

The Dynamics of Change in the Human Race: The Spirit's Work

John Pugh

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Attuned psychologists can help their clients connect to God's plans in their lives, according to this expansive guide.

Written for pastoral counselors and challenging traditional psychotherapy models, John Pugh's *The Dynamics of Change in the Human Race* introduces an expansive understanding of the connections between religion and psychology.

Attributing mental health concerns, including depression, anxiety, and anger, to obstacles between individual people and the work of the Holy Spirit, this diagnostic book works to bridge psychology and theology. Its supporting materials include both scientific works (like *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) and biblical references. In the course of its work, it indicts traditional psychological approaches with being not wholly coherent when it comes to understanding and accounting for Christian spiritual development. Conversely, its proposed treatment methods are about fostering individual Christians' formation—helping them “to change from their former selves into a more Christ-centered being beyond that of becoming a member of some institutionalized religion.”

The book rejects common understandings of what can be considered “normal”; its paradigm is directed by faith perspectives instead. Here, the Holy Spirit is presumed to be an active participant in people's lives, helping them to achieve the redemptive work of Jesus. Thus, Pugh pushes Christian counselors to reveal the work of the Holy Spirit in the daily lives of those they counsel; his book proposes an intriguing framework for probing any resistance that they encounter too. It suggests means of uncovering the deep emotional roots of spiritual distress, and it uses illustrations to illuminate these methods further, as when it connects “pleasure-seeking” to feeling helpless and says that such behavior masks despair.

Still, this work is somewhat limited: the book covers only a portion of the available clinical diagnoses, opting to focus on what it calls “classic” problems, correlating them to underlying spiritual causes. Further, many of the advanced problems covered fall outside of what average ministers will encounter in a church counseling environment. And the prose is dense and complex throughout, further limiting the audience: it presupposes nuanced understandings of both the Bible and psychology as a field. Still, its systematic theological approach is a thoughtful one, and those who are well versed in its areas of expertise will find it useful when it comes to reconsidering difficult and demanding psychological problems.

The Dynamics of Change in the Human Race is a useful guide for Christian counselors who hope to understand the Holy Spirit's impact in their clients' lives.

JEREMIAH ROOD (April 4, 2023)

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