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Book Review

Eternal Values and Personal Growth: A Guide on Your Journey to Spiritual, Emotional, and Social Wellness, by Allen E. Bergin. Provo, UT: BYU Studies <<http://www.byustudies.byu.edu>>, 2002. x+274 pages, references, index. ISBN 0-8425-2511-4, paper, \$29.95

REVIEWED BY: ERIC G. SWEDIN PHD

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The psychologist Allen E. Bergin PhD is known individually or through his research and writings to many AMCAP members. It is no exaggeration to describe Dr. Bergin as the grandfather of modern LDS psychology. A convert to the church, his faith and scholarship since the early 1970s have been combined in a sustained effort to promote theistic views within mainstream psychology and to understand human behavior through a combination of secular knowledge and LDS theology. He served as president of AMCAP in 1980-1981. The American Psychological Association awarded him the prestigious *Distinguished Professional Contributions to Knowledge* award in 1989, citing him as a "leading expert in psychotherapy research" and for challenging "psychological orthodoxy to emphasize the importance of values and religion in therapy" (American Psychological Association, 1990, p. 474).

Dr. Bergin collaborated with P. Scott Richards PhD [AMCAP Vice-President, 2001-2003] on two recent books: *A Spiritual Strategy for Counseling and Psychotherapy* (1997) and the *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Religious Diversity* (2000). Dr. Bergin retired from BYU in 1999, served a full-time mission, and published the present book in 2002.

Whereas *A Spiritual Strategy for Counseling and Psychotherapy* was academic in tone and laid down

suggestions for future research, *Eternal Values and Personal Growth* is both a workbook for classes as well as a self-help book. Dr. Bergin acknowledges the assistance of co-authors in every chapter (Sally H. Barlow PhD, Mark H. Butler PhD, Valerie M. Hudson PhD, Daniel K. Judd PhD, Kenneth W. Matheson DSW, P. Scott Richards PhD, Alma Don Sorenson PhD, and Diane Spangler PhD). This book is useful for Latter-day Saints striving to overcome minor psychological problems that impede their spiritual development, an example of the "cure of souls" (Featherstone, 1975) wherein the reader-student is guided toward greater spirituality and a stronger relationship with the Lord through spiritual and psychological exercises.

This book is not for Latter-day Saints who have clinical disorders and require professional intervention. Clinical disorders are defined as the "loss of self-determination" (p. 87). Even so, a psychotherapist sensitive to the LDS context can be of significant help to a healthy client, since even minor psychological problems can block a person from realizing his/her full potential.

Dr. Bergin dedicates this book to Elder Neal A. Maxwell, which is especially appropriate considering how much Maxwell's teachings on discipleship permeate the book – and Maxwell's long-standing support for research into LDS psychology (Hafen, 2002). The themes of agency, identity, integrity, power and intimacy permeate the book. Dr. Bergin notes that "the more enlightened we become about the shaping forces around us and inside us, the freer we become" (p. 6). In keeping with this sentiment, he does not shy away from potentially controversial issues such as sexual orientation, gender roles, discrimination, abuse and unrighteous dominion. Many of these issues are familiar to members of AMCAP.

As a historian, I am struck by the change in attitudes toward homosexuality over the past few decades. Dr. Bergin states: "most Latter-day Saint experts in human behavior agree that a strong preference for the same sex is not chosen but develops early in life and

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becomes prominent in adolescence” (p. 68). Unfortunately, “many priesthood leaders are not informed about same-sex attraction and may counsel members awkwardly or insensitively” (p. 69). Dr. Bergin believes that rates of homosexual *reparation* (see Nicolosi, 1991, 1997; Byrd, 2000) are good for individuals with bisexual tendencies, although “our knowledge remains limited” and “those with exclusive homosexual arousal and no heterosexual arousal have low rates of [reparative] success” (p. 208).

Some other quotes – pearls of wisdom from Dr. Bergin – accentuate the approach of the book:

- Discernment is necessary as we apply both inspired teachings and secular wisdom. (27)
- For some people, pathological circumstances, evil environments, or biological defects can cause severe problems to become deeply embedded at an early age – before there is any chance for the developing child to alter them by exercising agency. (34)
- From a Latter-day Saint perspective, it might be difficult to reconcile clinical evidence that unconscious processes are real with gospel concepts that we can choose our thoughts and behavior. (44)
- The combined power of eternal spiritual truths and inspired professional intervention provides hope for everyone that our eternal identity can shine forth brilliantly, providing light where darkness once reigned. (46)
- Fortunately, the devaluing of girls and women in Western culture has been countered gradually for about 150 years by movements supporting women’s dignity and equality. Although some elements of these movements have been problematic, their core values are positive. (65)
- Social conditioning, a form of control, is benevolent when it provides reasonable structure and protection so a child can safely mature in his or her capacity to reason and make choices. (86)
- To have full command of oneself is the ultimate freedom. With godly mastery of self comes peace, righteous achievement, and harmony with self, others, and God. To reach this high level of personhood, we must learn step-by-step to regulate our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. (112)
- Unrighteous anger will destroy us, while righteous anger is an important part of the healing process. (136)
- Modern revelation tells us that there are eternal differences between woman and man ... The differences between the sexes have often been used to position men above women, but a true God-like perspective does not allow this view. (157-158)
- Because Church decisions come from the top down, there are more opportunities for abuse than in more democratic organizations. All members of the Church should understand that they are not required to submit to unethical, immoral, or other unrighteous abuses of power, including verbal or emotional abuse. Abuse must be addressed. (166)
- We are so surrounded by gospel-alien cultures of power that it is easy to believe we have little choice but to participate in “the system” as it is. Even spiritually healthy people can be seduced and trapped by corrupt power structures and cultures. (178-179)
- *love is lawful*. Although deep, inner feelings are at its core, real love requires a firm, benevolent structure to surround it, just as civic laws give structure to community life and freedom to those who abide by them. True love exists within a framework of principles. (191)
- Regular forgiveness is vital to the health of any good relationship, especially marriage and family relationships. (197)
- God-ordained roles for the sexes should never become straightjackets upon the souls of God’s children. Intimacy and growth are impaired when men and women narrowly constrain their roles. (198)
- Most will need *both a medical specialist and a sex therapist who are trained and competent* in treating these problems. We emphasize the importance of confronting sexual problems and consulting professionals rather than relying on spiritual means alone. (207)
- In healthy, godly intimacy, each partner makes a deliberate choice to consecrate himself or herself to the welfare of the marriage by caring for, celebrating, and enlarging each other. (216)
- A transitional person is one who rejects the unhealthy or evil family patterns of previous generations and sets a new course for future generations by adopting healthy and godly patterns ... The transitional person exemplifies Christlike love by becoming a participant with the Lord in helping to redeem others. (229)
- *Eternal identity is strengthened by integrity and righteous action, including service, self-sacrifice, and sincere repentance. It is also strengthened through loving relationships, family kinship, social ties, and responsibilities.* (246)

- As we seek to be congruent with our values, we must be careful to avoid over-control and perfectionism ... if we feel guilty, we can think through in an honest and non self-punishing way what we did that triggered the guilt. (249)

The psychology espoused in this book is heavily influenced by client-centered and humanistic psychology; the writings of theoretical giants such as Carl R. Rogers (1902-1987), Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), and Erik H. Erikson (1902-1994) are often drawn upon. The positive ideal of the individual as being able to self-heal is a characteristic of humanistic psychology, as are the ideals of self-realization and self-actualization.

Dr. Bergin describes the work of the BYU philosopher Dr. C. Terry Warner (2001) as "the best existing analysis of self-deception in relation to prescriptions for a life of integrity" (p. 139), and draws on Dr. Victor L. Brown's (1981) concept of intimacy and illusions when discussing sexuality.

In many ways, this book (Bergin, 2002) is really a workbook for the earlier, more theoretical book, *A Spiritual Strategy for Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Richards & Bergin, 1997), and is another example of integration drawing on theories and insights from both secular and spiritual sources. I strongly recommend all LDS helping professionals read both books.

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