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**Saints and Madmen: Psychiatry Opens Its Doors to Religion** by Russell Shorto. New York: Henry Holt, 1999. 265 pp. \$25.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-8050-5902-4.

**Feet of Clay: A Study of Gurus** by Anthony Storr. London: HarperCollins, 1997. 271 pp. £6.99 (paper). ISBN 0-00-638423-4. [There appear to be several editions with different subtitles. The information given here is for the British edition.]

There is a popular maxim that a psychotic is a failed mystic. The authors of both of these books play with the interface between psychopathology and religious experience but from opposite directions. Russell Shorto recounts the recent readmission of religious concerns into the treatment of psychopathology, whereas Anthony Storr points out the dysfunctional aspects in the behavior of those who have set themselves up as charismatic religious leaders. The convergence is not symmetrical however, in that, conceptually, Shorto picks up where Storr leaves off, so let me first discuss Storr's book and then Shorto's.

In his book *Feet of Clay*, Storr gives short descriptions of the lives of a number of charismatic figures: Jim Jones, David Koresh, Georgei Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Rudolf Steiner, Carl Gustav Jung, Sigmund Freud, Ignatius of Loyola, Jesus, and Paul Brunton. In addition to presenting biographical material, Storr discusses each person's psychological characteristics and the apparent presence of any mental disturbances. Whereas some of these people, such as Jim Jones and David Koresh, were demagogues who engaged in reprehensible behavior, others, such as Rudolf Steiner, although holding idiosyncratic views, ended up doing much good. Most fall somewhere in between. Interspersed within the descriptions of gurus' lives and in chapters toward the end of the book are Storr's ruminations about the gurus' psyches and what all of this tells us about ourselves.

What does Storr conclude? Storr says that gurus have often been socially isolated as children, they have often suffered from some form of mental distress that preceded their proselytization, they have sometimes thought that they were God, and they have all been narcissistic. He makes the point that the line between sanity and insanity is blurred, and that the presence of bizarre beliefs should not be used as a sole criterion for diagnosing insanity.

In my opinion, Storr is heading in the right direction, but his analysis is reminiscent of a by-gone era. Perhaps most symptomatic of that is Storr's repeated invocation of the need for a scientific approach to the subject matter without actually committing himself to such an approach. For example, his attributions about Jesus's mental state appear to be based largely on common myths about Jesus based on the gospels, which, as Storr himself points out, were written well after Jesus's death. There has been considerable scientific research in the last several decades to seek to know something about the historical Jesus, who, as some evidence has suggested, may not have existed at all. In fact, Shorto has written a previous book about the deconstruction of the mythology surrounding Jesus, titled *Gospel Truth: The New Image of Jesus Emerging from Science and History, and Why It Matters*. At any rate, any speculation about Jesus's psychological nature should explicitly take into account what is actually known about the historical Jesus.

Storr makes the assumption throughout the book that there is no scientific evidence for anomalies rather than seeking out and reviewing any such evidence. For example, Storr mentions the visions and dreams of Carl Jung prior to the first world war in which Jung saw floods and ice destroying life and civilization. Whereas Jung himself subsequently interpreted these images as prophecies of the war, Storr chastises Jung for such an interpretation, and sees in Jung's attribution evidence of grandiosity resulting from Jung's inability to form psychologically healthy relationships during childhood. It is not at all clear that Jung's visions and dreams were actually precognitive, but adherence to a scientific approach means that such a possibility cannot be ruled out nor can Jung's attribution be used to infer the presence of a psychological disturbance until the evidence for precognition has actually been reviewed.

In his book *Saints and Madmen*, Shorto tries to capture the resurgence of interest in religious concerns in psychiatry and psychotherapy. He presents cases of individuals who had some form of mental breakdown and comments on the religious dimensions of their experiences. Among these cases is that of David Lukoff who, subsequent to his psychotic episode, became a psychologist and was instrumental in getting the presence of a religious or spiritual problem established as a formal diagnostic category. There is also a description of the roles of various other mental health professionals in the renaissance of appreciation for the religious dimensions of psychopathology. For example, Shorto relates the efforts of Nancy Kehoe, a Catholic nun and psychologist, to lead discussion groups about the meaning of life for those who are chronically mentally ill. After all, mental illness brings with it both the necessity and time to address existential questions, yet mental health professionals had, for many years, avoided giving those who were mentally ill the opportunity to do so. But renewed interest in religion on the part of psychotherapists has brought its own problems. For example, there has been a dramatic rise in Christian counseling, whereby mental health professionals work with elements of the Christian faith as part of the therapeutic process.

However, some Christian counselors have gone beyond the usual bounds of counseling to include the promotion of Christianity. The question arises of whether that is an appropriate activity in the context of psychological counseling.

Another question that naturally arises is whether there is any scientific justification for entertaining spirituality in psychiatry and psychology in the first place. Shorto unflinchingly takes on this question in several chapters toward the end of the book by describing neurological factors in psychopathology and mystical experiences, noting the evidence for the effectiveness of intercessory prayer, discussing research concerning psychedelic drug experiences, and citing arguments from the philosophy of mind for the significance of subjective experience. He ends up saying yes—that psychiatry and psychology should be moving into the spiritual realm—but that the claims of various psycho-spiritual factions cannot be adjudicated. It is a good effort but a difficult task, and his arguments are just not sufficiently comprehensive to resolve the matter.

Speaking to the substance of Shorto's book, I do not know how widespread or permanent the resurgence of interest in existential and spiritual concerns really is among psychiatrists and psychologists. We have had such resurgences before, most notably in the 1960s with the antipsychiatry and transpersonal psychology movements, neither of which has gained widespread acceptance in the mainstream mental health professions. In fact, enlightened mental health care in general has historically been reinvented so many times—from Philippe Pinel to Richard Maurice Bucke to David Lukoff—that it is difficult not to be cynical about the future of any given trend. Perhaps books such as Shorto's can help to keep the issues alive in our culture.

Storr is a psychiatrist; Shorto is a journalist. Yet I feel that it is Shorto who has the more perceptive understanding of the interface of psychopathology and religious experience—Shorto gives a nuanced account of people, events, and issues. Both books are trade books but do contain references and indices. Both are well written and easily read. Storr's book would be of value to those who unduly venerate charismatic religious leaders, whereas Shorto's would be of interest to anyone trying to understand our contemporary culture.

And finally, is a psychotic a failed mystic? Yes, indeed, psychosis and mysticism have much in common, including the masquerading of delusions as mystical insights and the irruption of mystical insights from psychotic delusions. This is not only a fascinating subject but a critically important one for those who themselves experience expanded states of consciousness or end up trying to help others who have such experiences.

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