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REVIEW OF REDEMPTION THE MONTBRYCE LEGACY ANNIVERSARY EDITION BOOK 3

- This book is one that I will forever go back and refer to. What a beautiful soul and an amazing forgiving heart. It teaches us all that in our darkest moments there are glimmers of hope and beauty.
- Millions of people have bought Man's Search for Meaning. It's author, Victor Frankl, saw that, not simply in terms of the book's success, but in terms of the emptiness that so many people must be feeling. During his lifetime, Victor Frankl (1905-1997) held two simultaneous professorships at the University of Vienna Medical School: Professor of Neurology and Professor of Psychiatry. He is most commonly thought of as the founder of "logotherapy," the third "Viennese School of Psychotherapy," Freud and Adler being earlier founders of psychoanalytic and individual psychology respectively. SYNOPSIS OF THE BOOK: The book is divided into two parts. The preface to the first edition is by Gordon W. Allport (1897-1967), at the time of the first edition, former professor of psychology at Harvard. Allport was chiefly responsible for the spread of Frankl's logotherapy within the U.S. [1] The preface to the 1984 edition is by Frankl himself. In that preface, Frankl explains the relationship between the two parts of the book. The first half is a story of life in a concentration camp and serves as the existential validation of the second, theoretical half of the book, which is Frankl's introduction to "logotherapy." In the first half, Frankl relates some of his own experiences during World War II, during which he spent time in three concentration camps, including Auschwitz and Dachau. He divides the first half of the

book according to the three phases of life he and others experienced in their internment in the camps: (1) the initial shock of camp life, (2) the routine of camp life, and (3) the experience and aftermath of freedom. Highlights are as follows: From the beginning, camp life is dominated by a sociological structure made up of Capos (collaborators who rule over other prisoners), other prominent prisoners (e.g., cooks, storekeepers, doctors, nurses, and camp policemen), foremen, wardens, and the Schutzstaffel (SS). At the bottom are ordinary prisoners. Despite the hierarchy and the evil it represents, no group is entirely villainous. Humanity is made up of two "races" -- the decent and the indecent -- and they are found at every level. The mere fact that a person is a member of a particular group does not indicate to which "race" he may belong. At first, prisoners experience hopelessness mixed with "delusions of reprieve." Homesickness and nostalgia are intense. Abnormal responses to abnormal circumstances are pervasive and entirely normal. Everything conspires to eliminate the basic humanity of victims -- yet some manage to rise above the downward pull of bestial circumstances. But sadly, as Frankl says, "the best of us did not survive." As camp life becomes routine, grim humor and cold detachment take hold. The world outside the prison camp becomes unreal. The torture of others no longer provokes sympathy or revulsion. Apathy and the blunting of emotions become functional in making inmates insensitive to routine beatings. The sole task becomes survival. For most inmates, inner life is reduced to its most primitive state. Lack of sleep, lack of food, sickness, mistreatment, and hard labor amplify irritability. Violence begets violence among those who are

routinely violated. Food dominates dreams and conversation. A few even resort to cannibalism. Yet politics and religion remain topics of intense conversation. Inmates still join each other in appreciating the beauties of nature. Amazingly, art and entertainment still survive, while sexual deviancy is strikingly absent in their all-male environment. The most telling influence of all is the "provisional existence" inmates experience in not knowing if or when their confinement will end. Psychic time runs counter to actual time. Days seem to last forever, but weeks pass quickly. In the midst of it all, some inmates manage to maintain an inner hold that helps them rise above their degrading environment. In so doing, they bear witness to the reality of human liberty despite the unimaginable constraints of camp life. In the worst of circumstances, humans still have a choice. Present existence can still have meaning in the face of profound and unavoidable suffering. Opportunities and challenges are continually present. It is always possible to make something positive of life -- even life in a concentration camp. In Frankl's words, "it does not really matter what we expect from life, but rather what life expects from us." In contrast, those who lose faith in their future are doomed. Liberation from camp life has its own dangers. Surprisingly, it does not come with overwhelming gladness, but with timidity and with depersonalization. Prisoners have to relearn joy. The sudden release of enormous mental pressure puts inmates at risk of moral and spiritual deformity. Liberty does not mean the prisoners do not need spiritual care. The oppressed have almost irresistible temptations to become oppressors. Bitterness comes from disappointed expectations of how great release would be. The dreams that kept prisoners

going in the dark days of imprisonment clash with the reality of loved ones who no longer exist. Disillusionment comes when inmates learn that suffering does not cease. Eventually the experience of camp life becomes unreal -- more like a nightmare than something that really happened. But in the end, former inmates have the comforting realization they have nothing left to fear except their God. Man's Search for Meaning differs from Frankl's original intention in two important respects. He originally intended only to write the first half of the book as an anonymous account, content simply to have his unattributed experiences of deepest suffering demonstrate the possibility of finding meaning in life despite the worst of circumstances. His friends, however, convinced him to add his name as author and his publisher requested he add a description of the basic tenets of logotherapy and a bibliography, the former of which constitutes Part II of the present work. The 1984 edition addresses more recent concerns in a postscript entitled "The Case for a Tragic Optimism." REFLECTIONS: Logotherapy provides deep insight into the basic nature of humanity. Its tenets are so easily taken for granted that Frankl's contribution seems to be, not so much as telling people something new, but more for articulating so well what they knew all along. The idea that humans cannot survive without meaning has explanatory power that can hardly be questioned. As Frankl says, "suffering ceases to be suffering once it has meaning." And to paraphrase him, suffering is not a prerequisite to meaning, but meaning can be found even in suffering. Logotherapy is valuable in highlighting absence of meaning as a common source of psychological problems. Frankl is astute in seeing meaninglessness as the motive behind

destructive pursuits of pleasure and the constant need for more and more entertainment.[2] There is little doubt that boredom,[3] depression, aggression, and addiction[4] are often traceable to a loss of meaning. It is useful to see such problems as possibly arising, not from psychodynamics, but from Frankl's "noodynamics" and the "existential vacuum" that meaninglessness entails. Frankl's examples of how quickly aggression within a group is "cured" by a collective task and how rapidly depression gives way in the face of new meaning to life are compelling. He is right in observing that people may have the "means to live," but they are in deep trouble if they do not have a "meaning to live." Most people will agree (although they may not act accordingly) that happiness cannot be obtained by pursuing it directly. Rather, as Frankl points out, it must ensue as an unsought consequence of pursuing something else. Logotherapy provides a useful counterpoint to much of Freudian psychology. Freud predicted starvation would reduce people to an identical urge. But Frankl found that starvation heightened the distinctions among individuals rather than diminishing them. Freudian psychology equates length of treatment with the depth of cure. But logotherapy suggests the possibility of deep and lasting benefits from the shortest of consultations. Freud sought cures in introspection and retrospection. But logotherapy finds answers to problems by looking outside oneself and to the future. Freud saw the deepest motive of humans as a "will to pleasure." But logotherapy sees the most basic need as a "will to meaning." [5] Freud saw inner tension as a problem in itself. But logotherapy sees inner tension as healthy in leading to the resolution of existential frustration through the discovery of meaning in

individual situations. Freud provided modernism's third blow to human dignity[6] in challenging human free will. But logotherapy holds that humans always have a choice. Frankl is a realist and an optimist in arguing that, although humans are not free from circumstances, they are free to take a stand against circumstances. He is provocative in asserting that no circumstances exist that can rob humans of all freedom. He opposes reductionist understandings of humanity in affirming the main characteristic of humans as the ability to rise above determinants -- determinants that Freudian psychology would find insurmountable. As Frankl says, "man invented the gas chambers, but it was also man who entered those chambers with head held high." On the surface, Frankl's assertion of the "unconditional meaningfulness of life" sounds troubling in apparently asserting meaningfulness for all choices, good and evil. The phrase is best understood, however, in opposing nihilism, which asserts that nothing has meaning. Frankl would probably say that even bad choices have significance -- how much more the good ones! Frankl correctly points out that humans find meaning in three kinds of choices: (1) through deeds or actions, (2) through encounters with something or someone, and (3) through their attitudes toward unavoidable suffering. The latter is most important in religious matters because it is the fact of suffering that calls God's goodness or even His existence into question.[7] For religious people, the personal meaning of particular situations is inseparable from the meaning of those same situations to God. For them, the search for meaning is the pursuit of what God intends in a particular circumstance. So Frankl's denial of any absolute meaning for a given situation may

be a bit problematic for religious people who are accustomed to thinking of one big divine Master Plan that comprehends and judges every decision. That apparent dilemma can be resolved, however, by appreciating the radical nature of human freedom. True righteousness does not mean choosing the one right course of action out of a multitude of wrong ones, but rather pursuing one choice out of many equally good choices with an attitude of faith.[8] Of course, non-religious people need logotherapy too. Logotherapy is well-suited to an increasingly secular Western world where psychiatrists are increasingly encountering, not cases of disease, but questions of meaning. Unfortunately, many psychiatrists have been educated, as Frankl notes, into a philosophy of nihilism, which they in turn pass on to their patients with tragic results. They are also wrongly trained to see human beings as "brain machines." They are too inclined to debunk that which is truly human in terms of it being simply a mask or facade for subconscious mechanisms.[9] So logotherapy provides a needed corrective for both secular patients and their secular care-givers in its "re-humanizing" of psychology. Frankl disavows any dogmatism in logotherapy. Although Jewish, he easily speaks of "crosses to bear." Frankl's eclectic impulse is evidenced in his adoption of techniques that have no necessary connection to logotherapy itself. An example would be "pseudo-orientation in time" -- a strategy of clarifying decision making by adopting a future stance looking back on a present decision. Another would be "paradoxical intention" -- a treatment of disorders (e.g., stuttering, insomnia) by intentionally trying to incite them (hyper-intention). A third would be "dereflection" -- a treatment for hyper-reflection and hyper-intention. One of Frankl's most

intriguing thoughts is his assertion that man is most human when focused on something outside himself. Couple that notion with the idea that man is made in the image of God and the result fits perfectly with the self-emptying nature of Christ in the "kenosis hymn" in chapter 2 of Philippians. Moreover, it should not be surprising that the good theology of Philippians 2 finds expression in physicalities of God's good creation. For we see humans who are made in the image of God endowed with the same kenotic impulse -- the same need to empty themselves for the sake of something outside themselves. Achieving that transcendence is healthy. Failing it is dysfunctional. Compared to existentialists in general, Frankl is more optimistic, less nihilistic, and more accommodating to the notion of God than most. But his is an odd form of existentialism in those respects. Existentialism and traditional Christianity do not mix very well. Existentialists say, "existence comes before meaning" -- i.e., no meaning exists until humans create it. Christianity says just the opposite -- "meaning comes before [human] existence" -- God has imposed a meaning on human life in advance of human existence. Therein lies the friction. Frankl, like all existentialists, comes down on the side of the notion that humans create "the good" by choosing. A better, Christian alternative is the idea that the real choice for humans is not whether "to create 'the good' by choosing" but rather to "to enter into 'the good' God has already chosen." Present-day preoccupation with the "search for meaning" is a rather recent development. Gerhard Sauter[10] thinks it comes from the loss of a common story that religion, tradition, law, and community once provided. In times past, people did not have to "give meaning" to their lives because their shared understanding of past, present,

and eternity had already done so in advance. Many people today, however, have no "story" but the one they create for themselves -- thus the prevalence of Frankl's existential vacuum. The answer to that vacuum is to discard the credo of individualism and return to the biblical story shared within a biblical community.-- Bill Brewer[...]NOTES:[1] See the publisher's note beneath the preface.[2] Readers should consider Richard Winters' book, Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment, for a Christian psychiatrist's view of the symptoms, causes, and cures of existential emptiness.[3] Use of entertainment to alleviate boredom avoids the hard task of making sense of life. Use of drugs to dull existential frustration in the depressed does the same thing. Logotherapy would work on the problem by creating tension in the life of the bored and the depressed, not resolve it. Frankl's illustration in this regard of fortifying an arch by putting more weight on it is a good one.[4] Frankl's belief that the libido runs wild in the presence of an existential vacuum matches everyday observation.[5] Frankl says the search for meaning is primary -- it is not simply a rationalization for Freudian hydraulic forces operating within the subconscious.[6] Copernicus argued that humans were not at the center of the universe. 2. Darwin argued that humans were not different from the animals. 3. Freud argued that humans are not even in control of their own minds.[7] Suffering is especially good at exposing an existential vacuum that might otherwise remain hidden.[8] Of course there are moral boundaries, but they are not necessarily narrow.[9] Frankl is superb in noting, "'I would not be willing to live merely for the sake of my 'defense mechanisms,' nor would I be ready to die merely for the sake of my 'reaction formations.' Man, however, is

able to live and even to die for the sake of his ideals and values!"[10] Gerhard Sauter, *The Question of Meaning: A Theological and Philosophical Orientation*, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), passim.