*Book Review of “Changing Course: Navigating Life After 50,” by William Sadler, Ph.D., and James Krefft, Ph.D.*

By Steven Herrmann, Ph.D., MFT

*Changing Course* is a book of inspiration and remarkable insight! I highly recommend it to anyone who wants an antidote to the “negative stereotypes” that surrounds the unhealthy image of old age in our culture. The book dispels many cultural illusions about the aging process. “We Americans,” the authors assert “find ourselves saturated with derogatory images of aging… We read them in newspapers, we hear them in music, and we see them in movies and on television.” As a healthy alternative, the book paves a path towards emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing to encourage optimal development. It clarifies what it means to be in the midst of change from fifty to approximately mid-seventy, and it delivers what it promises: to help readers chart a course towards the life one really wants to be living.

The book is idealistic but it is an ideal we can make happen. It provides a number of realistic life-stories from people the authors interviewed to challenge our culture’s stigmatizing of elders. It counsels us to see that in the two and one half decades of our lives that marks the *third age* we too can move not towards increasing diminishment and decline, but rather: towards a reinvigoration and reanimation of our soul’s body. It makes us conscious of the fact that if we are to live fully and energetically and vitally, some kind of attitudinal shift or mind-altering transformation is needed. The book’s life-stories teach us to let our spirits soar free towards the future that beckons. They call us to change our attitudes towards old age and allow our souls to migrate towards our inalienable rights to freedom. By re-claiming the youthfulness of our bodies―whether through hiking, swimming, yoga, weight lifting, dance, or running―our spirits can be set free.

The book is American in the sense that it emphasizes the goal of human freedom. It holds up for its ideal Thomas Jefferson’s motto: “The Pursuit of Happiness.” How refreshing such a book is, next to the sometimes dismal and constricting stereotypes of old age that our culture perpetuates in the media! The authors offer a helpful metaphor as an exemplar for our individuation: what the Native Americans called Eagle River. Because of the Eagle River’s many tributaries, which resemble an eagle’s wing, it was given its name by tribal elders. This image is used by the authors to get us into the flow. In Chapter Seven, “Designing a Third Age Portfolio,” the authors ask readers “What Makes Your Soul Sing?” They counsel us: “Let Your Flow Be Like an Eagle’s Wing.” They tell us that we can be energized to soar towards new *life peaks.* They encourage us to ask: “What legacy will I leave?” To follow the *flow* of an eagle’s wing, old habits of thought and doing must be broken, risks must be taken, and a new and realistic positive *third age identity* must be created out of the ground of being. Growing older in this connotation signifies that we are entering the prime of our lives and what is to come is only going to get better. The book induces us to rethink the paradox of aging by becoming young in our bodies, souls, and spirits again. The book offers the reader a number of helpful questions and hints for building a *third age life portfolio.* It coaches us to cast off unhealthy assumptions of diminishment and calls us to become *keepers of meaning* and *wisdom leaders.* It counsels readers not to become obsessed with anxieties evoked by the stale word “retirement.” Rather, by simple reflection and inaction and sitting, to begin, in the now―and by dreaming a lot!―to allow unformed ideas and life-potentials to germinate and grow. To enter the third age successfully is to enter a new frontier, a path into unknown horizons. Only through such expansion of the soul and spirit into spaciousness can we realize our dreams fully. Sitting, meditating on the past, present, and future, and doing a thorough life review, may lead our souls to sing authentically.

The book couches us, furthermore, to envision new *careers* in our third age. The authors argue that by *redesigning* our career portfolios and retirement plans we can *rejuvenate* and *reinvent* ourselves by investing in our Self. The book points out that to enter a process of successful aging in our third age we must get our finances in order and learn to tap into the powers of our imagination, visualization, and *dreaming*. We must learn to inhabit our dream bodies to forge a new identity. They counsel us to let go of old stereotypes, so that we can mindfully pursue a *Self-path* towards increasing wholeness. This path to change requires *mindful reflection.* Old scripts fall away and the Self emerges to awaken us to our destiny. In the life-passage after fifty the aim is not heroic competition but completion. Having a solid financial foundation underfoot to stand upon is necessary to accomplish this.

Life in the third age becomes increasingly serendipitous say the authors. Serendipity is a vehicle for a pluralism of vocations (what the authors call an “ensemble of careers”) in contrast to the singleness of one career or job of second age achievement. The focus in the book on careers intrigues me. Serendipity can lead one to find the One―the Self―in the Many vocations that can bless our lives and give it meaning.

*Changing Course* coaches us to embody what Erick Erickson called the seventh stage of psychosocial development: *generativity*. By becoming generative, we affirm our many vocations or callings through the miracle of serendipity. One has to be courageous and fearless and take chances if we are to remain vital in the third age. Only then can we become designers of our own destinies.

Borrowing a useful metaphor from the Jesuit theologian, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who referred to our human destiny as the *omega point,* moreover, the authors teach that our life is destined for moments of oneness with the universe, experiences of personal integration that forge the core of our *integrity*. It is during these moments of unity that our lives can become *boundarylessness,* in learning, creativity, and relationships. Following this path of change in our third age requires an openness and spaciousness to deepen the breath of our spirituality. They coach us finally: “Learn from our storytellers: make sure that you keep your spirit soaring by keeping your body and mind strong and vital. Take on new challenges. Go boldly where you have not gone before.”