

NYU POSTDOCTORAL PROGRAM IN PSYCHOTHERAPY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES:

THE CHRISTIAN NARRATIVE

PDPSA.4586.003

Marie Hoffman, PhD

RATIONALE

This course is conceptualized as part of a series of course offerings on the interface of psychoanalysis and religious narratives. Courses such as “Buddhism and Psychoanalysis”, “Judaism and Psychoanalysis”, “Islam and Psychoanalysis,” etc., may all potentially be part of such offerings. The present course addresses “Psychoanalysis and the Christian Narrative.”

In a 2010 Gallup poll, nearly 77% of the United States population self-identified as Christian, one in three US citizens considering themselves Evangelical Christian. In a 2009 Newsweek poll, 85% of US Citizens did not doubt the existence of God. These statistics point to the vast population in this country who will present to our offices seeking help, and understanding it through a specific, religiously tinged cultural lens.

The vision of this course is two-fold – historical/theoretical/philosophical, and clinical:

Historical/theoretical/philosophical

1) To familiarize candidates to some historical, theoretical, and philosophical continuities and discontinuities between the discourses of psychoanalysis and the Christian narrative.

Material will be presented suggesting that the current relational turn has been, in part, influenced by an embedded religious narrative appearing most clearly in the contemporary work of Jessica Benjamin, but traceable throughout the history of psychoanalysis to people associated with Jewish and Christian narratives.

Clinical

2) To heighten the understanding of analysts to the distinctives of American Christianity and its impact on the thinking of a Christian patient.

Guidelines will be suggested on what may either enhance or destroy a psychoanalytic treatment with a person of Christian faith, explaining intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting treatment, as well as offering cautions and modifications for specific sub-groups.

SYLLABUS

This course seeks to explore the interface between the discourses of psychoanalysis and the Christian narrative from historical, theoretical/philosophical, and clinical perspectives. The main text for the course will be my book, *Toward Mutual Recognition: Relational Psychoanalysis and the Christian Narrative* (Routledge: Relational Perspectives Book Series, 2011), and excerpts from my forthcoming book, *When the Roll Is Called: Trauma and the Soul of American Evangelicalism*, (Cascade: 2016). Supplementary readings and videos will be assigned.

The course will meet over two Saturdays to afford time for the readings, and will be offered for one credit. The hours on both Saturdays will be from 10:00 am to 5:15 pm.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

Saturday March 4th

Part I: 10:00am – 1:00pm

The session will cover the early history of psychoanalysis as it has related to the Christian narrative. It will begin with an overview of the forces at play culturally in a Europe dominated by a politicized Christianity. In that Europe that formed Freud's surround, anti-Semitism and secularism will be discussed as contributors to the formation of Freud's thinking. Freud's early experiences with the Christian narrative, both positive and negative, will be detailed.

Freud's antipathy for religion will be shown to have become reified in psychoanalytic theory to the extent that the faith background of many analysts went unrecognized. This session will turn to a focus on analysts in early psychoanalysis who were influenced by the Christian narrative and who incarnated aspects of that influence into the body of their works.

Required Reading:

Toward Mutual Recognition: Relational Psychoanalysis and the Christian Narrative (TMR) pp. 1-10; 65-95; 129-147; 183- 213.

Sorenson, A. L. (1990). Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Religion: The Illusion Has a Future. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 18, No. 3: 209-217. [Anita.Sorenson.pdf](#)

Optional Reading:

Aron, L. (2004). God's influence on my psychoanalytic vision and values. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 21: 442-451.

Frampton, M. F. (1991). Considerations on the Role of Brentano's Concept of Intentionality in Freud's Repudiation of the Seduction Theory. *Int. Rev. Psycho-Anal.* 18: 27-36.

Freud, S. (1927). *The Future of an Illusion*. SE 21, 3-56, (Available through PEP archive).

Hopkins, B. (1989). Jesus and Object-Use: A Winnicottian Account of the Resurrection Myth. *Int. R. Psycho-Anal.* 16:93-100.

Kierkegaard, S. (1847). *Works of Love*. (H. Hong & E. Hong, Trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Roazen, P. (1993). The Illusion of a Future. *Int. Jour. of Psycho-Anal.*, 74, 559-579. (Translation of Oskar Pfister's response to Freud.)

Sorenson, R. (2004). *Minding Spirituality*, Chapter One.

Learning Objectives:

1. Candidates will be able to describe the impact of anti-Semitism on Freud's thinking.
2. Candidates will be able to identify analysts who were influenced by their religious backgrounds.
3. Candidates will be able to describe the relationship between certain psychoanalytic theories and the religious backgrounds of the theorists.
4. Candidates will be able to differentiate analysts who were "adapters" from those who were "reactors."

Saturday March 4th:

Part II: 2:00 pm – 5:15 pm

In this segment, the focus will shift to the theoretical and philosophical confluences between contemporary psychoanalysis and the Christian narrative. The work of Jessica Benjamin and her resourcing of G. W. F. Hegel will be explored. The movements toward mutual recognition which are conceptualized as *identification, surrender, and gratitude*, will be shown as analogous to the theological trilogy of *incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection*. Special emphasis will be placed on the role religious narratives may play in the development of theory, in this case the understanding of "gratitude."

Required Reading:

TMR: pp. 10-35; 99-113.

Hoffman, M. (2015). Beyond Alterity: The Path to Gratitude. In D. Goodman & E. Severson (Eds.). *Psychology and the Other*. London: Oxford Press.
[../Documents/Beyond Alterity- The Path to Gratitude.pdf](#)

Optional Reading:

Benjamin, J. (1990). Recognition and destruction: An outline of intersubjectivity. In L. Aron & S. Mitchell (Eds.), *Relational psychoanalysis: The emergence of a tradition* (pp. 181-210). Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.

Ricoeur, P. (2005). *The course of recognition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Learning Objectives:

1. Candidates will be able to explain the use of G. W. F. Hegel in the theory of recognition of Jessica Benjamin.
2. Candidates will be able to identify the religious subtext of Winnicott's *Use of an Object* and its application in Benjamin's theory.
3. Candidates will be able to recognize and describe major confluences between contemporary psychoanalysis and the Christian narrative.

WEEK 2:

Saturday March 11th

Part I: 10:00 am- 1:00 pm

The course moves to clinical issues. Excerpts of the highly publicized film, *Left Behind* (2000), that has both radically influenced the minds of evangelical Christians but also created an indelible stereotype of that community will be shown and discussed.

The traumatic roots of American Christian fundamentalism will be explored and the effects of this transformation of the Christian narrative will be elucidated.

Required Reading:

Hoffman, M. (2014). Conflict and Trauma Underlying Fundamentalism. Paper delivered at APA, Div. 39, 2014.

[Conflict and Trauma Underlying Fundamentalism.2.pdf](#)

(open as HTML document)

Optional Reading:

Hoffman, M. (2016, forthcoming). *When the Roll Is Called: Trauma and the Soul of American Evangelicalism*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.

Saturday March 11th

Part II: 2:00 pm – 5:15 pm

The course continues its focus on clinical issues. The theological differences within the Christian community will be detailed and major Christian sub-groups such as sacramental, liturgical, rational, charismatic, emergent, evangelical and fundamental will be described.

Specific sensibilities of the Christian population will be detailed with a view to delineating their impact on the treatment process. The anthropological assumptions that a psychoanalyst who holds to the Christian narrative may bring to his/her patient's treatment, will be offered. An examination of one clinical case will be undertaken, identifying those aspects of the treatment that are particularly relevant to an understanding of the Christian narrative.

There will be time for concluding commentary and discussion.

Required Reading:

TMR: 37–39.

Sorenson, R. (2004). *Minding Spirituality*. Chapter 5.

Optional Reading:

Jones, J. (1991). *Contemporary Psychoanalysis and religion: Transference and Transcendence*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Rizzuto, A. (1979). *The Birth of the Living God*. Selected portions

Sorenson, R. (2004). *Minding Spirituality*. Chapter 4.

Learning Objectives:

1. Candidates will be able to describe traumatic roots of American Christian fundamentalism.
2. Candidates will be able to identify major denominational differences in the Christian community.
3. Candidates will be able to describe the particularly salient clinical issues specific to each denominational group.
4. Candidates will be able to apply material to cases through sharing vignettes.