

BOOK REVIEWS



Russell Siler Jones, *Spirit in Session: Working with Your Client's Spirituality (and Your Own) in Psychotherapy* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2019), 275 pp.

Russell Siler Jones has emerged as a leader of the newly formed Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy task force of the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE). Last year about 900 or so pastoral counselors made the transition from the American Association of Pastoral Counselors to the ACPE after the dissolution of AAPC. Now identifying themselves as spiritually integrated psychotherapists (without the word “pastoral” in their name), their first task has been to define (again) who they are. What is “spiritually integrated psychotherapy,” and how is it distinctive in the modern pantheon of psychotherapies? *Spirit in Session* is the first significant answer to this question. It is a clear, readable, ethical, and practical guidebook for what it looks like to practice as a spiritually integrated psychotherapist today. The book’s publication by Templeton Press and its many impressive endorsements on the jacket only underscore this volume’s importance and suggests that its intended audience is even larger than ACPE.

Jones defines spirituality very broadly as all of the ways that “you and God relate to each other” (he also uses the term “God” very broadly as a symbol of an ultimate mystery). He argues that spirituality is primarily an experience, both a personal experience and at the same time something that

Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry

ISSN 2325-2847 (print)* ISSN 2325-2855 (online)

* © Copyright 2020 *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*
All Rights Reserved

is universal to all humans. Spirituality is to be distinguished from being religious, which is more external, social, and particular. In this way, this book is quite interfaith or transfaith in its orientation. Jones argues that spirituality is broader than "God talk." It is implicit as well as explicit in therapeutic conversations. He suggests that therapists are having spiritual conversations with clients much more often than they realize and that every client is spiritual even if they do not acknowledge it.

Jones argues that the role of the spiritually integrated psychotherapist is to work with a client's spiritual resources, which can be explicit or implicit and internal or external. The task of the therapist is to strengthen the client's existing spiritual resources, to reconnect the client with forgotten resources, and/or to open space for new spiritual resources. He offers verbatims that illustrate all of these tasks. In this regard, Jones describes various kind of spiritual struggles, a concept he borrows from Ken Pargament. The task of the therapist is not to resolve the client's struggle but to accompany them on their journey. He does provide some helpful principles that guide this accompaniment.

Jones makes a strong case for the importance of listening to and understanding the client's spirituality, working within her or his framework, and not imposing, intentionally or unintentionally, the therapist's own spiritual assumptions or practices on the client. Toward that end, part three of the book is devoted to exploring the therapist's own spirituality as a source of both help and potential harm to the client. In this context, Jones introduces readers to the term/concept "spiritual countertransference." I suspect the term will catch on in the literature as a concept that is easily understood by therapists.

I appreciate Jones's self-disclosure regarding his own spirituality and religious journey and how that backdrop shapes how he does his therapeutic work. He has a rather optimistic view of human nature. There is little room for evil or sin in Jones's theology. Everyone is essentially asleep or unaware, and if they are loved enough in a trusting relationship, disturbed and spiritually ill people will find their "inner reformer" to move toward health. Perhaps I am acknowledging my own spiritual countertransference, but I find these theological assumptions to be a bit naïve. At the same time, I understand how and why it is very important for therapists to believe the best about their clients.

Throughout this book, Jones draws on the research of such notable scholars/authors as Ken Pargament and James and Melissa Griffith and refers readers to their work and other primary sources. The strength of *Spirit in Session* is that it is a readable, clear, well-organized, and common-sense approach to this subject. It is not heavy on theory; it is instead more pragmatic. It reads like an older, wise brother sharing how he does psychotherapy. Jones has a warm and conversational style of writing. If you know Jones or have attended one of his workshops, you will say, "This book sounds like Russell."

Spirit in Session is wonderfully interfaith. In this way, it fits with the larger movement toward interfaith chaplaincy and multifaith psychotherapy. Readers who prefer or have to limit themselves to clients only from their own spiritual tradition will not find this book as useful. Similarly, chaplaincy programs that are structured around religious identities, as government-funded chaplaincy programs often are, may not resonate with Jones's vision of a broad-based view of spirituality.

This is a book written to psychotherapists, particularly those formerly known as pastoral counselors but also to and for the wider community of mental health professionals. The term "clients," the clinical examples, and even the phrase "in session" in the title reflect its professional context. Yet, as I read it, I was wondering how a chaplain might read and respond to this book. Surely, the contexts are different, but I suspect that Jones's basic orientation and guiding principles could apply equally to religious professionals and mental health professionals.

I understand that this book will serve as the basis for a continuing education program to be offered in 2020 by ACPE for those wishing to be or who already identify themselves as spirituality integrated psychotherapists. I recommend the program and the book as a readable, common-sense, practical primer in the subject.

Scott Sullender
Editor, *Reflective Practice*
Petaluma, California