Social Interest in the Thinking of HRH The Prince of Wales


Abstract

*The Prince of Wales is a visionary thinker. The Adlerian fifth life task is reflected in his visionary thinking. He seeks to discern meaning in life through the tasks of individual and collective stewardship and spiritual leadership. His vision has the potential to place him among the foremost promoters of social interest in Western culture as it enters the next millennium. In tune with the times, HRH The Prince of Wales will most likely make a positive social contribution to his country and the world. His personal spiritual journey, interpreted in terms of Adlerian principles, suggests this.*

I have written elsewhere (Savage, 1998) concerning Adler’s Social Interest (SI) and its usefulness in the contemporary context. Adler’s common sense approach to living is set out in his theory of Social Interest (SI). SI refers to a feeling of belonging, of being accepted within a community. Further, I argue that SI constitutes and distinguishes our human nature such that SI is more than mere civil association. SI reveals a transcendental understanding in its more developed stages…. This transcendental understanding invites an individual to future spiritual development. (p. 43)

In this present article, I examine certain speeches1 of HRH The Prince of Wales and show that the Prince, consciously or unconsciously, thinks like an "advanced" Adlerian thinker. He thinks in terms of the Adlerian notion of the fifth life task. Many of his speeches reflect the Adlerian notion of the fifth life task in its more developed stages which contain an explicit spiritual component. This is sufficient reason to suggest that Adlerian thought is having an influence, albeit not clinical, in the public domain.

We may safely presume, that as King, Charles Windsor's thinking will continue to reflect Adlerian principles. These principles will be an asset to him as monarch. They will help keep him in touch with the modern world and in tune with the thinking of his subjects. Examining the thinking of HRH
The Prince of Wales in terms of the fifth life task highlights a distinctive leadership style that will be beneficial to his future subjects.

I argue that the present thinking of the future monarch is an encouragement to those who seek to advance SI now and in the future. The Prince's thinking, as reflected in his speeches, is not intended for himself alone in order to make him a better person. A purpose of the Prince's thinking is to increase SI for the common good and to encourage a spirituality in his future subjects. By doing this he thus helps himself. Since the fifth life task concerns spirituality (Mosak & Dreikurs, 1967), it is important that the monarch understand the spirituality that is relevant to his future subjects. If he fails, the effectiveness of the monarchy will be diminished.

It is difficult and somewhat risky to evaluate and draw conclusions about an individual's thoughts as they are being formed and being put into words. Thoughts change as personality changes. I discuss the thoughts of HRH as they appear in his speeches. I identify the context of these speeches, assess his words and draw conclusions about the developing philosophy of the future king of England. His visionary thinking reveals examples of "non-competitive ways to live, including useful and desirable work and open relationships" (Croake & Slavik, 1998, p. 72).

The Prince is convinced that seeking philosophical and spiritual meaning to existence provides the universal link between humans. Humans seek a meaning to existence that lies outside of themselves. Mosak and Dreikurs say that "any personal 'encounter' with God, through acceptance, alliance, public worship, individual prayer, or 'miracles' may give meaning to existence" (Mosak & Dreikurs, 1967, p. 21). Humans strive to understand their own meaning as well as the meaning of the world that is realized by their thoughts, goals and actions. In his speeches, the Prince often develops the thought of contributing to the common good and community participation, that is, SI.

This Adlerian way of thinking by the Prince of Wales provides social opportunities for change. The Prince is not a prophet. However, he does remind the realm, and others who care to pay attention, where and how they have gone astray. He reminds his future subjects of eternal truths they presently seem to ignore. This is a goal of the fifth life task according to
Adlerian thinking. Drawing on personal experience which he has gained from the world he has encountered; the Prince encourages opportunities for social improvement and supports efforts that are constructive of the human spiritual condition.

The Prince's thinking reveals a subjective and personal perspective. That is to say, he is an interpretive thinker who takes his own experience as primary. His visionary thinking acknowledges something (or someone) greater than himself. He has made a decision to believe in a greater power. This, as Mosak and Dreikurs (1967) relate, is part of the personal life task. Like most visionary thinkers, he struggles to express himself clearly. Clues in the Prince's speeches indicate that he hopes to help others grow into a deeper understanding of spirituality and in the truth concerning the unity of objective and subjective knowledge. In sum, through the example of his thinking a way of engaging in the fifth life task is reflected to the public.

Material and Spiritual Stewardship in the Fifth Life Task

With these words the Prince sets a personal and achievable goal for material and spiritual stewardship: “Good stewardship celebrates the beauty and the diversity of the natural world. We should not, I believe, just be ‘managing the Earth’s resources more efficiently’ (relying on a traditional utilitarian ethic), but seeking to live in balance with the rest of creation, even if we cannot discern any direct and immediate material benefit to ourselves in that process.” [Speech 1] Material and spiritual stewardship, on an individual and collective basis, are a concern for the Prince. According to him, we need to recognize our individual role in conservation as well as recognize that individuals are part of a greater whole. His holistic way of thinking accepts that the whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

A Marxist Socialism is not compatible with the Prince’s thinking. Marxist Socialism looks only on the material organization of human life as the Objective of government. This denies spiritual stewardship which is arguably an objective of civil government.

The Prince also opposes unbridled capitalism as an answer to social problems. Rather, he favours a co-operative and responsible approach to matters of material and spiritual stewardship. To further the ends of
material and spiritual stewardship by business and education, he suggests that "a business and educational partnership is a process which . . . has to prepare young people for the assumption of responsibility of one kind and another, for an active approach to citizenship, and for an understanding of the spiritual and moral dimensions of life--values which are all too easily submerged in the endless search for short-term profitability or buried beneath the more debilitating aspects of consumerism." [S. 2] The Prince, like many in his generation, reacts to what he perceives to be an overbearing, arrogant and destructive establishment within modern society which works against SI.

Among his earliest memories is a horror at contemporary trends of thought which seemed aimed at “destroying the traditional foundations on which so many of our human values had been based for thousands of years” [S. 3]. To the Newspaper society he says, "qualities of understanding, tolerance, judgement and good sense . . . are now everywhere under attack. They seem to be threatened by pressures in our society which not only undermine these values, but also intimidate the people who hold them. It appears to me that a preoccupation with the fashionable theories and trends of the day is threatening to eat away at the values of our society. "[S. 4] Although not a revolutionary thinker, he is certainly an evolutionary thinker.

The future king has shown concern for the material stewardship by establishing various trusts. "We have to show trust, mutual respect and tolerance, if we are to find the common ground between us and work together to find solutions. The community enterprise approach of my own Trust, and the very successful Volunteers Scheme it has run for some years, show how much can be achieved by a common effort which spans the classes, cultures and religions." [S. 5] These trusts illustrate how he realizes the fifth life task in a pluralistic public context. Likewise, the fifth life task includes empowering spiritual stewardship within the community. "In my experience, any approach to the problems of urban regeneration which is not based on community participation--a participation which empowers the community--is doomed, on the whole to failure.... It means helping to shift the balance of decisions from the developer and the planner towards those who live and work in a particular place." [S. 6] Thus, those who plan urban regeneration in a society ought to seek input from that society to achieve a balance of material and spiritual benefit.
The Millennium, according to the Prince, is a powerful visionary notion with its own creative powers for SI and a balanced stewardship. "We need to use the Millennium to reawaken our capacity to rejoice in all creation, to celebrate the glorious richness of God’s world and to re-establish our spiritual foundations which we can draw from the great religious traditions."

[S. 7] This universal thinking is the fifth life task. Among the Prince's concerns disclosed through engaging in the fifth life task is the right to worship with a free conscience, as distinct from the toleration of worship, not just for Christians but for non-Christians as well.

Speaking of renewal in the Millennium he says: “This concept of renewal is not the monopoly of Christianity, but is central to many great faiths.” He continues to say that “the deeper, more fundamental, aspects of the Millennium are barely being considered. Why should this be when here, above all, lies so much of its true meaning and significance for us, not just as Christians, but for people of all faiths and creeds?” (S. 7) From a social interest perspective, the Prince looks at the whole world not just the United Kingdom. His travels have given him a global perspective reflected in his thinking. This global outlook ensures that he does not restrict his thinking to Christian interpretation. The Prince understands the Millennium as an opportunity for renewal irrespective of religious persuasion. The goals of SI, material and spiritual in the fifth life task, can be presented to the nation through the concept of Millennium renewal.

**Spiritual Leadership in the Fifth Life Task**

In the contemporary Western context, little seems to be missing in life. However, according to the Prince, Westerners lack a dimension of spiritual fulfilment. "Despite all the dramatic changes that have been wrought by science and technology, and all the remarkable benefits they have indeed brought us, there remains deep in the soul… of mankind a persistent and unconscious anxiety that something is missing—some vital ingredient that makes life truly worth living; that provides that inexplicable sense of harmony and beauty to a world which is in danger of sacrificing these elements on the altar of outmoded and irreverent ideology. We are told that our contemporary built environment must reflect the ‘spirit of the age.’ But what concerns me most of all is that we are succeeding in creating an ‘age
without spirit." [S. 3] This concern for spirit is one of his vital messages and it is not simply a rhetorical issue.

Spirituality, or a search for meaning, is the common denominator that all humans share. Spirituality is a matter of the heart, not of the head. He addresses the Temenos society: "My support for Temenos is based on the importance of maintaining perennial wisdom and traditional forms of knowledge--that is, knowledge acquired through means that come from the heart; but not necessarily from the head – (our head is so often telling us one thing, while our heart is telling us something else). I am one of those people, for better or for worse who tends to follow his heart, and that is the only way in which I can operate. I think this is an important, if hidden, feature in many people's lives, but the use of the heart is 'educated out' during the process of education in the West." [S. 8]

That our head tells us one thing and our heart another when it comes to the meaning in life he clearly states in a speech to the Salvation Army at its 1978 Congress: "To my mind the example set by the Salvation Army is Christianity at its most essential, simple and effective level, unfettered by academic or theological concern for dogma or doctrine. In an age when we are assailed on all sides by a host of outlandish philosophies and inhuman beliefs, when people are uncertain about what is right and what is wrong and anxious about being considered old-fashioned or out of date, it seems worse than folly that Christians should still argue and bicker over doctrinal matters which only serve to bring needless unhappiness and distress to a considerable number of people. Surely what we should be worried about now is whether people are going to become atheists; whether they are going to be given an idea of what is right and wrong; whether they are going to be given an awareness of the things of the Spirit and of the meaning and infinite beauty of nature. These are the things which matter and these are the things for which Christians ought to join together with determination and understanding." [S. 9]

As part of the contemporary cultural condition, the Prince recognizes that spirituality has rights, as it were. "There is, I believe, a resurgence of spirituality across the world; small beacons of civilizing values in the face of the all-pervading materialism of recent times, which represent a yearning to improve the deeper quality of our lives and to restore those enduring
cultural priorities which represent a moral foundation in a world dominated by consumerism." [S. 7] These rights ought not to be forfeited or sold out to commercial concerns.

The Prince desires to provide for and to aid all humanity given that all are created in God’s image and likeness. This is an extension of Adler’s understanding of the purpose of religion. This desire to assist or aid is not merely of human origin. Like all Adlerian thinkers contemplating the fifth life task, the Prince recognizes another element at work prompting the living-out of a peaceful existence: "I do not expect you to agree with me, but I believe that the most urgent need for Western man is to discover that divine element in his being, without which there never can be any possible hope or meaning to our existence in this Earthly realm." [S. 10] One could hardly say this in public without some personal experience to rely upon.

Drawing on his personal experience, the Prince encourages opportunities for improvement and supports efforts that are constructive of the human spiritual condition. This leads to a developing of spiritual leadership in the fifth life task. He tells future architects: "What I would like to be taught and explored and studied in my Institute, is the fact that the architecture that nourishes the spirit is not so much a traditional, which resembles or apes the past, but rather a particular kind of architecture whose forms, plans, materials, are based on human feeling." [S. 3] The Prince’s speeches reveal that his understanding of personal feeling is similar to that of other Adlerian thinkers and that “one can use feeling to lead oneself into a life of community interest” (Croake & Slavik, 1998, p. 64).

The Prince encourages cooperation among his future subjects, including those with contrary beliefs or no beliefs. This is an element of the fifth life task. Mosak and Dreikurs (1967) write concerning this cooperation: “In addition to describing God and his relationship to Him, each individual assumes a posture toward those who either do not believe in God or those who do believe in Him but who do not share the same definitions or the same forms of relating to Him” (p. 17).

The Prince is not a philosopher, nor an academic, nor a historian but he is a modern, significant thinker. His way of understanding brings the constructive thinking of Adler’s fifth life task to the public forum. He says: "I
am no philosopher, but I can try to explain what I feel spirit to be. It is that sense, that overwhelming experience or awareness of a oneness with the Natural World, and beyond that, with the creative force that we call God which lies at the central point of all. It is, above all, an ‘experience.’ It defies conscious thought. It steals upon you and floods your whole being despite your best logical intentions. It lies deep in the heart of mankind as if some primeval memory. It is both ‘pagan’ and Christian, and in this sense, is surely the fundamental expression of what we call religion." [S. 3] The Prince's thinking presents us with something new. He is a modern man who has shifted his thinking away from expected topics and perspectives of royal tradition and delves into an uncharted area. This engagement of the fifth life task he has truly begun on his own. He explains this, in part, to future architects: "I discovered that Descartes and scientific rationalism led to a mechanistic view of the Universe and of Man’s place in it and I began to realise what lay at the root of this feverish revolution.... I have often wondered why it is that I was not seduced by this conveniently logical, but utterly soulless philosophical approach." [S. 3] This shift in attitude, the break it represents with royal tradition, its warmth and fervour show a courageous development towards SI in the thinking of the future monarch.

This type of spiritual discovery is an example for all who engage in the fifth life task. By way of encouragement, the Prince advises: "I would like students to learn that in order to be able to design with sensitivity and an appropriate sense of reverence for the natural surroundings, they first need to learn humility and how to submerge the inevitable egocentric tendencies that we all experience." [S. 3] In his biography of His Royal Highness, Jonathan Dimbleby (1994) writes of a personal spiritual journey undertaken by the Prince. This journey led His Royal Highness to submerge his own egocentric tendencies and, in turn, to suggest a way for others to follow.

Comment

From this brief examination, I conclude that the Prince’s present thinking reflects an understanding of Adlerian SI at the level of the fifth life task. This is an appropriate way of thinking for a future monarch in tune with the times. I anticipate that the Prince’s thinking will continue to develop along the pattern of Adlerian SI and this will be increasingly evident in his speeches and public pronouncements.
ENDNOTE:

I am grateful to Amanda Neville, Information Officer to The Press Secretary to HRH The Prince of Wales, for her kind assistance in providing me with photocopies of the Prince's speeches. In personal correspondence with me she wrote: “with regard to the question does His Royal Highness prepare his own speeches? Obviously, His Royal Highness has a large input into the speeches, but his Private Secretaries assist along with a select band of people who are specialists in various fields. His Royal Highness obviously has the final say.”

REFERENCES


SPEECHES CITED

5. Speech by HRH the Prince of Wales on the Occasion of His Visit to the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. 27 October 1993.
8. Speech by HRH the Prince of Wales at the Temenos Reception at St James’s Palace. 19 October 1995.
10. Lecture by HRH the Prince of Wales, as Patron, to the Royal College of Psychiatrists. 5 July 1991. Brighton.