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Unconscious God (Book Review)

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Book Reviews

by John M. Zinkand

The Unconscious God, by Viktor Frankl. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1975. Reviewed by Richard Buckham, Instructor in Psychology.

The Unconscious God contains two major parts: seven short chapters (which constituted the 1947 German edition of this English translation) dealing with Frankl's notion of "unconscious religion" and the broader question of the interrelation between psychotherapy and theology, and a "Postscript 1975" that offers an extended introduction to recent research in logotherapy ("meaning")-therapy. The book also contains a fairly exhaustive bibliography of English publications on logotherapy.

Frankl is probably best known for his book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959), in which he describes his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp and his recognition of man's "need" for meaning if he is to "survive" and live a fulfilled life. An adequate description of Frankl's system and a somewhat adequate critique of it can be found in Shea's "On the Place of Religion in the Thought of Viktor Frankl," *Journal of Theology and Psychology*, 1975, 3, 179-86.

Frankl recognizes that humans, by definition, must or will trust (defining "belief" and "faith") in something as their ultimate ground of meaning. Although Frankl sees this trusting as unique to humans, it is understood in terms of an anthropocentric search for meaning, rather than the response of man to God in either broken (idolatrous) or re-newed relationships. "Religion" is defined as man's search for ultimate meaning. However, "religion," for Frankl, is only a dimension of human existence, not the very condition and framework of that existence.

This criticism (of Frankl's anthropocentrism) is not to deny the presence and importance of personal meaning and distortions thereof in the God-man, man-man, man-self, and man-world relations that constitute the fabric of human existence. Frankl's writings certainly contribute to an understanding of at least the former three relations. But his anthropocentric view of "religion" will not do.

Frankl's discussion of the "spiritual unconscious" recognizes the depth dimension of human life: "Existence is essentially unconscious, because the foundation of existence is never and cannot be fully reflected upon and thus cannot be fully aware of itself" (p. 26). Furthermore, human existence cannot be fully analyzed. It seems to me that Frankl is correct here. Just as God cannot be known in himself (an onto-theology), so man's core or depth dimension can be known only in terms of "its" acts.

Frankl also sees the importance of responsibility in human existence, although his view is again anthropocentric; i.e., responsibility is seen primarily as for-oneself (toward authentic personal existence), rather than for God and our neighbor.

In his chapter on "unconscious religiousness," Frankl extends his analysis of the spiritual unconscious to say that man stands in a latent (if not manifest) relation to transcendence, a relation between an immanent "self" and a transcendent "thou." Unfortunately, Frankl is not sure what this transcendent "thou" is (one may call it "God"). At any rate, this transcendental unconscious is not—contrary to some current views—a pantheistic extension, a source of omniscient knowledge, or an impersonal "religious" drive or force in man. Frankl is certainly right at this point. Further, his insights

into the spiritual unconscious or depth dimension of man's relation to God are certainly worth considering. This understanding of "unconscious religiousness" may help Christians explicate how it is that non-Christians are religiously directed, are idolatrous, and yet not always in a manifestly conscious way. It might also help Christians obtain a fuller appreciation of our depth-relation with God.

Namibia, by Colin O'Brien Winter, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1977. Reviewed by Arnold Koekkoek, Associate Professor of History.

Namibia is the land we used to call South West Africa, and Colin O'Brien Winter is the Anglican Bishop in Exile of that territory, his diocese being known as Damaraland. A German colony before World War I, Namibia was entrusted in mandate by the League of Nations to the Union of South Africa "to develop the country for the well-being of all the inhabitants." What has happened, instead, is the exploitation of the black population and the natural resources of the land for the economic benefit of the white settlers and European-American investors. The iniquitous apartheid system has been imposed by the South African government, and Namibian blacks are treated even less fairly than those in the Union of South Africa itself. Bishop Winter gives a brief account of Namibia's history before telling of his own and co-workers' experiences and difficulties in trying to minister to both white and black Christians in the face of increasing opposition and outright persecution. Winter was banished in 1972 because of his outspoken opposition to apartheid and its associated evils.

This is not a scholarly book in the usual sense. It is not the product of careful library research, there are none of the usual footnotes, and it does not purport to be an objective study of Namibian history. Instead, this is a personal memoir, an eyewitness account, a heart-cry for Christians to act to bring justice to Namibia. Naturally, then, this is a passionate book. Winter worked and struggled in Namibia for thirteen years, and the evils, injustices, persecutions, white indifference and black suffering that he observed and experienced in those thirteen years burn in his soul.

Yet, for all its passion, this is also a sober book, for it does not contain flamboyant rhetoric, a call to arms, or any incitement to revolt. It is not a piece of yellow journalism. Winter simply tells the truth about Namibia and

his frustrated attempts to minister to his people there. Therein lie both the sobriety and the passion.

Perhaps most telling of all is Winter's indictment of the churches and the Christians in South Africa and Namibia. Whether out of indifference or fear, they have been responsible for many of the evils or have refused to act in opposition to them. Sad to say, it is the Calvinist Christians of South Africa—and Winter, to his credit, never questions their Christianity, though well he might—who have instituted and perpetrated the wrongs done in Namibia. And the whites in Namibian churches, whether Lutheran, Anglican, or Dutch Reformed, have cravenly acquiesced. If ever there were time and place for Christians to live as well as profess the Name and teachings of Christ it is here; yet clearly most of the church people have not done so.

The book has its shortcomings. There are a few typographical errors. Two different figures are given for the population of Windhoek, the capital city. At times the material gets a bit repetitious and drawn out. But generally the narrative and description flow along in easily read and straightforward style. And though this is not a great book, it is worth reading and pondering. It makes one angry. It should make a Christian ashamed. What is happening in far-off Namibia is not a matter to which we can be indifferent. Winter suggests what people in other countries might do to help Namibia. (See, for example, pp. 45 ff. and pp. 209 ff.) We may not like or agree with the author's suggestions, but we need to consider them. Above all, we may not simply brush Namibia aside.

How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture by Francis A. Schaeffer, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 288 pages, \$12.95. Reviewed by John M. Zinkand, Professor of Classical Languages.

This work is available with a study guide prepared by Jeremy C. Jackson (requested from the publisher but never received). "How Should We Then Live?" is also a ten-episode film and television series produced by Gospel Films, Muskegon, Michigan, under the direction of Franky A. Schaeffer V, Son of the author of the book.

Schaeffer, prolific author and founder of L'Abri ("the shelter," in Huémoz, Switzerland, which now has branches in other European,