



Who Is My Neighbor?, by Ivan Illich

Some thirty years ago, I went into sermons from the early third century into the nineteenth century dealing with this story of the Samaritan, and I found out that most preachers, when they comment on that passage, comment on it in order to show how we ought to behave towards our neighbor, when in fact this is the opposite of what Jesus, who tells that story of the Samaritan, wanted to point out.Â Â

The Pharisees came to ask Him, “Master, Teacher, tell us who is my neighbor?”Â Â They didn’t ask him, how does one behave to one’s neighbor?Â Â They asked him, point blank, the question: Who is the guy whom you call neighbor?Â Â

And he, as a story, told them a man was going down to Jericho, fell among robbers, was beaten up and left wounded.Â Â A teacher goes by, a priest goes by, sees him and walks on.Â Â And then an outsider comes along, the traditional enemy, and turns to the wounded man, as an internal turning, and picks him up, takes him into his arms and brings him to the inn.Â Â So he answers them, “My neighbor is whom I decide, not whom I have to choose.”Â Â

There is no way of categorizing who my neighbor ought to be. [...] The Master told them who your neighbor is is not determined by your birth, by your condition, by the language which you speak, by the “_ethnos_”, which means really the mode of walking which has become proper to you, but by you.Â Â You can recognize the other (hu)man who is out of bounds culturally, who is foreign linguistically, who “you can say by providence or by pure chance” is the one who lies somewhere along your road in the grass and create the supreme form of relatedness which is not given by creation but created by you.