

ADLERIAN ABERRATIONS

A Critique of *Understanding Human Nature and What Life Should Mean to You*, by Alfred Adler

Alfred Adler, associated for a time with Sigmund Freud, developed a system of psychology which has been highly influential in the twentieth century. The claims he makes for his psychology clearly intrude on the territory of Scripture. He wants to *understand human nature*. But the Bible has already given us *God's* view of human nature. He wants to tell us what life *should* mean, centuries after God has revealed to us what life *does* mean. We need to consider his system carefully in the light of Scripture.

Adler, who lived from 1870 to 1937, believed that people are motivated primarily by a desire to achieve superiority. He is particularly famous for his concept of "inferiority complex". His system has strong roots in the determinism of Freud, as Adler believed that an individual's "style of life" is pretty well set in concrete by age four or five. However, in his later years Adler developed the idea of the "creative self," moving toward the humanistic psychologies. Adler believed change to be a long, difficult process that necessitated an exploration of childhood memories to uncover the mistaken "style of life." Throughout his writings, the development of "social feeling" is another emphasis that cannot be missed. Adler continually stressed the necessity of living in community with other human beings, rather than living solely in pursuit of isolated selfish interests.

Although Adler does not demonstrate the *extreme*, blasphemous hostility to Christianity that is found in Freud, Ellis, and others, he is nevertheless far from Scripture in his religious beliefs. His view of Scripture and its authority is distorted, and he thoroughly misunderstands man's creation in the image of God. While certain aspects of his system might be initially appealing to believers, such as his emphasis on considering the needs of others, we must not be deceived into thinking that Adler has any new truths about human nature that supplement God's Word.

Understanding Human Nature

The Bible tells us that God created man (both male and female) in His image, but man has fallen into sin. Human nature is therefore *sinful*. However, those who trust in Christ as Savior are redeemed from the impact of sin. While continuing to struggle with sin to some degree, the believer is called a *new creation* in Christ. He has a *new nature*.

Scripture also reveals to us how God expects us to live, before Him and in relationship to others. We are fully accountable to Him for our thoughts and actions. God alone is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the inner man, the heart.

Adler's psychology addresses the *same issues*. If any one of his answers lines up with the Bible, it is *redundant*. If it conflicts with Scripture, it is in *error*. What exactly does Adler tell us about the nature of man and how he ought to live?

The purpose of *Understanding Human Nature* (UHN) is stated as follows:

"This book is an attempt to acquaint the general public with the fundamentals of Individual Psychology. At the same time it is a demonstration of the practical application of these principles to the conduct of one's everyday relationships, not only to the world, and to one's fellow men, but also to the organization of one's personal life.... The purpose of the book is to point out how the mistaken behavior of the individual affects the harmony of our social and communal life...to teach the individual to recognize his own mistakes...to show him how he may effect a harmonious adjustment to the communal life." (p. IX, UHN)

This statement of purpose clearly shows that Adler has ventured into biblical territory. In doing so he is *trespassing!*

Adler wants to do more than develop "occasional experts" in the understanding of man. He wants every person to understand human nature (p. 15, UHN). He believes that "human beings would live together more easily if their knowledge of human nature were more satisfactory" (p. 16, UHN). This assumes that mere knowledge, apart from the working of God's Spirit in the hearts of men, is sufficient for such radical changes. Adler ignores the riches of biblical teaching when he makes the claim that:

"Contemporary education is still unsuited to give us a valid knowledge of the human soul.... There is no tradition for the acquisition of a true knowledge of the human soul." (p. 22, UHN)

But indeed there *is* such a "tradition": God's infallible Word.

Adler assumes that man, apart from and even *in place of* God, is able to know himself:

"The best knower of the human soul will be the one who has lived through passions himself. The contrite sinner seems as valuable a type in our day and age as he was in the days when the great religions developed." (p. 22, UHN)

Note the unstated assumption here that even when "the great religions developed," *man* could understand his own nature without any kind of divine revelation. Such a view cannot be reconciled with Scripture.

Adler relies heavily on empirical data, seeing man's basic senses as one key source of understanding himself:

"Of all the organs with which a child attempts the conquest of the world the sense organs are the most important in the determination of the essential relationships to the world.... We can therefore understand a human being only when we know with what sense organs or organ-systems he approaches the world, because all his relationships are colored by this fact." (p. 48, UHN)

Scripture, however, contrasts the outward appearance with the inner man. David may have seemed an unlikely candidate to be God's anointed ruler over Israel. One of his older brothers looked more suitable to the prophet Samuel:

"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'" (1 Samuel 16:7)

Adler's criteria for understanding human nature cannot pass the test of Scripture.

Soul. Adler should have remained silent concerning the *soul* of man. His inadequate understanding reflects his lack of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Adler proposes the existence of man's soul from the fact that humans are able to freely move about:

"We attribute a soul only to moving, living organisms. The soul stands in innate relationship to free motion.... There

is a strict corollary between movement and psychic life. This constitutes the difference between plant and animal." (p. 27, UHN)

A similar statement emerges in *What Life Should Mean to You* (LM):

"All moving beings...can foresee and reckon up the direction in which to move; and this fact makes it necessary to postulate that they have minds or souls...the mind governs the body--it sets the goal for movements." (p. 26, LM)

The Bible does use the term "soul" in the Genesis creation account to refer to all animated creatures, encompassing animals as well as man. However, it is clear from an overview of the entire Scripture that the *soul* or *spirit* of man is a dimension not present in other creatures. God's mode of creation took a dramatic turn when He completed the first six days of His work. When He created the heavens and the earth, and the creatures in the sky, sea, and land, He said, "let there be...." But when He created the first man, He formed him from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils. Scripture undeniably reveals *two parts to man*, the physical body and the immaterial part (soul or spirit). These two parts are separated at death.

Adler, ignoring God's *creation* of man, goes on to state that:

"...the soul arises from a hereditary substance which functions both physically and psychically. Its development is entirely conditioned by social influences." (p. 223, UHN)

These basic influences, according to Adler, are primarily "the rule of communal life" and "individual striving for power and superiority" (p. 223, UHN). We will see later how *social feeling* and the *striving for superiority* are crucial pillars of Adler's system. For the moment, note this basic statement about the fundamental motivations in the heart of man:

"Two great tendencies dominate all psychic phenomena. These two tendencies, the social feeling, and the individual striving for power and dominion, influence every human activity and color the attitude of every individual in his striving for security, in his fulfillment of the three great challenges of life: love, work, and society." (p. 102, UHN)

In spite of the emphasis seen above on heredity and social influences, Adler attributes to man's soul the ability to perceive the future:

"The soul has the faculty not only of perceiving what actually exists in reality, but also of feeling, of guessing, what will occur in the future." (p. 59, UHN)

Goals and Purpose. Adler's view of the purpose of man's "psychic life" is one that is limited to earth, ignoring any hope of immortality:

"The psychic life is a complex of aggressive and security-finding activities whose final purpose is to guarantee the continued existence on this earth of the human organism, and to enable him to securely accomplish his development.... *We cannot imagine a psychic life which is isolated.* We can only imagine a psychic life bound up with its environment." (p. 28, UHN)

Adler further emphasizes the goal to which man's "psychic life" is directed, a goal highly influenced by surrounding civilization (p. 31, UHN):

"The psychic life of man is determined by his goal...all phenomena of the soul life may be conceived as preparations for some future situation." (p. 29, UHN)

Adler believes that "few people know exactly what their goal is" but "on the other hand, it is quite possible to deduce what the goal of an individual must be from his present activities" (p. 30, UHN). In addition, he teaches that man's "goal," unknown though it may be, *determines* him to such a degree that his will is no longer free:

"Nowadays it is believed that human will is not free. It is true that human will becomes bound as soon as it entangles itself or binds itself to a certain goal." (p. 29-30, UHN)

The Scripture speaks of man as either worshipping God the Creator--or some aspect of the creation (Romans 1). The unbeliever, while fully responsible before God, has a will that is *enslaved* to sin (Romans 8:7-8). The Christian has been set free from this slavery to sin, so that he is able to will what is good and pleasing to God. The unbeliever's enslavement to sin is not equivalent to the psychic determinism in Adler (or Freud), nor is the believer's freedom the equal of Adler's "creative self," which helped pave the way to humanistic psychological systems.

Responsibility. Adler destroys responsibility for sin in his system, lumping "disagreeable character traits" (sinful habits) with physiological deficiencies:

"When we have gained a true knowledge of human nature, built upon a recognition of the value of the difficulties which may occur in the proper development of the soul, it can never be an instrument of harm so long as we have ourselves thoroughly developed our social fellow men with it. *We must not blame* the bearer of a physical defect, nor a disagreeable character trait, for his indignation. *He is not responsible for it.*" (p. 71, UHN, emphasis added)

Nevertheless, here is an example of an instance where Adler himself *places blame*:

"Faintheartedness is a characteristic of those who feel that every task which faces them is especially difficult.... With some reservations, one can evaluate them as individuals who want to avoid problems by making detours about them." (p. 189, 191 UHN)

Human equality. Adler promotes a view of equality that ignores the reality of human sin and bypasses positions of authority specifically ordained by God. He considers such equality to be a "law" of society:

"We come rationally to a thesis which we have felt intuitively: *the law of the equality of all human beings.* This law may not be broken without immediately producing opposition and discord. It is one of the fundamental laws of human society." (p. 180, UHN)

Submissive individuals, says Adler, "are comfortable when they are obeying someone else's commands" (p. 202, UHN). Biblically, some persons are called to obey the commands of others--God first, then others such as parents, government, church leaders, employers. But this doesn't fit Adler's system:

"It is difficult today to exclude from our thought processes the division of human beings into master and servant, and to consider everyone as quite equal. Yet the mere possession of the new point of view of the absolute equality of every human being, is a step in advance, adapted to help us, and prevent us from falling into considerable errors in our conduct." (p. 204, UHN)

Notice Adler's admission that this absolute equality is a *new* perspective. But perhaps it isn't. Satan's fall from heaven originated in his desire for *absolute equality* with God. Problems arise when people defy Scripture by asserting an "equality" that God never intended.

Four Temperaments. Adler accepts the theory of the four basic temperaments, but unlike many Christians today, he believes that only the *sanguine type* is "approximately healthy" (p. 147, UHN):

"The sanguine individual alone can be a good human being.... Clearly defined temperaments, however, are seldom found...nor are these 'types' and 'temperaments' fixed." (p. 148, UHN)

The other three "types" are to some degree undesirable, according to Adler. For example:

"The phlegmatic temperament is a defense mechanism, a meaningful response to the challenge of existence." (p. 150, UHN)

These categories do not find support in Scripture, where the believer is to be conformed to the image of *Christ*, not a personality type. Adler seeks to do more than merely *understand* human nature. He attempts to define what it *should* be. Here he clearly trespasses on biblical territory.

Childhood

Determinism. Adler's association with Freud is clearly evident in the view he holds concerning childhood. His view of human nature is tainted by the same type of determinism taught by Freud. This determinism is quite comprehensive and affords little hope:

"The most important determinants of the structure of the soul life are generated in the earliest days of childhood." (p. 17, UHN)

"One can determine how a child stands in relation to life a few months after his birth." (p. 45, UHN)

"The particular pressure he has felt in the days of earliest infancy will color his attitude toward life and determine in a primitive fashion his world-view, his cosmic philosophy." (p. 73, UHN)

"By the end of the fifth year of life a child has reached a unified and crystallized pattern of behavior, its own style of approach to problems and tasks. It has already fixed its deepest and most lasting conception of what to expect from the world and from itself." (p. 12, LM)

"Even the preparation for the attitude to the other sex has its roots set in the first four or five years of life." (p. 193, LM)

However, Adler moves beyond Freud, teaching that the novelty of the above discovery is the ability to join childhood experiences with "the later phenomena of the soul life, in one incontrovertible and continuous pattern," which Adler calls a *style of life* (p. 17, UHN). Adler claims to have discovered that:

The individual's "secret goal of his childhood attitude is identical with his attitude in maturity...what we observe in him as an adult we consider the direct projection of that which he has experienced in childhood." (p. 17, UHN)

"People do not change their attitude toward life after their infancy, though its expressions in later life are quite different from those of their earliest days." (p. 73, LM)

Adler does insist that, in spite of psychic determinism, the individual has a role in modifying the factors of his early life:

"The fundamental factors which influence the soul life are fixed at the time when the child is still an infant. Upon these foundations a superstructure is built, which may be modified, influenced, transformed." (p. 31, UHN)

Nevertheless, his *goal in life* "is determined by those influences and those impressions which the environment gives to the child" (p. 31, UHN). Later modifications are anything but *easy*, achieved only by struggle:

"...an individual can deviate from the behavior into which he has grown in childhood only with great difficulty...the psychic life does not change its foundation...his goal in life is also unaltered." (p. 18, UHN)

Early in life (the first four to five years), the child has already formed a particular interpretation of life, according to Adler. Later in life:

"The interpretation always accords with the original meaning given to life. Even if this meaning is very gravely mistaken...it is never easily relinquished. Mistakes in the meaning given to life can be corrected only by reconsidering the situation in which the faulty interpretation was made, recognizing the error and revising the scheme of apperception." (p. 13, LM)

Adler believes that "the formation of types begins at this early period." One type develops *power*, the other demonstrate its *weakness* in varied ways (p. 40, UHN). Adler's "inferiority complex" is a term frequently used in our culture. He taught that this "complex" begins during the early years of life when a person is naturally in a weakened position:

"One must remember that every child occupies an inferior position in life...the beginning of every life is fraught with a more or less deep feeling of inferiority." (p. 65, UHN)

Adler believes that children wrongly evaluate themselves as inferior, and that this evaluation heavily impacts adult life. However:

"One cannot expect a child to have a correct estimation of himself in any particular situation; one does not expect it of adults!" (p. 69, UHN)

The basis for educating children, Adler claims, "lies in the striving of the child to compensate for his weakness" (p. 40, UHN). He believes adults should be sensitive to a child's inferiority feelings, protecting him from the more difficult things in life:

"The rule of conduct which we must maintain toward a child grows out of our recognition of his feeling of inferiority...we must prevent him from learning the dark side of existence too quickly." (p. 137, UHN)

At the same time, Adler also places emphasis on the striving for *superiority* or power over others. Thus he concludes that:

"Educability may be shattered by two factors...an exaggerated, intensified, unresolved feeling of inferiority" or "a goal of dominance." (p. 66, UHN)

It is clear that Adler believes a child's "meaning in life" is formulated very early. Adler warns, however, that "there are...certain situations in childhood from which a gravely mistaken meaning is very frequently drawn" (p. 14, LM). The three most frequent, he claims, are physical limitations ("imperfect organs"), pampering, and neglect. Much of Adlerian counseling is concerned with a detailed review of early life in order to uncover the "mistaken meaning" determined during that time.

Childhood Play. Adler assigns a great deal of significance to the playing of children. He understands childhood games as "communal exercises" that "enable the child to satisfy and fulfill his social feeling." Other factors in play include the desire to gain superiority and creative expression (p. 82, UHN). Adler believes that as every child prepares for the future, he "has in him something of the adult he will be at some time" (p. 82, UHN). In looking at Adler's view of childhood games, we can see his emphasis on the development of *social feeling*, an integral part of his system.

Family. It is not surprising to learn that Adler attaches great importance to a child's place in his family of origin, saying that:

"...before we can judge a human being we must know the situation in which he grew up. An important moment is the position which a child occupied in his family constellation." (p. 123, UHN)

Even more critical, however, is Adler's view of the mother's role.

Mother. Adler emphasizes the critical role of the mother in a child's life:

"For many months his mother plays overwhelmingly the most important role in his life; he is almost completely dependent upon her.... This connection is so intimate and far-reaching that we are never able, in later years, to point to any characteristic as the effect as heredity." (p. 120, LM)

Adler moves right along, claiming that "perhaps the greatest problem of our society" is the resistance of women to motherhood:

"The whole of human society is bound up with the attitude of women to motherhood. Almost everywhere the woman's part in life is undervalued and treated as secondary." (p. 122, LM)

However, he refuses to assign *guilt*:

"If the mothers fail, if they are dissatisfied with their tasks and lack interest in them, the whole of mankind is endangered. We cannot regard the mother, however, as guilty for failures. *There is no guilt.*"

(p. 123, LM, emphasis added)

Although motherhood is instituted by God and clearly a critical role, this rejection of *guilt* is at heart a rejection of biblical values. It also fails to supply *hope*. If no one is guilty, then no one is responsible.

It is interesting to note that while Adler places human motherhood on the same level with the instincts of animals, he also sees it as an attempt to *create out of nothing* just as God creates:

"Among animals, among rats and apes, for instance, the drive for motherhood has been shown to be stronger than the drives of sex and hunger.... A mother often feels her child as a part of herself. Through her children she is connected with the whole of life; she feels herself the master of life and death...feeling that through her children she has accomplished a work of creation. She feels, we might almost say, that she has *created as God creates*--out of nothing she has brought forth a living being. The striving for motherhood is really one aspect of the human striving for superiority, the human *goal of godlikeness.*" (p. 124, LM)

A later section is devoted to Adler's misunderstanding of the image of God in man. This is an example of his aberrations. Bearing the *image* of God does not equate with being like God in the sense of creating out of nothing, or otherwise taking over the prerogatives of deity! Early in Scripture, God speaks of procreation as one aspect of image bearing:

"In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created. When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth." (Genesis 5:1b-3)

Never does God consider bearing children to be *equal* to His initial act of creation, however.

Heredity. Adler rejects hereditary influences to an extreme degree. For example, he believed that "gifted children" are not "gifted" due to heredity (p. 169, LM). He insists that "Mozart's talent was not inherited" (p. 170, LM). There is a subtle rejection here of the fact that *God* gives talents and gifts to people to use in glorifying Him.

Adolescence. Adler's attention to this period of a child's life is directed primarily toward a reinforcement of his views concerning early life determinism:

"There are many dangers in adolescence, but it is not true that it can change character." (p. 182, LM)

Any *apparent* changes are construed by Adler in a manner consistent with his theories:

"The apparently obedient child was always in opposition to his parents; but it is only now, when he has more freedom and strength, that he feels able to declare his enmity." (p. 183, LM)

Adler's view of power and inferiority also enters into his picture of teenage years:

"For almost every child, adolescence means one thing above all else; he must prove that he is no longer a child." (p. 182, LM)

A glaring omission here is the fundamental rebellion in the human heart due to *sin*.

Character Development. In general, Adler's perspective on childhood, for all its determinism, is rather chaotic, left to chance and to man *without God*:

"There are no reasons for the development of character; but a child can make use of experiences for his goal and turn them into reasons." (p. 124, LM)

In the believer, it is the *Holy Spirit* who develops character and conforms the person to the image of Christ. The earliest years of life, so crucial to Adler, are a time relegated by Scripture to the "old man" apart from Christ. What Adler considers to be rather permanently set in concrete has already been bulldozed by the Spirit of God, "crucified with Christ" in biblical terms. God is sovereign over the experiences of life,

working all things together according to the counsel of *His will* (Ephesians 1:11). It is thus *God's goal* that takes precedence, not the purposes of man.

Memories

Much counseling today is absorbed with detailed explorations of childhood events, and the resurrection of "repressed" memories. Adler, too, assigns a critical role to childhood memories in the understanding of human nature:

"The greatest of all helps...in gaining a quick comprehension of the meaning an individual gives to himself and to life comes through his memories. Every memory, however, trivial he may think it, represents to him something *memorable*." (p. 19, LM)

According to Adler, events are selectively remembered for some specific purpose, although that purpose is not necessarily a conscious one:

"The individual response of the soul to the problems of life leaves traces in the structure of the soul.... We may deduce that all recollections have an unconscious purpose within themselves." (p. 50, UHN)

"There are no 'chance memories'...he chooses to remember only those which he feels, however darkly, to have a bearing on his situation." (p. 73, LM)

Adler believes the *chosen* memories are used to keep an individual concentrated on his particular life's goal, "to meet the future with an already tested style of action" (p. 73, LM).

Memories, supposedly, reveal information about a person's fundamental attitudes, philosophy, and purposes in life:

"A lasting recollection, even though it is a false one, as is often the case in childhood, where memories are frequently surcharged with a one-sided prejudice, may be transposed out of the realm of the conscious, and appear as an attitude, or as an emotional tone, or even as a philosophic point of view, if this be necessary for the attainment of the desired goal." (p. 50, UHN)

Adler believes that a person's very earliest memory is particularly important. He believes that "the fundamental

estimate of the individual and his situation is contained in it," and that "it is his subjective starting point, the beginning of his autobiography he has made up for himself" (p. 19, LM). The very earliest memory provides "the individual's fundamental view of life...and opportunity to see at one glance what he has taken as the starting point for his development" (p. 75, LM).

Incredibly, the actual *truth* of a particular memory is unimportant to Adler. He is concerned only with what an individual *believes* to have happened in his early life:

"It is comparatively indifferent whether the memories are accurate or inaccurate; what is of most value about them is that they represent the individual's judgment." (p. 75, LM)

"What the child *feels* need not actually be the case. It does not matter what really has happened, whether an individual is really inferior or not. What is important is his *interpretation* of his situation." (p. 124, UHN)

A similar indifference to truth is shown in Adler's view of the critical "earliest" memory:

"It is indifferent for the purposes of psychology whether the memory which an individual considers as first is really the first event which he can remember--or even whether it is a memory of a real event. Memories are important only for what they are 'taken as'; for their interpretation and for their bearing on present and future life." (p. 20, LM)

This interpretation, Adler claims, provides the key to understanding an individual's basic approach to life:

"...we must stress that the experience itself is not so important as the fact that just this experience persists in memory and is used to crystallize the meaning given to life.... The memories of early childhood are especially useful in showing how long standing is the individual's own peculiar approach to life, and in giving the circumstances in which he first crystallized his life-attitude." (p. 19, LM)

Change later in life, using Adlerian psychology, seeks to use memories to uncover a person's original "error" in his attitude toward life:

"...no argument or treatment can be successful if it falls short of discovering the original error." (p. 22, LM)

Christians cannot accept Adler's emphasis on memories and their use in facilitating change. Adler's disregard for *truth* is clearly unacceptable. This type of attitude is what has fostered the current epidemic of "false memories" where families and relationships are systematically being destroyed.

Also, the *Christian* must view his life as consisting of two key time periods. There is the period prior to his conversion, his former way of life, when he conducted himself according to pagan standards. But now, as a believer, he is a new creature in Christ. The Holy Spirit dwells in him, sanctifying him, conforming him to the image of his Lord. He does not need to return to the first few years of life to determine his "original error." (Original *sin* is replaced by "original error" in Adler's system!) Nor do his first four to five years determine his life as a Christian! Adler's system can do nothing more than a "repair job" on what Scripture calls the "old man." It is a counterfeit for the work that the Holy Spirit does within the believer.

The Unconscious

In addition to childhood memories, a person's "unconscious" is also fertile soil for Adler to plow in his attempts to understand human nature:

"We may seek and find the behavior pattern of a man in the unconscious. In his conscious life we have but a reflection, a negative, to deal with." (p. 86, UHN)

The descent into the unconscious seems to be driven partially by Adler's reluctance to trust a person's conscious evaluation of himself:

"We have placed little value upon what an individual says or thinks of himself. We are convinced that each of us can somehow go astray and that each of us feels himself under the necessity of retouching his psychic image for his fellow man, through various of the complicated egoistic, moral, or other tricks." (p. 100, UHN)

Adler believes that people use unconscious mechanisms and avoid bringing them to awareness:

"It is a universal and human phenomenon that everyone seizes upon those thoughts which justify him in his attitude and

rejects every idea which might prevent him from going on."
(p. 90, UHN)

Adler is skirting a biblical truth here, that the human heart is *deceitful* (Jeremiah 17:9) and can only be understood by God, using His Word and Spirit (Hebrews 4:12-13). We need not enter into a separate realm of the inner man, the non-existent Freudian "unconscious," in order to discern truth.

Adler proposes two basic "types" of human beings. One "type" is "those who live a more conscious life," the other "approaches life with a prejudiced attitude, and sees only a small part of it. The behavior and speech of individuals of this type are always directed in an unconscious manner" (p. 87, UHN). Adler attributes great power to the supposedly unconscious realm of the inner man:

"Human beings develop powers in themselves which are constantly at work, though they know nothing of them. These faculties lie hidden in the unconscious." (p. 87, UHN)

Adler believes in "the psychic economy that events which are unconscious, remain in the unconscious." He sees the importance of this "fact" in that "the human soul has the capability of directing the consciousness" (p. 88, UHN). We must reject the hypothetical "unconscious" largely for this very reason: it demolishes personal responsibility for sin.

Dreams. Adler places great emphasis on this specific manifestation of the "unconscious." He states that:

"In the sleep dream, as in the daydream, we are concerned with the activity of an organism which is attempting to map, plan, and direct its future life toward a goal of security." (p. 58, UHN)

"The dream is a creation of the style of life, drawn from the individual's own interpretation of his own peculiar circumstances." (p. 107, LM)

Thus the dream, according to Adler, is intimately connected with understanding a person's "style of life":

"The dream must be a product of the style of life, and it must help to build up and enforce the style of life." (p. 98, LM)

Adler intentionally distances his theories from those of the Freudian school of psychoanalysis, accusing the latter of an unscientific approach:

"The Freudian interpretation has taken the dream out of the region of science.... 'Conscious' and 'unconscious' are placed in contradiction to each other.... Wherever we see such contradictions, we must conclude an unscientific attitude of mind." (p. 95, LM)

Adler insists that his own attitude is scientific because he takes into the account the *whole* individual in his interpretations:

"What is missing from psychoanalysis is the very first requisite for a science of psychology--a recognition of the coherence of the personality and of the unity of the individual in all his expressions.... From a scientific point of view, the dreamer and the waking man are the same individual, and the purpose of dreams must be applicable to this one coherent personality." (p. 96-97, LM)

From this supposedly "scientific" foundation, Adler proceeds to draw some rather astounding conclusions about understanding human nature. He admits that it is "clear that dreams would be found, not more intelligent and prophetic than everyday thinking, but more confused and confusing" (p. 94, LM). He also admits that dreams are a limited and incomplete source of information:

"We...will draw conclusions about his character from the dream of an individual only when we can find additional supporting evidence in other characteristics, to substantiate our interpretation of the dream." (p. 93, UHN)

But in spite of this admitted confusion and uncertainty, Adler insists that "in dreaming an individual is hoping to solve his problems in his sleep" (p. 95, LM). He does so, according to Adler's speculations, in a rather purposeful manner:

"In the construction of a dream we pick out only such incidents as agree with our style of life and express what the style of life demands when confronted by our present problems." (p. 102, LM)

Adler draws vital conclusions from examining the information gathered from this questionable source:

"...a dream shows not only that the dreamer is occupied in the solution of one of his life's problems, but also how he approaches these problems." (p. 99, UHN)

More specifically, "the social feelings, and the striving for power, will make themselves evident in his dream" (p. 99, UHN). Note here that Adler reads into the dreams of others *his own* unique theories about the fundamental motivations of human beings.

Dreams, according to Adler, arouse emotions that conform to the dreamer's own "style of life":

"Something remains--we are left with the feelings our dreams have aroused.... The purpose of dreams must be in the feelings they arouse.... The feelings an individual creates must always be in conformity with his style of life." (p. 98, LM)

These feelings contribute to and support the "style of life":

"The purpose of the dream will be to support and back the style of life, to arouse the feelings suited to it." (p. 99, LM)

Adler asserts that this arousal of emotion is only possible because of the mysterious nature of dreams:

"The fact that dreams are designed to fool us and intoxicate us accounts for the fact that they are so rarely understood. If we understood our dreams they could not deceive us. They could no longer arouse in us feelings and emotions." (p. 107, LM)

Adler cautions us about the dreams of those who have a "mistaken style of life," that:

"Dreams are mainly built up out of metaphors and symbols.... The use of metaphors and symbols is always dangerous in the hands of an individual who has a mistaken style of life." (p. 102-103, LM)

Biblically, what are we to make of Adler's heavy focus on gathering information from a person's dreams? The Bible does record *prophetic* dreams, such as those interpreted by Daniel. These were used by God to demonstrate to pagan nations His identity as the one true God. However, nowhere does Scripture point us toward the ordinary dreams of individuals as a source of

understanding the inner man. Adler thus derives information about human nature from an unreliable, unbiblical source.

Power and Inferiority

Adler's theory is rooted in the assumption that human beings are motivated primarily by the desire to overcome *inferiority* and gain *power*, or *superiority*, over others. In addition to "social feeling," the other "criterion for the evaluation of character" is considered by Adler to be "those powers which are most hostile to the social feeling...the tendencies and strivings toward personal power and superiority." He contrasts "social feelings" with "personal aggrandizement," saying that these two tendencies "are always in opposition to each other" (p. 154, UHN).

Inferiority experienced in childhood is a key to unlocking the human heart, according to Adlerian theory:

"This feeling of inferiority is the driving force, the starting point from which every childish striving originates. It determines how this individual child acquires peace and security in life, it determines the very goal of his existence, and prepares the path along which this goal may be reached." (p. 65, UHN)

It may begin with inferiorities of a physiological nature:

"One can state as a fundamental law that children who come into the world with organ inferiorities become involved at an early age in a bitter struggle for existence which results only too often in the strangulation of their social feelings. Instead of interesting themselves in an adjustment to their fellows, they are continually preoccupied with themselves, and with the impression which they make on others." (p. 65, UHN)

Adler believes that the *same principle* applies equally well to social and economic burdens, producing hostility to the world (p. 65, UHN). Thus he is able to conclude, a couple of pages later, that:

"It is the feeling of inferiority, inadequacy, insecurity, which determines the goal of an individual's existence." (p. 67, UHN)

But beware, because the struggle for power can become pathological:

"When the feeling of inferiority is intensified to the degree that the child fears he will never be able to compensate for his weakness, the danger arises that...he will demand an overcompensation.... The striving for power and dominance may become so exaggerated and intensified that it must be called pathological." (p. 69, UHN)

In addition, the desire for power clearly interferes with interpersonal relationships:

"Whatever the errors to which a child is exposed in his development, the most serious consequences arise from his desire to elevate himself over all his fellows, to seek more personal power which will give him advantages over his fellow man." (p. 128, UHN)

Relationships within the community, according to Adler, contribute further to the fundamental goal of achieving superiority:

"An individual never remains long at any neutral goal, for the communal life of mankind is accompanied by constant self-measurement which gives rise to the desire for superiority, and the hope of success in competition." (p. 57, UHN)

Note clearly, at this juncture, that Adler has defined *man's fundamental problem* as a striving to overcome feelings of inferiority, *rather than* sinful rebellion against God. This is a major shift from the *biblical* understanding of human nature.

Adler interprets dreams in terms of the theory he has created about what motivates man:

"The striving for power of an individual who is seeking to overcome difficulties and maintain his position in the future, is re-echoed in his dreams. Dreams offer us important grips on the problems of the psychic life." (p. 58, UHN)

In addition to dreams, Adler asserts that "examinations of childhood fantasies show clearly that the striving for power plays the predominant role" (p. 57, UHN).

Education, which we will examine later, is claimed to have an impact on the inferiority feelings of young students:

"Education affects the child by virtue of its conscious or unconscious desire to compensate him for his insecurity, by schooling him in the technique of life, by giving him an educated understanding, and by furnishing him with a social feeling for his fellows." (p. 68, UHN)

In addition to power, Adler believes people are motivated to achieve *security* in their fight against inferiority feelings:

"All our strivings are directed toward a position in which a feeling of security has been achieved.... The goal of security is common to all human beings; but some of them mistake the direction in which security lies and their concrete movements lead them astray." (p. 27-28, LM)

The "inferiority complex," however, remains crucial to Adler's understanding of human nature. He insists that "every neurotic has an inferiority complex" (p. 49, LM), but even beyond that, "inferiority feelings are in some degree common to all of us" (p. 51, LM). These feelings arise in the face of difficult tasks:

"The inferiority complex appears before a problem for which an individual is not properly adapted or equipped, and expresses his conviction that he is unable to solve it." (p. 52, LM)

Adler attributes a variety of different problems all to the "inferiority complex" (p. 55, LM), which seems to be a catch-all in his system. But it isn't all bad news. Adler believes that "inferiority feelings" are not only a *normal* part of human nature, but the cause of all positive contributions to human progress:

"Inferiority feelings are not in themselves abnormal. They are the cause of all improvements in the position of mankind." (p. 55, LM)

"It is the striving for superiority which is behind every human creation and it is the source of all contributions which are made to our culture." (p. 69, LM)

Later, however, Adler is quick to explain *criminal* actions by the same underlying forces! He says of criminals that:

"...in this point they are just like the rest of us. We all wish to overcome difficulties. We are all striving to reach

a goal in the future by attaining which we shall feel strong, superior, complete." (p. 197, LM)

Adler believes that we are *all* "striving for security" or "self-preservation," described more fully as "the struggle to rise from an inferior position to a superior position" (p. 197, LM). Criminals are included in exactly the same human goals and struggles:

"In all the criminal's actions and attitudes, he shows that he is struggling to be superior, to solve problems, to overcome difficulties." (p. 198, LM)

In order to facilitate change, in a criminal or anyone else, Adler believes that "we must recognize the specific discouragement which he shows in his style of life" (p. 49, LM). He is quick to look behind appearances and locate the "inferiority complex" at the foundation of whatever behaviors and attitudes happen to surface. This is true even of those who give the impression of superiority or conceit:

"Behind every one who behaves as if he were superior to others, we can suspect a feeling of inferiority which calls for very special efforts of concealment." (p. 50, LM)

Notice how there is *no escape* from Adler's interpretation (if accepted!). Outward appearances and conscious statements are all disregarded in favor of the theory that an "inferiority complex" lurks beneath every surface. No doubt this theory has had its impact on the self-esteem teachings that infiltrate our modern culture and church.

Vanity. It is not surprising to find a discussion of vanity tucked into Adler's discussion of the "inferiority complex." He believes that vanity is frequently hidden from others:

"It is probably true that every human being is vain to some degree, yet making an exhibit of one's vanity is not considered good form. Vanity, therefore, is frequently so disguised and cloaked that it appears in the most varied transformations." (p. 155, UHN)

Adler claims to penetrate the disguise, explaining it according to his theory of human nature:

"We are dealing here with the various tricks of the human soul, with attempts of individuals to maintain, at all costs,

their feeling of superiority, and to shield their vanity from any insult." (p. 156, UHN)

But lest any of this be attributed to sin, for which man is responsible, Adler cautions that:

"In the social atmosphere of our times...it is impossible to divorce ourselves entirely from a certain degree of vanity." (p. 157, UHN)

This is hardly a biblical evaluation of pride or vanity! Scripture exhorts the believer to maintain *humility*, not to engage in vain struggles to exalt oneself.

Envy. Scripture cautions believers against envy, but Adler explains it away with his theory:

"Where there is a striving for power and domination, one can with certainty find the trait of envy in addition. The gulf between an individual and his supernaturally high goal expresses itself in the form of an inferiority complex." (p. 178, UHN)

Adler evidently recognizes that envy clashes with the teachings of religious faith:

"Although our ethics and our religion forbid feelings of envy, we have not yet psychologically matured enough to do without them." (p. 179, UHN)

Note that "psychological maturity," in Adlerian psychology, replaces the Christian's goal of sanctification, becoming like Christ.

Rather than receive the salvation from *sin* offered by Christ alone, Adler wants to turn envy to useful purposes:

"Since we cannot entirely destroy it, we must make it useful.... In the case of the individual we can prescribe an occupation which will elevate his self-esteem." (p. 180, UHN)

Scripture, however, never condones making our sins "useful"!

Emotions. Adler neatly explains *all* emotions according to his catch-all theory:

"No one understood the meaning and value of the affects and emotions until it was discovered that they were valuable instruments to overcome the feeling of inferiority, and to elevate the personality and obtain its recognition."
(p. 213, UHN)

This is a blatant disregard of the fact that *God* provided revelation about human nature many centuries before psychologists came onto the scene.

Anger is one emotion Adler attributes to the striving for power:

"We must designate all irascible, angry, acrimonious individuals as enemies of society, and enemies of life. We must call attention to the fact that their striving for power is built upon the foundations of their feeling of inferiority. No human being who realizes his own power is under the necessity of showing these aggressive, violent movements and gestures." (p. 211-212, UHN)

There is a similar explanation for *sadness*:

"The striving for superiority is present, just as in all other affects." (p. 213, UHN)

Even *joy* and *laughter* may be due to the same motivations, Adler insists:

"Even this laughter and this happiness may be misused for personal ends...a joy which arises at the wrong time or in the wrong place, which denies the social feeling and destroys it, is nothing but a disjunctive affect, an instrument of conquest." (p. 217, UHN)

Sympathy, although believed by Adler to be a generally good emotion indicating a mature "social feeling," can also be exaggerated and misused (p. 218, UHN).

Evidently, *whatever* emotion, behavior, or attitude is under consideration, Adler can explain it as an attempt to overcome an underlying "inferiority complex." He hangs far too much on a theory that finds no scriptural support whatsoever! The "striving for power" seen in Scripture is viewed more accurately as man's sinful attempt to cut himself loose from *God's* revelation and commands.

Social "Feeling"

Adlerian psychology places a heavy emphasis on man's life within a community of other human beings. Since this contrasts so sharply with the highly individualistic emphasis of so much modern psychology, Adler's system may lure Christians through its doors. But we must guard against the deception that is intertwined with such a seemingly biblical emphasis.

Adler believes that "social feeling" is basic to an understanding of human nature and to evaluating a person's character:

"The most important and valuable fundamental thesis for our communal life is this: *The character of a human being is never the basis of a moral judgment, but is an index of the attitude of this human being toward his environment, and of his relationship to the society in which he lives.*" (p. 153, UHN)

"In order to know how a man thinks, we have to examine his relationships to his fellow men. The relation of man to man is determined on the one hand by the very nature of the cosmos, and is thus subject to change" but also "determined by fixed institutions." (p. 34, UHN)

Notice here that the "nature of the cosmos" has replaced *the nature of God*. God determines that relation of man to man, not an impersonal cosmos!

Adler goes so far as to insist that an individual's *value* rests on his attitude toward other humans:

"Any man's value...is determined by his attitude toward his fellow men, and by the degree in which he partakes of the division of labor which communal life demands." (p. 102, UHN)

"It really does not matter what you think of yourself, or what other people think of you. The important thing is the general attitude toward human society, since this determines every wish and every interest and every activity of each individual." (p. 87, UHN)

Even more, Adler bases *universal values* on the judgment of the social community:

"What we call justice and righteousness, and consider most valuable in the human character, is essentially nothing more than the fulfillment of the conditions which arise in the social needs of mankind. These conditions give shape to the soul and direct its activity; responsibility, loyalty, frankness, love of truth, and the like are virtues which have been set up and retained only by the universally valid principal of communal life. We can judge a character as bad or good only from the standpoint of society." (p. 38, UHN)

"We cannot judge a human being except by using the concept of the social feeling as a standard, and measuring his thought and action according to it.... The degree to which the social feeling has developed in any individual is the sole criterion of human values, universally valid." (p. 137, UHN)

In this system, *society replaces God*. In the Bible, it is *God* who defines "universal values" such as justice and righteousness. And it is *God*, the Judge of all the earth, who judges man by *His* standards.

This critical Adlerian concept, "social feeling," is supposedly not difficult to determine:

"We can easily measure anyone's social feeling by learning to what degree he is prepared to serve, to help, and to give pleasure to others." (p. 199, UHN)

Adler points out the rather obvious facts that "no human being ever appeared except in a community of human beings" (p. 35, UHN) and "the community is the best guarantee of the continued existence of human beings!" (p. 36, UHN). However, he also notes that we live rather "isolated lives" today. Therefore, "since we do not find sufficient contact with our fellow men, we become their enemies" (p. 15, UHN). Adler insists that a better understanding of one another would greatly improve "social feeling":

"Human beings would doubtless get along with each other better, and would approach each other more closely, were they to understand one another better. Under such circumstances it would be impossible for them to disappoint and deceive each other." (p. 21, UHN)

To Adler, modern psychology is clearly the means to such increased understanding.

Considerable space is devoted to examining the conditions and consequences of community life. Adler cites favorably the founders of Communism in this area:

"An important aspect of our consideration lies in the materialistic stratification of society which Marx and Engels have described." (p. 34, UHN)

There is a strong element of *determinism* in Adler's view of social life, just as there is in his individual psychology:

"The rules of communal life are really just as self-explanatory as the laws of climate.... If the conditions of our life are determined in the first place by cosmic influences, they are also further conditioned by the social and communal life of human beings, and by the laws and regulations which arise spontaneously from the communal life." (p. 35, UHN)

But there is no mention of *God*! Adler proposes universal "laws" without reference to the Creator. He substitutes the *impersonal* term, "cosmic influences."

Adler also believes that social life impedes the individual person's ability to act as a free agent:

"Man's soul cannot act as a free agent because the necessity of solving the problems which constantly arise, determines the line of its activity." (p. 34, UHN)

These "problems" relate to group life, and "the essential conditions of this group existence influence the individual" (p. 34, UHN). Meanwhile, Scripture is clear about man's responsibility before God for his sinful choices.

Adler also draws on the theories of Darwin, who founded the popular but dangerous theory of evolution:

"Darwin long ago drew attention to the fact that one never found weak animals living alone; we are forced to consider man among these weak animals, because he likewise is not strong enough to live alone." (p. 35, UHN)

Adler lists "security and adaptation" to nature as purposes of communal life. Man is forced to "seek situations in which the disadvantages of the human status in the scheme of life will be obviated and minimized" (p. 36, UHN).

It is here, in looking at man's "disadvantaged status," that Adler suppresses the most critical distinction between man and the animals: man's creation in the image of God. However, he does say that "the psychic organ alone could render first-aid quickly, and compensate for the organic deficiencies of man" (p. 37, UHN). He notes that the ability to use language differentiates man and animals:

"Another instrument of the communal life is to be found in articulate speech, that miracle which distinguishes man from all other animals.... Speech would be absolutely unnecessary to an individual organism living alone.... Speech has an enormously important value in the development of the human soul. Logical thinking is possible only with the premise of speech, which gives us the possibility of building up concepts and of understanding differences in values." (p. 37, UHN)

But Adler, along with Darwin, misses the critical facts of creation. The ability to speak, and to think rationally, is one aspect of *the image of God* in man. Man was given dominion over the rest of creation. Furthermore, logical thinking and speech are only possible with the premise that the personal, sovereign God of Scripture exists and *created* man as a rational creature.

Man's *responsibility* to his fellow human beings is a key emphasis in Adlerian psychology. Adler says that:

"Society exacts certain obligations of us which influence the norms and forms of our life, as well as the development of our minds.... Everyone must help his neighbor. Everyone must feel himself bound to his fellow man." (p. 39, UHN)

Adler concludes that man must be studied as a *social* being, in relation to his family, clan, nation, and even all of humanity (p. 46, UHN). But again, we must note that *society replaces God*. Adler perceives obligations as arising from *society instead of God*. He studies man in relationship to man, but not man in relationship to God.

Adler stresses the influence that human beings have on each other. He says that "our entire life is very much dependent upon the faculty of identification," and that people possess "an inborn social feeling," which is the basis for the ability to identify with others (p. 60, UHN). Such "inborn" social feeling makes it

possible for people to influence one another, a key factor in community living:

"Our whole communal life were impossible unless one individual could influence another." (p. 60, UHN)

However, Adler warns, that influence will be short-lived if it involves harm to the other person:

"It is impossible to have a lasting influence upon an individual whom one is harming. One can influence another individual best when he is in the mood in which he feels his own rights guaranteed." (p. 61, UHN)

Adler clearly places a high value on social interaction. He uses the term "criminal neglect," to mean "defective interest for one's fellows men" or "defective social feeling" (p. 85, UHN). He also explains social failures in terms of the striving for superiority discussed in the last section:

"Striving for power and the lust for dominance have introduced false values into the normal division of labor." (p. 102-103, UHN)

"The social feeling, next to the striving for power, plays the most important role in the development of character.... The social feeling is influenced both by the feeling of inferiority and its compensatory striving for power." (p. 136-137, UHN)

What Adler ignores in these comments is man's fundamental rebellion against God. Man's *sin* is at the root of his social failures and his striving for power over others.

Male-female relationships are a point of emphasis in Adler's discussion of "social feeling." He is clearly opposed to the biblical view of male headship, established by God at creation:

"Men who like to believe that their privileges and prerogatives are determined by nature will be surprised to learn that men did not possess these prerogatives from the beginning, but had to fight for them.... Masculine dominance is not a natural thing. There is evidence to prove that it occurred chiefly as a result of constant battles between primitive peoples." (p. 105, UHN)

The positions of men and women, however, are determined by *God*, not *nature*. Continuing his discussion of the *development* of male dominance over time, Adler says that "woman was often held up as the source of all evil, as in the *biblical* conception of the *original sin*" (p. 109, UHN). The Bible certainly does *not* view woman as the *source* of evil. On the contrary, the *man*, Adam, is held responsible for his lack of leadership. In Romans 5:12-21, it is the *one sin* of the one *man* Adam that led to death for all men.

Adler clearly rejects the male dominance evident in his culture, noting the accomplishments of women in various fields, and the "almost universal dissatisfaction with the feminine role" (p. 111, UHN). He credits psychology with what he considers the correct view:

"The alleged inferiority of woman is maintained in our age by law and tradition, though it is denied by anyone with a real psychological insight." (p. 119, UHN)

Although Adler does not take up the agenda of modern radical feminists, he clearly rejects the male dominance of his culture:

"We must take up the battle not because we have some pathologically exaggerated respect for woman, but because the present fallacious attitude negates the logic of our whole social life." (p. 119, UHN)

Biblically, we learn that both male and female are created in the image of God. For *this* reason, not because of "psychological insight," we are to treat women well. Nevertheless, the Scriptures do teach a *hierarchy* in which there is to be male leadership. Humans, in their sin, have distorted that leadership calling so that it sometimes becomes abusive and therefore sinful.

Earlier, we saw how Adler explained criminal behavior in terms of his "inferiority complex" theory. He also discusses criminality in terms of "social feeling," explaining that:

"We find the same kind of failure exhibited in criminals as in problem children, neurotics, psychotics, suicides, drunkards and sexual perverts.... Every one of them fails in social interest. They are not concerned with their fellow beings." (p. 197, LM)

However, according to Adler, the criminal must somehow crush his "innate" social feeling in order to perpetrate a crime:

"Even the criminal must try to reconcile himself with social feeling. At the same time he must prepare himself to kill his social feeling, to break through the wall of social interest, before he can commit the crime." (p. 214, LM)

The treatment of criminals, according to Adlerian psychology, must be rooted in the improvement of "social feeling":

"We can see, now, where we should begin in our treatment of criminals. We must train them to be cooperative." (p. 203, LM)

Adler takes it back even further, advocating that we train children in "social feeling":

"If we could train our children to the right degree of ability to cooperate, if we could develop them in social interest, the number of criminals would diminish very considerably, and the effects would be shown in the near future.... The spirit of cooperation would be immediately spread over the whole world; and the whole social atmosphere of mankind would be raised to a much higher level." (p. 236, LM)

Optimistic as this sounds, it isn't biblical. Adler takes no account of the gravity of human sin. Sin can't be erased by merely teaching children to cooperate. We do need to teach children to consider others, but we must do so on the only possible basis: God's Word. Adler divorces his teaching from divinely revealed standards. His agenda is more in line with New Age global plans than with the Scriptures.

Adler attributes "mistaken meanings of life" to his concern for "social feeling." He claims that:

"...all failures...are failures because they are lacking in fellow-feeling and social interest...the meaning they give to life is a private meaning: no one else is benefited.... A private meaning is in fact no meaning at all. Meaning is only possible in communication." (p. 8, LM)

"True" meanings of life contrast to "mistaken" meanings primarily in terms of social interest, according to Adler:

"The mark of all true 'meanings of life' is that they are common meanings--they are meanings in which others can share, and meanings which others can accept as valid." (p. 9, LM)

Adler anticipates the objection, "What about the individual...does not his own individuality suffer?" In response, he states that:

"If a human being, in the meaning he gives to life, wishes to make a contribution, and if his emotions are all directed to this goal, he will naturally be bound to bring himself into the best shape for contribution. He will fit himself for this goal." (p. 10, LM)

In an age of "codependency" where service to others is consistently downgraded, such an analysis may be appealing to Christians. However, the *Christian* sacrifices for others because he lives to serve *God* first of all. Adler's "social feeling" is purely humanistic, cut from any connection to the God who *created* man.

Adler promotes broad implications for his theory. In fact, he credits all human progress to "social feeling":

"The oldest striving of mankind is for men to join with their fellow men. It is through interest in our fellow men that all the progress of our race has been made." (p. 252, LM)

Having no heavenly hope, Adler says concerning our ancestors that:

"...all that survives of them is the contributions they have made to human life." (p. 11, LM)

"Only the work of those men who have contributed survived. their spirit continues and their spirit is eternal." (p. 237, LM)

However, when Adler says that "their spirit is eternal," he speaks only of the remains of their earthly accomplishments. Nowhere does Adler evidence any sort of belief in immortality.

In the areas of work and marriage, people are clearly involved with one another. Adler applies his theories to these areas. Here is how he explains the necessity for work:

"If we lived on a planet which offered us everything we needed without work, it would perhaps be a virtue to be lazy and a vice to be industrious. As far as we can understand

from our relation to our own planet, earth, the logical answer to the problem of occupation, the only answer in accordance with common sense, is that we should work, cooperate and contribute. This has always been felt in the intuitions of mankind; we can see its necessity, now, from the scientific angle." (p. 247, LM)

Marriage is also explained in terms of Adler's "social feeling":

"It can easily be shown that love and marriage are one side of cooperation--not a cooperation for the welfare of two persons only, but a cooperation also for the welfare of mankind." (p. 263, LM)

In Scripture, both work and marriage are a part of *God's* original plan for man's life on earth. Man was instructed to work, to care for the rest of creation, and to be fruitful and multiply. Adler has no biblical roots for his statements.

Vanity, discussed earlier in connection with the "inferiority complex," is also important in considering "social feeling." Adler, while believing vanity to be somewhat inescapable, says that "vanity, and the feeling for one's fellow men, are not conceivable together" (p. 157, UHN). Thus he easily concludes that:

"We arrive at a point of view which people have understood for thousands of years. It is expressed in a famous biblical line: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (p. 169, UHN)

It is, of course, more blessed to give than to receive. But Adler holds that "social feeling" is an innate quality of man. He fails to connect the blessedness of giving with *God's* commands and revelation.

Adler notes increasing isolation as a major societal problem in today's world:

"A deep-rooted trend of our culture allows human beings to isolate themselves into nations, creeds, and classes. Conflict, expressed in senile impotent traditions, is the sole result." (p. 186, UHN)

Some isolation, when the grounds are unbiblical, is clearly wrong. However, in Scripture, there is a separation *unto God* that is expected of believers. God says that we are to live in the world

but not be of the world. We are consecrated, set apart, belonging to Him. Adler's move away from isolation is chilling in its resemblance to the global agenda of the current New Age movement, where all differences are blurred--including the Creator-creature distinction!

The Meaning of Life

In titling his book, *What Life Should Mean To You*, Adler assumes the prerogatives that belong to God alone. Only God can rightfully determine what life *should* mean to you!

Meanwhile, Adler is aware that meaning exists, that there are no random, meaningless facts:

"Human beings live in the realm of *meanings*. We do not experience pure circumstances; we always experience circumstances in their significance for men." (p. 3, LM)

Individuals *interpret* their experiences, according to Adler, and then live according to those interpretations:

"It is in his actions that every man inevitably puts the question and answers it.... He behaves as if he could rely upon a certain interpretation of life." (p. 4, LM)

Adler calls that interpretation one's "meaning of life."

Adler believes that "the province of psychology" is "the use for human welfare of an understanding of *meanings* and the way in which they influence human actions and human fortunes" (p. 12, LM). He makes the remarkable claim that "if once the meaning given to life is found and understood, we have the key to the whole personality" (p. 22, LM). He clearly assigns a critical role to psychology in the understanding and evaluation of individual life meanings:

"The province of psychology is to explore the meaning involved in all the expressions of an individual, to find the key to his goal, and to compare it with the goals of others." (p. 28, LM)

He presumes to do the work of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 4:12-13) when he insists that psychologists can discern the inner man:

"The psychologist must learn to read between the lines; he must learn the art of appreciating life-meaning." (p. 58, LM)

In attempting to understand man's basic problems, Adler believes that *all* such problems can be grouped in the areas of occupation, social life, and sex. He states that:

"It is in his response to these three problems that every individual human being unfailingly reveals his own deep sense of the meaning of life." (p. 7, LM)

In each of these three areas, man lives under certain limitations (p. 5, LM). He must live with other human beings rather than in isolation, and he must recognize that there are two sexes. These two are rather obvious facts. But Adler departs sharply from any connection with Christian theism when he limits man's life strictly to earth, saying that "we are living on the crust of this poor planet, earth, and nowhere else" (p. 5, LM). He considers "the greatest of problems and purposes and goals" as "to continue our personal life and to continue the life of mankind, on this planet which we inhabit, in cooperation with our fellow men" (p. 6, LM). After he informs us that life would be terribly dull with no further problems to solve, Adler says that "art and religion, which cheer us with the imagination of our unattained goals, would no longer have any meaning" (p. 57, LM). Only *problems* give meaning to life in Adler's scheme, not the glory of God! Adler rules out the Christian's glorious eternal hope under his system. His humanistic view of meaning is one that evaporates as a mist.

"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever." 1 Peter 1:24-25a

Truth is strictly relative on Adler's hopeless perspective. Life's meaning is elusive:

"There are as many meanings given to life as there are human beings, and, as we have suggested, perhaps each meaning involves more or less of a mistake. No one possesses the absolute meaning of life, and we may say that any meaning which is at all serviceable cannot be called absolutely wrong." (p. 4, LM)

Any hint of *absolute* truth, in Adler's mind, is determined by the mind of *man* rather than the mind of *God*:

"We can discover what it is that the better meanings share in common, what it is that the worse meanings lack. In this way we can obtain a scientific 'meaning of life,' a common measure of true meanings...we must remember that 'true' means true for mankind, true for the purposes and aims of human beings. There is no other truth than this; and if another truth existed, it could never concern us; we could never know it; it would be meaningless." (p. 4, LM)

There is nothing either scientific or biblical about this statement, which leaves us adrift on a sea of chance and relativity. Scripture anchors us in the eternal hope we have been given in Christ, where "life's meaning" is not tossed about according to whims of sinful man. While it is true that there are no meaningless, "brute" facts, all the facts have been *created by God* and are given their meaning by Him alone.

The "Style of Life"

It is critical to understand and evaluate Adler's term, "style of life." His basic methods for understanding human nature and helping people change revolve around this concept:

"What is necessary is to discover the fundamental behavior pattern of our patient. Once this is understood we can learn his essential character and the correct interpretation of his illness." (p. 18, UHN)

That "fundamental behavior pattern" is integrally related to the person's environment:

"An evaluation of a man's character must be made solely when his context, his environment, is known." (p. 140, UHN)

However, Adler does not see people as primarily *victims* of environment, but as active participants in shaping what they experience:

"Everyone determines how and what he will experience. In our daily life we observe people drawing whatever conclusions they desire from their experiences." (p. 20, UHN)

Many Christians today are weary of therapies that encourage people to view themselves as victims. Adler's point of view may appear at first glance a welcome change of scene. But we must proceed with extreme caution.

One problem is Adler's insistence on bringing the *unconscious* into this process of shaping experience:

"We do not test anything, but receive, transform, and assimilate all perceptions in the shadow of our own conscious, or the depths of our unconscious." (p. 75, UHN)

Another problem is the basically *fixed* nature of the "style of life," reflecting again an element of psychic determinism:

"One learns to avoid some difficulties, it is true, and acquires a philosophical attitude towards others, but the pattern along which one acts does not change as a result of this." (p. 20, UHN)

Although outward appearances may change, Adler believes the foundation, the "style of life," to remain fixed:

"An individual may change the way in which he makes his goal concrete...we must still look for the underlying coherence, for the unity of the personality. This unity is fixed in all its expressions." (p. 59, LM)

Goals. The "style of life" is not *merely* a manner of conducting oneself. It is not a mere *behavior* pattern, although behavior is part of the picture:

"Every expression of a man's life is an aspect of his unit behavior pattern." (p. 74, UHN)

Adler teaches that "all human behavior is based upon the striving for a goal" (p. 74, UHN). He says that the possibility for errors exists because "every one of us utilizes his triumphs and psychic assets according to his particular pattern" (p. 74, UHN). It is the underlying *goal*, and not mere outward behavior, that occupies Adler's attention. As might be expected, he believes human motivation to be centered on overcoming "inferiority" feelings. He insists that:

"The goal of superiority, of power, of the conquest of others, is the goal which directs the activity of most human beings. This goal modifies the world philosophy and the behavior pattern and directs the various psychic expressions of an individual into specific channels. Traits of character are only the external manifestations of the style of life, of the behavior pattern, of any individual." (p. 133, UHN)

Amazingly, Adler claims that all of a person's actions, focused on his chosen goal, are *without mistake* in pursuit of that goal:

"Once the goal of superiority has been made concrete, there are no mistakes made in the style of life. The habits and symptoms of the individual are precisely right for attaining his concrete goal; they are beyond all criticism."
(p. 61, LM)

An individual's goals, claims Adler, need not be *consciously* pursued:

"The assumption of a striving for a goal is more than simply a convenient fiction. It has shown itself to be largely coincident with the actual facts in its fundamentals, whether these facts are to be found in the conscious or unconscious life. The striving for a goal, the purposiveness of the psychic life is not only a philosophic assumption, but actually a fundamental fact." (p. 68, UHN)

Actions, such as the choice of an occupation, *reveal* the underlying "style of life" in Adler's system:

"In a child's choice of an occupation we can observe his whole style of life. He is showing us the main direction of his striving and what he values most in life. We must let him value as he chooses." (p. 244, LM)

Note the openness to *whatever* values a child may choose, rather than care to teach and uphold *God's* values.

One major concern about Adler's system is that two completely *different* patterns of actual conduct may represent pursuit of the *same* goal. After discussing a variety of "mechanisms" used by children in the pursuit of their life's goals, Adler says that:

"We may conclude that anything may become a means to an end, once the pattern of psychic activity is fixed. The child may develop himself in an evil direction, in order to arrive at his goal, or he may become a model child, with the same goal in view." (p. 44, UHN)

There is no escape from this system:

"The movements and expression of two human beings may be outwardly identical, yet when examined for their underlying

behavior patterns, prove themselves to be entirely different...we must evaluate them according to the unit goal toward which they are directed." (p. 74, UHN)

For example:

"An individual who isolates himself may be suspected of the same hostility as one who wages open and direct warfare upon society." (p. 185, UHN)

Adler must make *judgments of the inner man*, which he does on the basis of his all-encompassing theory, in order to draw such conclusions. But no human being is qualified for this awesome job, which is reserved for the Holy Spirit alone. Man can only look at the outward appearance, in terms of the standards revealed by God. Adler's theory crumbles under a burden it cannot bear.

Childhood memories. The memories of early childhood are a key building block in the structure of one's "style of life." According to Adler, memories are specially selected to coincide precisely with that style:

"Memories can never run counter to the style of life.... In so far as his style of life alters, his memories also will alter; he will remember different incidents, or he will put a different interpretation on the incidents he remembers.... Early recollections have special significance...they show the style of life in its origins and in its simplest expression." (p. 74, LM)

This emphasis is significant in an age where counseling so often encourages extensive trips into the past. The Christian must beware of such excursions. Adler (along with many modern counselors) has no regard for actual *truth*, but is concerned only with what a person *believes* to be true. This can be devastating when warped memories involve the lives of other people and key relationships. The believer needs to recognize the difference between his life *before Christ*, and his new life *in Christ*. He must see *God* in control of all the events of his life. It is *God*, not the individual or a psychologist, who *interprets* those events.

Character traits. Adler defines a *character trait* as:

"some specific mode of expression on the part of an individual who is attempting to adjust himself to the world in which he lives. Character is a social concept." (p. 133, UHN)

He then defines *character* as "the behavior pattern according to which his striving for significance is elaborated in the terms of his social feeling" (p. 133, UHN). As usual, these definitions are colored by Adler's theories, this time the "social feeling" in particular.

Adler teaches that character traits are "acquired for the purpose of maintaining a particular habitus in life" (p. 133, UHN). Traits shared by a community of people are explained in terms of identification and imitation:

"The reason that there are character traits which are common for a whole family, or a nation, or a race, lies simply in the fact that one individual acquires them from another by imitation or by the process of identifying himself with the other's activity." (p. 134, UHN)

It's slightly difficult to reconcile this view with Adler's teaching that individuals actively shape and create their own experiences! Meanwhile, he ignores the biblical reality of original sin. Man's condition is sinful, and many sinful traits are repeated because of that basic biblical fact.

Emotions. Adler believes that a person's emotions are always in line with his underlying "style of life" and goal:

"The feelings are never in contradiction to the style of life. Where there is a goal, the feelings always adapt themselves to its attainment." (p. 30, LM)

"The affects are not mysterious phenomena which defy interpretation; they occur wherever they are appropriate to the given style of life and the predetermined behavior pattern of the individual. Their purpose is to modify the situation of the individual in whom they occur, to his benefit." (p. 209, UHN)

It is futile, Adler claims, to attempt to change emotions *alone*. Change must always involve a more basic change in the style of life:

"If we see emotions that apparently cause difficulties and run counter to the individual's own welfare, it is completely useless to begin by trying to change these emotions. They are the right expression of the individual's style of life,

and they can be uprooted only if he changes his style of life." (p. 47, LM)

For example:

"In Individual Psychology we no longer concern ourselves with finding out causes of fear, but rather with identifying its purpose." (p. 128, LM)

"This emotion [anger] betrays very clearly that its purpose is the rapid and forceful destruction of every obstacle in the way of its angry bearer...an angry individual is one who is striving for superiority by the strenuous application of all his powers." (p. 210, UHN)

How does this square with Scripture? We might agree that merely attacking emotions is a dead end road. But then we must leave Adler behind in the dust. The *Christian* must examine his life in the light of God's Word. He must look at *who* or *what* he worships: the Creator, or the creation? Even more importantly, he must rely on the gracious work of the Spirit to progressively change his heart so that he becomes more like Christ. Adler has no *means* of godly change, no concept of worship, no standards for evaluating a person's life, and no objectives that please God. Yet he presses on, with schemes to categorize people and plans to eliminate crime!

Optimists and Pessimists. Adler teaches yet another scheme for categorization of people, based on "the manner in which they approach difficulties." One "type" is the *optimist*, the other the *pessimist* (p. 142, UHN). It is not surprising to see Adler's own theories emerging again, this time the "inferiority complex." The pessimists:

"...are the individuals who have acquired an 'inferiority complex' as a result of the experiences and impressions of their childhood, for whom all manner of difficulties have vouchsafed the feeling that life is not easy." (p. 143, UHN)

The "style of life" that results, according to Adler, may mask the inferiority that lurks beneath the surface:

"In their desire to maintain their superiority at all costs they may develop a behavior pattern so complicated that, at first glance, one would never suspect them of an essential hostility to mankind." (p. 145, UHN)

Adler further explains that pessimists do not trust themselves, and therefore never trust others either (p. 145, UHN).

Such a scheme is never presented in Scripture. In God's Word, men are described in terms of their obedience to God's revealed standards, not their trust in self or "inferiority complex."

Criminals. Adler claims to have found the solution to crime in his theories. He says that "crime is not an isolated thing in itself but the symptom of an attitude to life" (p. 229, LM). (Earlier, crime was explained in terms of the "social feeling" and "inferiority complex" theories, too!) Here's Adler remarkable claim:

"I am convinced that Individual Psychology shows us how we could change every single criminal. But consider what a work it would be to take every single criminal and treat him so that we changed his style of life." (p. 233, LM)

But apart from the work of God's grace, through His Spirit, such radical changes cannot be expected. Adler believes that man's humanistic psychology can erase crime, but only God can change the human heart. Adler denies the biblical reality of man's total depravity. He cannot begin to shed light on the darkness of sin.

The biblical "way of life." The New Testament uses the Greek word *anastrophe* to describe a person's way of conducting himself. Let's look at this term and compare it with Adler's "style of life." We need to understand how the concepts differ, and what Scripture actually says about the believer's *anastrophe*.

This Greek word is clearly used to refer to a person's *conduct*, the manner in which he conducts himself before God and man. The Scriptures using this term contrast the conduct associated with the unbeliever's pagan life, and the holy, righteous conduct expected of a Christian. In Ephesians 4:22, the Christian is instructed to *put off* his former *anastrophe*, and in 1 Peter 1:18 he is told that Christ has redeemed him from the futile *anastrophe* handed down to him by his forefathers. The verbal form of *anastrophe* is used in Ephesians 2:3, where Paul states that we formerly lived in the lusts of the flesh. Peter refers to the sensual conduct of morally corrupt men in 2 Peter 2:7. He also refers to godly conduct in several passages. In 1 Peter 1:15, Christians are instructed to be holy in their conduct, because God is holy (similarly in 2 Peter 3:11). They are exhorted to maintain excellent conduct among the Gentiles (1 Peter 2:12).

Wives of unbelievers are told to conduct themselves in a respectful, godly manner so that their husbands might be won over without a word (1 Peter 3:1-2). James exhorts Christians to show deeds of wisdom by his good *anastrophe* (James 3:13). The writer to the Hebrews instructs his readers to consider and imitate the *anastrophe* of their leaders (Hebrews 13:7). Paul instructs Timothy to be an example to others in his *anastrophe*, as well as his speech, love, faith, and purity (1 Timothy 4:12).

In every instance, Scripture speaks clearly of *conduct*, highlighting the contrast between believer and unbeliever. Nowhere are Christians instructed to examine the *anastrophe* of their *former* lives, apart from Christ, in order to discover the "error" that now hinders their walk with the Lord! Furthermore, Adler's "style of life" includes *much more* than mere conduct, encompassing as it does the goals, purposes, and plans of a man's heart. A human counselor cannot speak to all of that. He cannot peer into the inner man and discern the inmost thoughts, imaginations, and such. Only the Spirit, using God's powerful Word, can do so:

"For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to give an account." (Hebrews 4:12-13)

How Do People Change?

Adler's psychology includes specifics about *how* people can and should change. Adler admits that change is no easy task:

"The hardest thing for human beings to do is to know themselves and to change themselves." (p. 21, UHN)

In fact, attempts to educate men to be "better people" produce only illusory change, because "all the seeming changes are only apparent changes, valueless so long as the behavior pattern itself has not been modified" (p. 21, UHN). It is this fundamental change in "behavior pattern," or rather the "style of life," that Adler emphasizes in the process of change. He proposes an intense look back into childhood years, because of his belief that a person's life meaning and goal "can be changed only if he becomes free from the mistake involved in his childhood crystallization" (p. 34, LM). Explaining more fully, he states that:

"We must never treat a symptom or a single expression: we must discover the mistake made in the whole style of life, in the way the mind has interpreted its experiences, in the meaning it has given to life, and in the actions with which it has answered the impressions received from the body and from the environment." (p. 47, LM)

Adler attributes great power to the counselor who is able to discern the basic "error" in a person's style of life:

"At the same time that we understand a trait or behavior pattern in anyone, we acquire a lever with which we can modify that individual's behavior." (p. 147, UHN)

Adler specifically applies his methods to the rehabilitation of criminals, stating that:

"We cannot convince him...unless we can get behind all his interpretations, all his training in his own point of view, and discover the way in which his attitude first began." (p. 218, LM)

Very early childhood is the key, Adler claims, to unlocking the criminal mind:

"Our only remedy is to find out the block to cooperation which the criminal suffered in childhood. Here Individual Psychology has opened up for us the whole dark territory. We can see much clearer. By the age of five years a child's psyche is a unit; the threads of his personality have been drawn together." (p. 220, LM)

The Bible never requires a Christian to search back into his earliest years, often years *prior to conversion*, to uncover his mistaken "style of life." Nor can any human counselor pierce the inner man in the manner advocated by Adler. Such power to modify another person's behavior is not in the hands of any mere mortal. The sin of the human heart--criminal or other--is left untouched by man's psychological therapies. Only the Holy Spirit can effect the inner changes needed in the life of a believer, to conform him to the image of Christ.

Role of the Counselor. Adler's description of the ideal counselor is one that could easily appeal to Christians:

"We shall not be able to help him either by spoiling him or by slighting him; we must show him the interest of one man towards a fellow man.... We must cooperate with him in finding his mistakes, both for his own benefit and for the welfare of others. With this aim in view we shall never run the risk of exciting 'transferences,' of posing as authorities, or of putting him in a position of dependence and irresponsibility." (p. 72-73, LM)

This sounds so much better than the "professional" distance between counselor and counselee that characterizes so much "professional" counseling today. Scripture exhorts believers to be truly *involved* in one another's lives, admonishing, exhorting, encouraging, teaching, and such. There are no "experts," although there is ordained church leadership.

Adler's own counseling efforts may appear a welcome relief from the self-oriented teachings that have taken over even "Christian" counseling today:

"All my efforts are devoted towards increasing the social interest of the patient.... As soon as he can connect himself with his fellow men on an equal and cooperative feeling, he is cured." (p. 260, LM)

While the *type of relationship* described here may stand a little above the sickening "professional" distance established in most counseling situations, we still don't encounter a biblical view. Biblical *standards* for change are missing. Without such standards, there is no solid basis for considering the needs of others, for loving others and *loving God*. No *authority* is present, such as we have from the Scriptures. There is nothing at all about the counselor's relationship to God and his own walk with Christ. Nor is there anything about the responsibility of the *church*, and the shepherds ordained by God, to exhort believers in accordance with God's Word. All we have here is one more humanistic model that disintegrates under the biblical scalpel.

Adler is quick to bypass God's design for both church and family when he proposes that school teachers correct the "mistakes" of the home:

"We can make teachers the instruments in our social progress; we can train our teachers to correct mistakes made in the family, to develop and spread the social interest of the children towards others." (p. 237, LM)

Although godly teachers may be used by God in the lives of children who come from ungodly homes, this is not a biblical model for effecting change. God has ordained the *family* as having the primary responsibility for instruction of children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The "Creative Self." Despite his roots in determinism, Adler paved the way for humanistic psychologies in which man seeks autonomy *even from God*. He deliberately broke from earlier psychic determinism and asserted the individual's ability to create his own meaning in life:

"It is here that individual psychology breaks through the theory of determinism. No experience is a cause of success or failure.... We are *self-determined* by the meaning we give to our experiences...meanings are not determined by situations, but we determine ourselves by the meanings we give to situations." (p. 14, LM)

The ability to master one's own fate is even more prominent when we consider Adler's goal in the training of children. He wants them to be able to say:

"We must make our own lives. It is our own task and we are capable of meeting it. We are masters of our own actions. If something new must be done or something old replaced, no one need do it but ourselves." (p. 23-24, LM)

A hint of determinism remains, and yet a strong creative element enters in, when Adler says that after the first four to five years of life, an individual:

"...is taking his hereditary material and the impressions he receives from the environment and is adapting them to his pursuit of superiority. By the end of the fifth year his personality has crystallized." (p. 34, LM)

Finally, Adler's hope for the future of mankind is steeped in both psychological "wisdom" and man's radical independence:

"A better knowledge of ourselves must, with our technique of living, result in a behavior pattern more appropriate to our needs.... Thus it will no longer be necessary for an individual to be condemned to an unhappy fate simply because he originated in an unfortunate family, or hereditary, situation. Let us accomplish this alone, and our civilization will have taken a decided step in advance! A

new generation will grow up courageously conscious that it is *master of its own fate!*" (p. 140, UHN, emphasis added)

Christians, of course, reject the psychic determinism promoted by Freud and the like. But they must equally reject such assertions of radical independence. This is not godly change that pleases God and conforms believers to the image of Christ. It is more like the arrogant attempt of our enemy, the devil, to place himself above the throne of God:

"But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'" (Isaiah 14:13-14)

The Role of Education

In the field of education, outside the family and church, Adler finds hope to institute his theories and values. His reasoning includes an evaluation that education within the family is currently both deficient and incapable of meeting the complex demands of modern life. He believes that current education within the family "is too much given to fostering vain ambition, and the desire for personal aggrandizement, in individuals" (p. 221, UHN). In addition, he says that "the school is the prolonged arm of the family" (p. 156, LM) Although in earlier cultures the family would have been responsible for education, Adler claims that:

"Our present culture...makes more complex demands on us, and schools are necessary to lighten the work of parents and carry on what they have begun." (p. 156, LM)

Thus the school is the institution for the salvation of mankind, according to Adler. He says that "the only institution capable of effecting a change is the school" (p. 222, UHN). However, he raises the issue of authority and its effectiveness:

"Why should authority in school be good when we have seen that authority in the home, where the situation is really better, effects only one thing, universal rebellion against it? Any authority whose recognition does not occur in and of itself, but must be forced upon us, is no real authority." (p. 222, UHN)

Adler obviously misses the biblical reality of sin. And as he answers his own question, he also misses the one and only self-attesting authority--God speaking in Scripture:

"The school is a situation which every child experiences in the course of his psychic development. It must, therefore, be adequate to the demands of a healthy psychic growth. We can speak of a good school only when that school is in harmony with the necessities for a healthy psychic development." (p. 223, UHN)

Only God's authority is self-attesting, universal, and eternal. Adler cannot give us adequate reasons for the *school* to usurp the educational role assigned to church and family by God. But he presses on, with a frightening agenda for the *psychologists*, with their psychological value systems, to take over.

First, he states that "we need the most intimate cooperation between the psychiatrist and the teacher" (p. 159, LM). But he doesn't stop with mere cooperation. He hopes that teachers will actually take on the role of psychologists, thoroughly trained in their system and values:

"The teachers themselves are really psychologists. They learn to understand the unity of personality and the coherence of all its expressions.... Indeed, it would be our hope, if all the teachers could be trained, that psychologists would become unnecessary." (p. 180, LM)

Clearly, Adler expects the school, with its psychologically trained leaders, to replace and "correct" the family:

"The child who has not learned to cooperate is the neurotic, the drunkard, the criminal or the suicide of later years.... We cannot, in our present society, hope to reach all the parents and help them to avoid mistakes. The parents who most need advice are the parents who never come for it. We can hope, however, to reach all the teachers and through them to reach all the children; to correct the mistakes which have already been made and to train the children for an independent, courageous and cooperative life. In this work, it seems to me, lies the greatest promise for the future welfare of mankind." (p. 178, LM)

This is not a godly agenda. Both family and church are systematically cut out of the process of education. *Psychology* replaces God's revelation in Scripture. *Psychologists* replace

both parents and ordained church leadership. The entire scheme is diabolically opposed to the revealed will of God for the education of mankind.

The Image of God

Adler's most serious errors have been reserved for our concluding sections. He misunderstands Christian theism in serious ways, not the least of which is his warped view of the image of God in man.

The desire to be *like God* is a motive that Adler equates with his theory of striving for superiority:

"We should not attempt to formulate too easily any particular superiority striving; but we can find in all goals one common factor--a striving to be godlike." (p. 60, LM)

Sometimes, according to Adler, children actually say, "I should like to be God" (p. 60, LM). Similarly, he notes that Nietzsche signed himself as "The Crucified" after becoming insane (p. 60, LM).

The striving to be like God is something Adler associates with fairy tales:

"It is very interesting to see how in fairy tales, as well as in the overheated psychic striving of vain individuals, the striving for power assumes the expression of a desire for the ideal of God-likeness. One does not have to search far to find that a vain person acts exactly as though he were God." (p. 172, UHN)

"Closely related to this thirst for God-likeness is the ideal of the fairy-tale Utopia." (p. 173, UHN)

He sees a similar tendency within the educational system of his time, insisting that:

"...a large portion of humanity has the tendency to secure for itself a little place in the vicinity of God. There are still a number of schools whose educational ideal is God-likeness." (p. 172-173, UHN)

Note very, very carefully Adler's *rejection* of attempts to be like God, attempts consciously grounded in the biblical account of man's creation in His image:

"In former times this was, indeed, the conscious ideal of all religious education. We can only attest to the results of this education with horror. We must certainly look about nowadays for a more reasonable ideal. But that this tendency is so deeply rooted in human kind is quite conceivable. Apart from psychological reasons the fact is that a large portion of humanity gets its first conception of the nature of man from the catch-word phrases of the Bible which declares that man was created in the *image of God*. We can imagine what important and what perilous consequences such a conception may leave behind it in the soul of a child. The *Bible*, to be sure, is a wonderful work which one can constantly read and reread with astonishment at its perspicacity, after one's judgment has matured. But let us not teach it to our children, at least not without a commentary, to the end that a child may learn to be content in this life, without assuming all manner of magical powers, and demanding that everyone be his slave, ostensibly because he was created in the *image of God*!" (p. 173, UHN, emphasis added)

But as Christians, we can only attest with horror to Adler's understanding of the biblical account! We react with equal horror to the idea that the Bible is *not for children*! Certainly some accounts in Scripture are beyond the intellectual capacities of very young children, but the essentials of creation, sin, and salvation are for everyone, regardless of age. It would clearly be wrong to "assume magical powers," or to demand that others be our slaves, on the basis of God's image. But such actions would demonstrate a desire to *be God*, rather than to bear His image. Scripture teaches that as image-bearers we are to treat others *well*, because they, too, bear His image.

It is sickening to see how Adler's misunderstanding of the image of God leads also to a twisted view of communion with God in prayer:

"The satisfaction of one's vanity through the misuse of one's desire for religious satisfaction, is also found on the trail of the striving for God-likeness. We have only to remark how important it may be to an individual who has suffered psychic shipwreck, to remove himself from other human beings, and engage in personal conversation with God! Such an individual considers himself quite in the proximity of God, Who is duty-bound, by virtue of the worshipper's pious prayers and orthodox ritual, to personally concern Himself with the

worshipper's well-being. Such religious hocus-pocus is usually so far from true religion that it impresses us as being purely psychopathological." (p. 173, UHN)

Adler makes judgments of what he cannot understand using theories that are opposed to the Word of God. It's true that God is not "duty-bound" because of pious rituals to cater to the whims of people. However, Adler's description is a pure caricature of the prayers of believers. God remains sovereign, but He does hear, He does care, and He does answer the prayers of His people.

It is also nauseating to note how Adler offers a psychological explanation, according to his own theories, to "explain" not only the striving to be like God, but the desire for immortality:

"In a more reasonable way, perhaps, the same goal of godlikeness comes out in the desire to know everything, to possess universal wisdom, or in the wish to perpetuate our life. Whether it is our earthly life we desire to perpetuate, or we imagine ourselves as coming to earth again and again through many incarnations, or we foresee an immortality in another world, these prospects are all based upon the desire to be like God. In religious teachings it is God who is the immortal being, who survives through all time and eternity. I am not here discussing whether these ideas are right or wrong: they are interpretations of life, they are *meanings*; and to some degree we are all caught up in this meaning--God and godlikeness. Even the atheist wishes to conquer God, to be higher than God; and we can see that this is a peculiarly strong goal of superiority." (p. 61, LM)

Adler *claims* not to discuss "whether these ideas are right or wrong," but we cannot help but conclude that he has no concept of the reality of eternal life. If Adler truly knew the Lord and had the assurance of eternal life, he could not possibly speak as if ideas of immortality were created by the imaginations of man. Nor could speak in this manner if he maintained a biblical view of man's *sin*. His statements dimly reflect man's attempt to cut himself from God, to be the equal of God in wisdom and knowledge. That is the essence of the Fall. The Bible tells us *clearly* about that Fall, whereas Adler's writings mask the truth in a web of psychological babble.

The image of God is a crucial concept for helping people. No understanding of human nature can be accurate when man is divorced from his Creator, in whose *image* he is created.

Adler's Religious Aberrations

Unlike more outspoken unbelievers like Freud, Jung, Fromm, and Ellis, Adler does not openly blaspheme God and express hatred of Christian theism. However, his distortions of key biblical doctrines are equally dangerous. His views of Scripture, truth, prayer, family, salvation, sin, and immortality, for example, are definitely aberrations of sound doctrine.

Scripture. Adler's first direct mention of religious issues does not occur until almost half way through *Understanding Human Nature*. But it's critical. After telling us that "all the psychic phenomena can be considered as preparations for a definite goal," as "preparation for the future," he states that:

"All the myths, legends, and sagas which speak of an ideal future state concern themselves with it. The convictions of all peoples that there was once a paradise, and the further echo of this process in the desire of humanity for a future in which all difficulties have been overcome, may be found in all religions. The dogma of the immortality of the soul, or its re-incarnation, is a definite evidence of the belief that the soul can arrive at a new configuration." (p. 81, UHN)

It is important to note here that Adler lumps together *all religions*, and appears to consider their teachings as *myth, saga, or legend!* This is similar to the emphasis of the New Age movement on the equality of all religions.

Truth. Adler has no solid foundation for his theories, and certainly no *biblical* basis, in view of his rejection of absolute truth. After speaking about antithesis, such as the "conscious" and "unconscious," Adler states that:

"...from a scientific standpoint, they are not contradictions, but varieties.... In the same way, good and bad, normal and abnormal, are not contradictions but varieties." (p. 96, LM)

This is consistent with New Age views, where distinctions are blurred and evil often denied. But it certainly isn't biblical!

Adler's extreme concern with "social feeling" is also in line with New Age globalism. Like New Age proponents, he lumps all religions and denies that any *one* may lay claim to exclusive truth:

"There are many religions and confessions which try in their own way to increase cooperation; and I...would agree with every human effort which recognized cooperation as the final goal.... We are not blessed with the possession of the absolute truth and there are several ways leading towards the final goal of cooperation." (p. 253, LM)

Adler's view of individuals also reflects his rejection of absolutes and thus of biblical values:

"Let us be very modest then, in our judgment of our fellows, and above all, let us never allow ourselves to make any *moral* judgments, judgments concerning the moral worth of a human being!" (p. 129, UHN)

This may sound tolerant, non-judgmental, and therefore appealing, but beware. Although we can't make judgments according to our standards, we must indeed test, evaluate, and make judgments according to the standards of God revealed in Scripture.

Sin and Salvation. Adler clearly rejects the biblical view of sin. He describes and explains it in psychological terms:

"I have often found girls who felt unappreciated at home beginning to have sex relationships...to achieve at last a position in which they are appreciated and the center of attention." (p. 188, LM)

Adler flatly refuses to associate any *guilt* with such behavior, which is clearly opposed to God's Word:

"We can understand that the girls are *not really guilty*. They are wrongly prepared." (p. 191, LM, emphasis added)

Such aberrant, unbiblical unreasoning is even applied to prostitutes:

"From their early life all prostitutes have had the firm conviction that nobody likes them." (p. 192, LM)

But God, in Christ, has the real answer to such sin. Unlike Adler, the Bible doesn't mask sin under psychological categories that remove the whole concept of guilt. Christ saves the sinner from the penalty and power of his sin.

Rejecting sin, Adler likewise rejects the *biblical* view of salvation. He places religion among "other great strivings," and he redefines salvation:

"The meaning of life is to be interested in the whole of mankind.... In all religions we find this concern for the salvation of man. In all the great movements of the world men have been striving to increase social interest, and religion is one of the greatest strivings in this way." (p. 11, LM)

Again, Adler and the New Age movement have similar agendas.

Prayer. Adler makes a mockery of prayer:

"Some...chronically misunderstood people beat a retreat into religion...shift their pains upon the shoulders of a complacent God.... In this process they believe that God, this extraordinarily honored and worshipped Being, is concerned entirely with serving them, and is responsible for their every action. In their opinion He may be brought into even closer connection by artificial means, as by some particularly zealous prayer, or other religious rites.... They approach their God just as they approach their fellow men, complainingly, whining, yet never lifting a hand to help themselves or better their circumstances." (p. 207, UHN)

This is a gross distortion of the prayers of believers! Adler misunderstands the entire process of prayer. Equally nauseating is his caricature of Old Testament revelation:

"People often felt that in dreams some master spirit, some god or ancestor, would take possession of their minds and influence them. They used their dreams to obtain guidance when they were in difficulties.... In the Old Testament dreams are always interpreted as revealing something of future events.... From a scientific standpoint, such views seem ridiculous to us." (p. 94, LM)

Besides the Old Testament, Adler mentions the American Indians, the Greeks, and the Egyptians, thus lumping Christianity with pagan religions. The New Age movement would love it!

Death and immortality. We noted earlier that Adler has no hope of heaven. He psychologizes religious faith when he says that:

"Sometimes an experience of death can be compensated in another way. The child will have the ambition to survive death through artistic or literary creation; or he may become devoutly religious." (p. 246, LM)

The *reality* of life after death, in either eternal bliss or torment, is totally left out of the question here!

Family. Adler denies key biblical teachings about the family. One of these is God's plan for the authority and spiritual leadership of the father:

"The meaning of marriage is that it should be a partnership of two people for their mutual welfare, for the welfare of their children, and for the welfare of society.... Since marriage is a partnership, no one member should be supreme.... In the whole conduct of the family life *there is no call for the use of authority.*" (p. 133, LM, emphasis added)

Adler explains his unbiblical view in terms of his "inferiority complex" theory:

"There should be no ruler in the family and every occasion for feelings of inequality should be avoided." (p. 135, LM)

There is a radical denial here of sin, and an unbiblically optimistic view of human nature. The result is anarchy!

Adler opposes Scripture when he calls the father's authority an *evil* thing and downgrades family education that is based on it:

"Education in the home...commits the gravest of psychological errors in inoculating children with the false idea that they must be superior to everyone else and consider themselves better than all other human beings. Any organization of the family which is based upon the idea of the leadership of the father, cannot be separated from this thought.... And now the evil begins. This fatherly authority is based only to a very slight degree upon the feeling of human community and society." (p. 219, UHN)

Again, his theory about "striving for superiority" is at the root of his aberrations:

"Every child grows greedy for domination, becomes ambitious for power, and inordinately vain.... Under the prevailing

educational influences in the home, it is practically impossible for a child to lose sight of the goal of superiority." (p. 220, UHN)

Adler reverses biblical roles when he says that "the relationship to the *mother*...determines all subsequent activities" (p. 220, UHN, emphasis added). He goes on to attribute unhappy marriages to belief in the biblical view of family authority:

"Many women are convinced that it is the man's part to rule and dictate, to play the leading role, to be the master. This is the reason why we have so many unhappy marriages. Nobody can bear a position of inferiority without anger and disgust." (p. 267, LM)

Adler's view of family life rejects some key biblical values, such as *servng* others in humility and love, yet later he affirms monogamy and rejects premarital sex. It's a deceiving mixture!

"The fullest and highest development of the individual in love and marriage can best be secured by monogamy." (p. 286, LM)

Note carefully that even when Adler appears to affirm a biblical value, such as monogamy, *he does not ground his teaching in Scripture*. This is critical. There is no absolute truth in Adler's system, no eternal, universal values. With no anchor, such a teaching quickly disintegrates under sinful humanistic pressures.

Adler also rejects biblical teachings about the discipline of children when he says:

"Punishment, especially corporal punishment, is always harmful to children." (p. 135, LM)

This violates a number of verses in Proverbs about the duties of parents, such as:

"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." (Proverbs 29:15)

"Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; he will also delight your soul." (Proverbs 29:17)

"He who spares his rod hates sin son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently." (Proverbs 13:24)

Birth order and relationships between siblings are other areas where Adler destroys the biblical view of the family. For example, he speaks of the power struggle in the life of a second-born child, referring us to the "biblical legend" of Esau and Jacob (p. 126, UHN). Here again we see his view of Scripture as *legend* rather than historical fact.

Elsewhere, speaking of a child's birth order, Adler says that "all other children can be dethroned; but the youngest can never be dethroned." He then states that "in the Bible it is always the youngest who conquers. Joseph was brought up as a youngest" (p. 150, LM). Adler misses the scriptural point about God's *election* and the demonstration of His power. Joseph's calling from God has nothing whatsoever to do with psychological theories of birth order.

Concerning divorce, Adler believes that:

"...probably there are cases where it would be better that they should be apart. Who should decide the case?... Perhaps we might imagine that if something is wrong with a marriage, a psychiatrist should decide whether or not it should be broken...in Europe I have found that psychiatrists for the most part think that personal welfare is the most important point." (p. 283, LM)

Despite his reservations, it is clear that Adler leans toward placing the psychiatrist in a position of authority in such matters. Thus he rejects the role of ordained church leaders, *and the authority of God's Word, too.*

Family relationships are a critical matter in helping other people to change and grow in the Lord. Adler misses the biblical boat by many, many miles. His theories have no scriptural roots, and at many points are diametrically opposed to God's revealed will.

Religion and psychology. Adler sees the value of religion primarily in facilitating his goals for social cooperation, regardless of any specific doctrinal content:

"The simplest primitive religion is the worship of a totem.... Those who worshipped the same totem lived together and cooperated, and each member of the group felt himself a brother of the other members. These primitive customs were

one of the greatest steps of mankind in fixing and stabilizing cooperation." (p. 252, LM)

He wants to move on from religion, however, and base such "cooperation" on *scientific* principles. Note, first, his warped view of the purpose of religious faith:

"The most important task imposed by religion has always been, 'Love thy neighbor'...now from a scientific standpoint we can confirm the value of this striving." (p. 253, LM)

Adler leaves out the part that says to *love the Lord your God with all your soul!* In addition, he prefers that this goal be pursued through *psychology*, which is actually his own *faith* system:

"Religions...have often been misinterpreted.... Individual Psychology arrives at the same conclusion in a scientific way.... Perhaps science, by increasing the interest of human beings in their fellow human beings and in the welfare of humankind, will be able to approximate closer to the goal than other movements, political or religion." (p. 12, LM)

Yet again, Adler coincides perfectly with the goals of the New Age movement. Psychology *replaces* religion, or rather *is itself* a religion. Adler's theories are anything but *scientific*, being based thoroughly on his own speculations about the human heart.

The duty of man. Let us close with a comparison of Adler's view of man's primary duty, as compared with the Scriptures. Adler's perspective is grounded in his theories:

"All that we demand of a human being, and the highest praise that we can give him, is that he should be a good fellow worker, a friend to all other men, and a true partner in love and marriage." (p. 262, LM)

This view omits God, but the Bible does not:

"Now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

© **Christian Discernment Publications Ministry, Inc.**
www.christiandiscernment.com

