



Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy: A Meeting of Minds (American University Studies)

By Alexis Trader

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Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy details a colorful journey deep into two seemingly disparate worlds united by a common insight into the way our thinking influences our emotions, behaviors, and ultimately our lives. In this innovative study about mental and spiritual health, readers are not only provided with a thorough introduction to the elegant theory and practical techniques of cognitive therapy, they are also initiated into the perennial teachings of ascetics and monks in the Greek-speaking East and Latin-speaking West whose powerful writings not only anticipated many contemporary findings, but also suggest unexplored pathways and breathtaking vistas for human growth and development. This groundbreaking interdisciplinary volume in the art of pastoral counseling, patristic studies, and the interface between psychology and theology will be a coveted addition to the working libraries of pastors and psychologists alike. In addition, it is ideal as a textbook for seminary classes in pastoral theology and pastoral counseling, as well as for graduate courses in psychology dealing with the relationship between psychological models and religious worldviews.

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Editorial Review

Review

Archbishop Chrysostomos has written a book review on *Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy* appearing in *Orthodox Tradition*, Volume XXVIII, Number 2 (June, 2011) posted at

orthodoxinfo.com/phronema/review-of-ancient-christian-wisdom-and-aaron-becks-cognitive-therapy.aspx

From the review:

"I admit that I had to read parts of this book several times, since it covers such a vast amount of material... Rereading Father Alexis's excellent prose was a delight in itself... A splendid, highly recommended book that is not to be missed."

Dr. Bruce Foltz, professor of philosophy at Eckerd College, has also written a fuller review on the Eighth Day Books Blog for Aug. 28 2011. The link is blog.eighthdaybooks.com/?p=792

From the review:

"Above all, this is a remarkable exploration of spiritual and psychological health, brimming with practical insights and useful techniques. In fact, it may be one of the most solid and useful 'self-help' books of our time."

«This remarkable volume will not only appeal to a wide range of audiences, but each one will surely find a wealth of ideas and insights far exceeding what could have been expected. Therapists will find the most impressive retrieval of the spiritual depth beneath their science since the work of Carl Jung. Pastoral counselors will discover the truth of what they have long espoused – that scientific and spiritual knowledge cannot really conflict in a world created by a single deity – along with practical guidance that will set a new standard in their field. Students of human nature will find a stunning juxtaposition of ancient wisdom and the findings of modern research. Intellectual historians will discover here an author equally at home in the world of ancient spiritual wisdom and modern science, who is at the same time able to make brilliant connections between these cultural domains. And individuals seeking wisdom about what Plato called ‘that greatest question’ of how one is to live will find insights and challenges that have the potential to be life-transforming. » (Bruce Foltz, Professor of Philosophy, Eckerd College)

From the Author

When I am asked the simplest of questions, "What is your book about?" Trying to supply a simple answer that does justice to the material is a rather difficult task. I think it would be more helpful to answer it somewhat indirectly by describing some of my concerns while writing it, which will in turn reveal some of the issues the work intends to address.

At its core, the book is really about being a Christian in this post-Christian world and the choices that this reality presents. In some ways, today's situation is similar to that of believers during the first centuries of the early church. The two easiest options are to reject the culture entirely and try to survive in a self-enclosed cultural ghetto or to embrace the culture and merge with it. Both of those choices, however, have severe problems in terms of Christian outreach on the one hand and apostasy on the other. These subjects I discuss

at length in chapter one entitled "Egyptian Gold in a Christian Hand: Models for Relating Cognitive Therapy and Orthodox Pastoral Theology." Looking at important figures in the history of Christianity, I note that there is yet another option, which I refer to as discerning openness. It can be seen in the works of Clement of Alexandria, Basil the Great, and Maximus the Confessor among other luminaries of the first millennium. So, *Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy* is about applying an approach of discerning openness to what may be one of the most important forms of treatment for various psychological problems of our day.

Of course, I anticipate objections from audiences who feel very strongly about what inspires them in their lives. For example, some Christians might point out that Christian tradition in all its many manifestations often seems to be at odds with modern secularism as an ideology that leaves little room for the sacred in human life. They might have some very reasonable questions such as "Wouldn't a therapy that grows out of such an ideology be dangerous for the believer? When dealing with the human soul is it theologically acceptable to apply the findings from a very different source, anthropologically speaking, to how a Christian can better think, feel, and live? Mightn't the use of such a source have a harmful effect on the faith of the believer?" These questions are foremost in my mind and in each chapter I try to answer them on the basis of the teachings of early Christian writers.

Therapists and counselors in the secular world will also come to this work with their own questions and reservations. Starting with Freud, psychotherapy has been very suspicious of religion and, at the very least, influenced by the Freudian understanding of religion as a misguided projection of the primitive subconscious. Psychologists rightly decry the fact that many who appeared to be mentally ill were stigmatized as witches, tortured, and burned at the stake in the West during the Dark Ages and even during the more broad-minded Renaissance. Thus, the non-religious psychologist reading this work might have questions such as "What insight could possibly be derived from figures who take demon possession seriously? Wouldn't mixing pre-Enlightenment thought with results derived from the rigorous application of the scientific method be one step backwards if not two?" I have also tried to be mindful of these questions out of respect for the time, the work, and the genuine human compassion that are also at the foundation of the development of the cognitive therapeutic attempt to relieve human suffering.

And so, the work begins and continues as a kind of balancing act. Yet, the aim is not to avoid offending certain people, but to be fair to all parties in the hope of recognizing the unified wisdom of God both through revelation and the use of the God-given reason of the human mind. Of course, it's a tall order to respond to the best of our culture even in its secularity in a way that is somewhat analogous to how the Great Cappadocians responded to the best of ancient "secularism," Plato and Aristotle. But I believe that it is an attempt that needs to be made and a conversation that should be had. *Ancient Christian Wisdom* seeks to begin that conversation, which is really important for so many people who suffer from psychological and spiritual problems.

From the Back Cover

"This remarkable volume--which has been characterized as "a *Gray's Anatomy* of the human soul," a "twenty-first century successor to William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* and his *Principles of Psychology*," and a "bilingual dictionary" translating between psychology and spirituality,"--will not only appeal to a wide range of audiences, but each one will surely find a wealth of ideas and insights far exceeding what could have been expected. Therapists will find the most impressive retrieval of the spiritual depth beneath their science since the work of Carl Jung. Pastoral counselors will discover the truth of what they have long espoused--that scientific and spiritual knowledge cannot really conflict in a world created by a single deity--along with practical guidance that will set a new standard in their field. Students of human nature will find a stunning juxtaposition of ancient wisdom and the findings of modern research. Intellectual historians will discover here an author equally at home in the world of ancient spiritual wisdom and modern science, who is at the same time able to make brilliant connections between these cultural domains. And individuals seeking wisdom about what Plato called "that greatest question" of how one is to live will find

insights and challenges that have the potential to be life-transforming."

Dr. Bruce Foltz,
Professor of Philosophy,
Eckerd College

"It is with great pleasure that I read this very erudite and yet beautifully written book. Father Alexis, its author, was my student in his undergraduate years, and I recognize, even at many years' distance, the clarity of mind and the intellectual thirst that distinguished him then. This journey into the modern world of cognitive psychology, accompanied all along by the writings of the church fathers, introduces us into two universes that crisscross and yet do not dissolve into each other. Father Alexis did not embark on this journey for purely theoretical reasons, although he distills theories very nimbly. He is a Christian theologian who wants to use both the resources of his tradition and those of cognitive psychology to make more effective the task of caring for those who suffer. His considerable learning, not least in his detailed exposition of Aaron Beck's thought, remains in the service of his calling."

Dr. Annette Aronowicz,
Department Chair, The Robert F. and Patricia G. Ross Weis Professor of Judaic Studies and Professor of Religious Studies
Franklin and Marshall College

"Father Alexios Trader has innovatively woven together an account of cognitive psychotherapy and of the Christian struggle to realize an authentic spiritual life. This extraordinary volume, which draws on contemporary cognitive psychology and the Christian patristic tradition, is destined to become a popular manual for mental health and the spiritual life. It is easily accessible while maintaining depth of insight. One does not need to be a Christian, much less a believer, to appreciate the power of this book."

Dr. David Solomon,
W.P. and H.B. White Director of the Center for Ethics and Culture,
Notre Dame University

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jose Scott:

As people who live in typically the modest era should be up-date about what going on or facts even knowledge to make these keep up with the era that is always change and move ahead. Some of you maybe can update themselves by reading through books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to anyone is you don't know what one you should start with. This Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy: A Meeting of Minds (American University Studies) is our recommendation to cause you to keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and need in this era.

Marvin Smith:

Spent a free time for you to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their down time with their family, or their own friends. Usually they doing activity like watching television, about to beach, or picnic

within the park. They actually doing same every week. Do you feel it? Would you like to something different to fill your own free time/ holiday? Could be reading a book could be option to fill your cost-free time/ holiday. The first thing that you will ask may be what kinds of reserve that you should read. If you want to attempt look for book, may be the guide untitled Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy: A Meeting of Minds (American University Studies) can be great book to read. May be it may be best activity to you.

Jewell Brundage:

This Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy: A Meeting of Minds (American University Studies) is great guide for you because the content that is full of information for you who always deal with world and still have to make decision every minute. This particular book reveal it information accurately using great manage word or we can declare no rambling sentences within it. So if you are read the idea hurriedly you can have whole info in it. Doesn't mean it only gives you straight forward sentences but tough core information with wonderful delivering sentences. Having Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy: A Meeting of Minds (American University Studies) in your hand like obtaining the world in your arm, details in it is not ridiculous 1. We can say that no guide that offer you world throughout ten or fifteen second right but this e-book already do that. So , this is good reading book. Hey there Mr. and Mrs. stressful do you still doubt that?

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