

BOOK REVIEW

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY: AN INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

Written by Thor Johansen, Psy.D.

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Reviewed by Erik Mansager

The first full-length publication on the topic of Individual Psychology and religion is an important accomplishment. Dr. Johansen is to be commended for his dedication to the theme, the attempted thoroughness of the topic and for his willingness to put forward a presentation for consideration by clinical professionals as well as by the professional psychology of religion and spirituality community (see Rosen, 2012, this issue).

Having been asked by the publisher to be an initial reviewer of the manuscript, I shared the following review which focuses on the book's theoretical, theological and pastoral aspects.

Theoretical Concerns.

My first observation is that the author understands Rudolf Dreikurs very well -- and the publications of his students, yet he actually uses Adler relatively little. Adler and Dreikurs are not synonymous with one another. This is all the more apparent with the availability of the *Collected Clinical Works of Alfred Adler* (Stein, 2002-2006) in print for a number of years now. That this 12 volume collection is not mentioned in the overview (Chapter 2) is a professional gaff of some magnitude. The author's reliance on Dreikurs clearly leans the book in a more cognitive

direction and misses almost all the depth and nuance of Adler. I'll offer an example.

The author states, "Adlerians believe that people move in the direction of belongingness" (p. 26). This sentence is a famous Dreikursian formulation while the rest of the paragraph uses Adler's formulations to support it, but it comes across as somewhat incoherent rather than convincing: "We all want to belong, to feel important and significant." The striving for significance is what Adler posited as the primary motivation of human beings. This is not the same as belonging. Rather, belonging is only one way to enact significance. One can also feel belonging via gangland criminality. I don't know if this sounds petty or not to non-Adlerians, but the discussion about "significance" and "belonging" is a well published controversy among the IP community.

Surely there is nothing wrong with the author being more Dreikursian than Adlerian. The Dreikurs/Adler debate is a healthy professional one and if it were utilized here, it could show the richness and diversity of the theory the book purports to bring to a pastoral audience. But instead, the mixing of the two reads to me as if the author is trying to diminish or ignore the controversy – or worse, is unaware of it.

More generally on the level of Adlerian theory, the text reads unevenly and indecisively. References to the life tasks, for example, alternate between being enumerated as five and then as three. An important paragraph in Chapter 1 (p. 18) lays out the difficulty fairly enough. I was expecting to see the life task discussion clearly stated and hoped it might be added to. In Chapter 2, in fact, there is a wonderful opportunity to do so (see "The Tasks of Life section," pp. 33-36). Instead, the author

initially offers Adler's primary theoretical components but appends the Dreikurs-Mosak five tasks. No mention is made of the professional literature that expands them still further – to six, twelve and even 20 – including some spiritually focused ones. So why the “infamous five”? Of course, because it serves the purpose. Fine and good, but it leaves the question about what else has been redacted to fit the author's leanings? This problem appears again in the theological arena.

As for the five life tasks, in Chapter 4 on Christianity, he addresses the spiritual task but then refers to the “existential task of coping with oneself” (p. 77). This is an unfortunate choice of wording since the Adlerian literature on these extended life tasks identify the “existential task” with spirituality not with “coping with self.” Be that as it may, if the author had taken a clear and decisive stand one could agree with him or not. Instead, in the other-than-Christian religious chapters (Judaism, Islam, Hindu and Buddhism) there is no further mention of the extra life tasks - - only the original three are referenced.

Theological Concerns.

The place where spirituality is taken up by Adlerians is certainly an interesting theoretical issue – and the author works mightily to demonstrate its practical implications. One would hope in the first major book to address the matter, there might be more clarity than confusion on this point. Shouldn't there be some innovation especially in this book? Instead there is an uneven reporting of the Adlerian literature, as if to support the conservative Christian stance on biblical interpretation and suspicion of psychology. Adler seems to be put forward as

something of a trustworthy psychologist in a field of the unfaithful (see “Developing Credibility among the Faithful,” pp. 13-15). To me, this comes across as demeaning to the decades of authentic pastoral care efforts and publications that the conservative Christians regularly overlook.

Regarding this conservative bent, I was disappointed to read the un-nuanced contrast in Chapter 6 on Judaism that “Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the literal Son of God” (p. 100). This may seem standard fare to the author, but a good number of readers are going to be theologically-astute and, in fact, literalists are not necessarily in the majority on this issue. There are salient discussions even in moderate conservative churches about what “Son of God” meant. For example, it was already understood as an honorific title (as with King David). Also, paternity by a non-gendered spirit, even if called “Father” is not without difficulties. Finally, I found it ironic that most of the specific Christian denominations that take a strong literalist view of this (such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Latter Day Saints) are not mentioned at all in this chapter – and by some accounts the Mormons are the fastest growing segment of the Christian body – at least in North America.

Pastoral Concerns.

Herein lies the most serious of my concerns. While the many case presentations stand as a strength of the book, I was not moved by any of them. They seemed staid and simplistic, show little of the struggle that the client (or the therapist) goes through to arrive at solutions. As such they sometimes seem like cookie-cutter approaches.

Still more disturbing is the section on homosexuality in Chapter 6 (pp. 113-114). I cannot understand why it is added here. The author seems uneasy about the matter. While he courageously addresses women's inequality in Chapters 6 (on Judaism), 7 (on Islam), and 8 (on Hinduism), stating Adler's insistence on the matter, it is peculiar to find in Chapter 6 – and so much negativity. Johansen does not address homosexuality in the other religious sections.

This was a prime opportunity to show the strength of the current Adlerian struggle to be as humane as our theory dictates (see *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, 64:2); but nothing is said. There is no kind word to therapist or client – and surely some of the readers will be lesbians or gay men. This unwound the rest of the book for me as this section comes across as thoughtless and potentially cruel.

Conclusion.

The book is important as an initial full-length attempt to show how Adlerian approaches can impact pastoral counseling. Its summaries of the religions are manageably brief and helpful. Unfortunately, the predisposed conservative Christian presentation leads the reader to wonder if the other religious presentations are also biased.