



God, Self & Community: Revelation, Testimony & Practice

Bernard L. Brookes

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God, Self & Community is a collection of autobiographical stories and essays by psychologist Dr. Bernard Brookes, dealing with such issues as faith, hope, love, knowledge, violence, and power. His theme is that the development of an authentic self occurs in relationship to others (community) and in relation to one's source of transcendent value (God). In a chapter called 'Music and Revelation,' he writes, "The words themselves contain music, as in poetry, where their sounds and meanings play their own form of melody, harmony, and rhythm. In using words and sounds thus, we joyfully or sorrowfully recognize that there is more to "meaning" than rational sense-making and more to "purpose" than "objective.'" The same can be said of this book, that the writing and the content reinforce each other to create a word of art, as well as of knowledge and wisdom.

Dr. Brookes perspective, and the book, is influenced by his somewhat unusual life path. He was born and lived for the first twelve years of his life on the tiny Caribbean island of St. Kitts. He then moved with his family to live in and around New York City until he left at age eighteen to go to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to attend Harvard University. He had a spiritual experience at age nineteen which led him to drop out of Harvard in his second year and began learning to play music while he worked at McLean Hospital, a mental health hospital just outside of Boston. When he finally returned to school after six years, he went to Berklee College and got a bachelor's degree in music. Soon after this he got a master's and doctoral degrees in clinical psychology at Boston University, followed by a master in business administration also from Boston University. Through his continued relationship with McLean Hospital, and he did his clinical training and his dissertation research in the Massachusetts' maximum security mental hospital and the prison system, and worked there for five years, before co-founding and directing a mental health agency in Massachusetts.

The book begins with an introduction which describes the spiritual and psychological theme around which the book is organized. The introduction begins with a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., which says that people live in two realms the spiritual and the material, and that "Enlarged material powers spell enlarged peril if there is not a proportionate growth of the soul." This leads nicely into a discussion of the relationship between God, self and community, and the author's understanding of the sources and purposes of the book.

The first three chapters of the book consist of autobiographical stories, always involving events that have spiritual and psychological significant in the life development of the author, and the communities in which he participates at that particular point in his life. These communities include the small Caribbean island of St. Kitts, New York City and Mount Vernon New York, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts prison and mental health systems. Chapters three and five contain essays such as 'Faith and Psychology', and 'Power, Violence, and Nonviolence.' These bracket chapter four, which as mentioned earlier is called 'Music and Revelation,' which begins with an essay, and is then followed by four autobiographical stories with musical themes, under the general title of 'Musical Pictures from Life's Exhibition.' The latter is a reference to Modest Mussorgsky's 1874 piano suite "Pictures at an Exhibition," which was intended to describe ten pictures that the composer viewed at an art gallery in that same year.

The structure of the book, like the author's own life, does not follow a standard format, but is guided by his intense search for meaning and for the full expression of his creativity and his personality, as they develop in the context of his relationship with God and with the various communities in which he has participated. It is perhaps a testament to his faith that he has succeeded here, and the resultant work is, to quote the psalmist, "fearfully and wonderfully made."

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