient activity, the weak have survived by fooling the strong."

"Tremendous skill and power must be exercised to show to the disinherited the awful results of the role of negative deception into which their lives have been cast. How to do this is perhaps the greatest challenge that the religion of Jesus faces in modern life."

## A Hound of Hell Hate

"Christianity has been almost sentimental in its effort to deal with hatred in human life. It has sought to get rid of hatred by preachments, by moralizing, by platitudinous judgments. It has hesitated to analyze the basis of hatred and to evaluate it in terms of its possible significance in the lives of people possessed by it."

## The Word of the Religion of Jesus

"What then is the word of the religion of Jesus to those who stand with their backs against the wall? There must be the clearest possible understanding of the anatomy of the issue facing them. They must recognize fear, deception, hatred,

each for what it is. Once having done this, they must learn how to destroy these or to render themselves immune to their domination. In so great an undertaking it will become increasingly clear that the contradictions of life are not ultimate. The disinherited will know for themselves that there is a Spirit at work in life and in the hearts of men which is committed to overcoming the world. It is universal, knowing no age, no race, no culture, and no condition of men. For the privileged and underprivileged alike, if the individual puts at the disposal of the Spirit the needful dedication and discipline, he can live effectively in the chaos of the present the high destiny of a son of God"