

Book Review: Words of the Father

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***The Words of the Father*. By Anonymous. United Kingdom: The North-West Psychodrama Association, 2011. (original work published 1922.)**

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J. L. Moreno's biographer (Marineau, 1989) has it right when he writes that *The Words of the Father* is the most fascinating book that Moreno ever wrote. It is fascinating because of its origin, fascinating because of its premise that the Words came directly from God, and fascinating because the Words reflect the major philosophical concepts upon which the later Morenean methods are founded. It may also be the most controversial.

Moreno had two obsessions: God, and creativity. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that these were two aspects of a single obsession. He considered his life to have two parts or phases, a religious one comprising approximately the first 30 years of his life, and a scientific one comprising all the rest. He traces his interest in God to his childhood, telling us the well-known story of God-playing as a four year old. In his *Autobiography* (1989, p. 19), he writes that as a child, "The most famous person in the universe was God, and I liked to be connected with Him." Referring to himself at a slightly older age, he notes that, "It was in the early part of our century that a young man tried to become God" (1989, p. 15). *The Words of the Father* serves as a capstone to the religious phase of Moreno's life.

Moreno's intense focus on creativity was based on his conviction that humankind was, and is, in danger of being enslaved or destroyed by the products of its own creativity. Without doubt we have created the means for the destruction of humankind. The problem, Moreno contended, is that we are too enamored of the products of our human creativity, and have neglected to cultivate the creative process itself. The solution is to understand and master the spontaneous/creative process so that we can become even more creative – creative enough to avoid self-destruction or enslavement to the cultural conserve. God, of course, the Ultimate Creator, is the epitome of creativity.

Moreno tells us that the Words emerged from an experience in which he

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heard a voice speaking, a voice that can be heard everywhere in the universe, a voice that does not speak in a human language but in the language of God, a voice that can be understood by every living creature. The words in this book are God's own Words, insofar as His own meanings can be captured and presented in human language (2011, p. 166). The Words were written in red pencil on the walls of the house in which he lived, and later copied for publication. His description of the experience from which Words emerged fits quite closely William James' definition of a mystical experience (James, 1902).

Das Testament des Vaters was published in Vienna in 1920. Moreno subsequently translated the work into English, added a preface and other expository material, and published it without a date as *The Words of the Father* in 1941 (Hare, 1986). Long out of print and almost impossible to find, it has now been republished by the North-West Psychodrama Association of the United Kingdom with the blessing and encouragement of Zerka T. Moreno. For this 2011 edition, Jonathan Moreno, the son of J. L. and Zerka T. Moreno, has written a brief and helpful foreword in which he gives us a description of the historical and social milieu in which the Words emerged. As Jonathan Moreno says, this work can be understood in many ways. There is no doubt that *The Words of the Father* is an account of J. L. Moreno's understanding and explanation of the Godhead.

While God never changes, Moreno assures us, our understanding, our conceptualization of God can change, and has changed according to the times. The God of the Hebrews, for example, was a powerful Godhead, distant in space, unreachable and unknown, but a Supreme Power upon whom people could depend and trust to guide their lives and protect them, a He-God who gave directions through special, virtuous men, the prophets. Millennia later, Christ brought God close and made him more personal as the God of love, the Thou-God, the God who could be talked to and who communicated through his own Son, Jesus. Now, partly as a result of having imitated God and created our own world of machines and books, and partly because we have betrayed the Thou-God so many times, something more needs to be added, a new perception of God. This new conceptualization of God is the God who comes from within our own person, the I-God.

According to this conceptualization of God, the author of Genesis got it wrong when he wrote that God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh. The true God did not stop creating after six days, living a comfortable life ever after, growing holy and wise and intellectual as He looked down on the earth and praised His work. The true God went on creating and He is creating still ... (2011, p. 14). God, according to *The Words*, is the source of all the spontaneity-creativity in the universe. However, He has distributed His spontaneity throughout the universe, sharing His spontaneity with all living creatures. We therefore take part in the ongoing creation of the universe; we are co-creating the universe with God. And our spontaneity is God in us, a direct connection with God, the I-God. Taking part in the creation of the universe places great responsibility upon us, a responsibility we share with God for the entire universe and everything and every being in it. We are linked by spontaneity to God and to every living being. This is a holistic God and a holistic creation.

There are, Moreno writes, religions with gods and religions without gods. Here, in the Words, is God Himself, without a religion (2011, p 171). The I-God supersedes and subsumes all previous conceptualizations of God, including the Hebrew He-God and the Christian Thou-God. The I-God is a God of all things, the God of Jews, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, agnostics and atheists (and of rabbits and lions, for that matter), the God of every living thing. This is a God who speaks without an interpreter, directly to all beings. His voice is understandable by all beings. The Words in the book are the words as they came to one man in one moment, then translated by him into human language from God's own unique language. God's words themselves, because God is totally spontaneous, are spoken once and only once. God is omnipresent, in every moment. However, as the needs of one moment may be different from the needs of another, God in one moment may be different from God in the next.

I first read *The Words of the Father* when I was a relatively new student at the Moreno Institute. I found it variably fascinating, inspirational, moving, and enigmatic. That is not an unusual or unique experience, people tell me. It may help the reader of *The Words of the Father* to keep in mind that Moreno gave himself a messianic assignment to provide for humankind a way to avoid destroying itself. He tells us that in *Preludes of the Sociometric Movement*, published with the 2nd edition of *Who Shall Survive?* (Moreno, 1953). Here he spells out his basic, three-part philosophy: Spontaneity-creativity is the propelling force in human progress; faith in our fellowmen's intentions; and the belief that a superdynamic community based on these principles can be established with the proper techniques.

All the cultural and social techniques which I developed in the course of years have been motivated to serve this purpose. This position was expressed first in the creation of a religious group with the friend of my youth, Chaim Kellmer, and was later reported in my *Philosophy of the Here and Now* (1918) and *The Words of the Father* (*Das Testament des Vaters*, 1920). (Moreno, 1953, p xv)

The method that Moreno created for this purpose was sociometry, with its subsumed methods of group therapy and psychodrama, including sociodrama, role training, and spontaneity testing and training. Many of us think regularly of Moreno only as the originator of a powerful form of psychotherapy. A majority of the books published in the past 30 years have been expositions of psychodrama, mostly as a method of psychotherapy. The overarching category of sociometry itself, and the fact that psychodrama is a sociometric method, has been paid scant attention.

In the preface to *The Words of the Father*, Moreno prepares the reader, warming him or her up to the Words by describing and discussing God's function as Creator. His functions of all-might, all-wisdom, righteousness, goodness, love, and charity have received adequate attention, Moreno writes, while His function as Creator of the universe has been overlooked. Moreno explains the necessity that God have subjectivity, albeit a subjectivity beyond human comprehension, how the universe is still being created, and how every being is enlisted upon birth

as a co-creator with God in this project. The universe is never separated from God, and God Himself is present in all of humankind's struggles, present in the sense of coexistence. Every man is inseparable from God. The relationship between God and beings is more one of fellowship than of sovereignty, and all are linked together through God. Furthermore:

The fundamental statement in this book is that God cannot be expressed except by Himself, in His own terms and only on the basis of His own experience; that no other being can fully express Him – no man, no prophet, no holy spirit, not even the Son of God; that there are no true means of articulation for God other than His own voice. It is this voice which must be heard. There is no communication with God equal to direct communication. (2011, p 12–13)

In other words, the verses in *The Words of the Father* are not to be regarded in the same way as those in the New and Old Testament or the Koran, as sacred and unchanging. They are simply God's own words as heard by one man in one moment, and translated by him into a human language (and then into another). Each being must listen to Him in each moment. And God is spontaneity, hence the commandment: Be spontaneous!

While there are a number of themes in the "I," another that keeps emerging is the holistic nature of the universe. God and the universe and everything and being in the universe are an indivisible unity. There is a connection, a bond between every human being and every other human being, and all are linked to God. What affects one impacts all. Spontaneity, creativity, and the moment are other frequent themes, as are responsibility and authenticity. There are also many echoes of both the Old and New Testaments. Perhaps the most radical idea in the Words is the notion that as God creates us, we are creating God.

The additional material that Moreno added to the English version includes explanations of concepts used in *The Words of the Father* as well as commentary on the theology of the Godhead. There is also a presentation of Moreno's theory of spontaneity-creativity with discussions of the moment and the cultural conserve, concepts that are available in other writings. One also finds Moreno's claim that God has created many more universes than the one we know, foreseeing the notion of multiple universes now popular with quantum theorists.

Over the years, I have picked up *The Words of the Father* and leafed through the verses purporting to be God's own words a number of times. And I always find the book fascinating, inspiring, moving, and enigmatic—and also encouraging. The God who spoke these words and who is elaborated on by Moreno is a God I can appreciate. I have also found that the Words have occasionally given me clues to the understanding of Moreno's later works. As has been noted a number of times, Moreno's writings are not always easy to comprehend. I have welcomed any aid in this pursuit.

The critical thinker and the skeptic are entitled to ask, "Are these God's words, or are these just Moreno's own words? Were they attained a) from a mystical experience, b) in an altered state of mind, or c) from God Himself?"

When I ask myself that question, the answer is "Yes." They are both God's Words and Moreno's, no matter how they were derived. In the summa (summary) of *The Words of the Father*, Moreno insists that every individual is entitled to his personal idea of the Godhead. The universal idea of God incorporates every single one of these personal ideas. Elsewhere Moreno referred to the Words as a therapeutic poetization, and I think that this provides a reasonable perspective on the Words. Moreno attempted to reverse roles and play God. He encouraged others to do the same. What would happen if we all did the same and lived up to the best and the greatest that is in us?

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