
Pro Rege

Volume 4 | Number 4

Article 8

June 1976

Sensation of Being Somebody (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Buckham, Richard (1976) "Sensation of Being Somebody (Book Review),"

Pro Rege: Vol. 4: No. 4, 30.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol4/iss4/8

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mental in TM that is not present in other contemporary man-centered ideologies. Many of the same assumptions are made about the source of man's problems, about the nature of man (fundamentally Aristotelian, dualistic, rationalistic), and about the solution to these problems. However, it does seem that people are helped by TM, assuming the veracity of the personal testimonies cited in the text. It is not surprising, therefore, that people are attracted to TM.

There is a lesson here for Christians. Are we in fact so principial that we miss out on the psychic and behavioral fulfillment which is available to us as children of God, so that non-Christians do not see this peace and wholeness as a possibility in the Christian life? Let us pray that people will turn from TM and other humanist technologies and be attracted to a personal relationship in Christ with the living God because of the fruits of the Spirit and the total fulfillment they see manifested amongst Christians.

The Sensation of Being Somebody--by Maurice Wagner. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975, 251 pages. Reviewed by Richard Buckham, Instructor in Psychology.

This book, like many others currently being published, is concerned with the Christian's self-experience and matters related thereto. From a Reformed perspective, see A. Hoekema's recent, and excellent, The Christian Looks at Himself (Eerdmans, 1975). The "self" has, of course, always been there, but the Zeitgeist, in North America anyway, found special manifestation in the emphasis on self-experience and subjectivism. Witness the rise of the existential and humanistic psychologies, the philosophy and psychology of consciousness, the influence of "self" concepts in personality theory, social psychology, and psychotherapy, and the "cult of the self" in our culture. In the light of this, it is apropos that Christians confront the problem of the self.

There are three parts to Wagner's book. Part One, "What We Are," is an explication of the way we think about ourselves, what our basic self-identity needs are, and the mental processes to be engaged in for accomplishing an adequate self-concept. All that Wagner discusses in this section is an accurate portrayal of emotional malfunctioning due to an inadequate self-concept. What I find disconcerting in this section, and in the entire book, is an emphasis on

man as a thinking self: notice his emphasis on mental processes, on self-concept as a mental picture, on re-thinking ourselves, on the need for a spiritual dimension in our thinking, and so on. I will return to this theme later.

Part Two, "How We Become What We Are," is the most disappointing part of the book. In his explication of the development of the self-concept during childhood and later years, Wagner seems to utilize an eclectic psychoanalytic perspective. There are definite allusions to Freud, Adler, Jung, Horney, and contemporary psychoanalytic ego psychology. The child is presented as being a basically hedonistic and manipulatory organism that, in effect, learns to be rational, social, and autonomous, i.e., human. I do not find it helpful for Christians to utilize Aristotelian and other humanist perspectives, even in a "baptized" fashion. I find a far better analysis of the mother-child relationship (and related matters) in MacMurray's Persons in Relation (Faber and Faber, 1961).

Part Three, "What We Can Become," in spite of the above-mentioned emphasis on man as a thinking self, is Wagner's best discussion. He realizes that the Christian life should be one of emotional fulfillment and that this is in fact possible. He is cognizant of the cruciality of the old-self-new-self split (Romans 7), and of the importance of partaking of that which is available to us as Christians in being more than conquerors over that which would hinder or prevent our full emotional development and positive self-identity. There are many beautiful insights in this part of the book.

In summary, speaking of man in such mentalistic terms hinders rather than facilitates an adequate Christian understanding of this whole matter called self-experience. Wagner's anthropology is at fault here. As to the old-self-new-self struggle, I find a far more radical and adequate analysis in Galen Sharp's The Present Kingdom of God (Revell, 1974). However, Sharp's analysis is also vitiated by a confusing anthropology.

To conclude, I cannot recommend this book as shedding any light on the problem of the self. Wagner does, however, provide some interesting practical understanding of the dynamics of self-experience. It is interesting that several contemporary secular philosophers have emphasized the centrality and significance of psychic struggle and opposition as indicators of the self (see esp. Johnstone, The Problem of the Self, 1971). I find this supportive of the Christian view that man is not his own, as it were, but is the locus of a struggle between the powers of darkness and the powers of light, even in the very heart of man.