

In Memoriam: Dr. William W. Meissner, M.D., S.J., Training Analyst, Author, and Professor



With the passing of William Meissner , M.D., S.J., on April 16, 2010, at 79 years of age, the psychoanalytic world has lost a true luminary. Since I did not have the privilege of a direct relationship with him, I am writing this with a mutual friend who knew him well. History will eventually record the fundamental contributions he made as a teacher, supervisor, and training analyst. From 1987, he held the title of ‘University Professor of Psychoanalysis’ at Boston College where he found a home after a distinguished career as a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He was known simply as ‘Bill’ by his many analytic friends in Boston and throughout the world who are feeling the loss of their mentor deeply.

Dr. Meissner was a uniquely complex and valued person. Many in Canada have absorbed part of their core analytic views from his 1981 book *Internalization in Psychoanalysis*. He also authored more than 285 publications, including 27 books. Beyond being a leading expert on psychoanalysis, he was also a committed Jesuit priest, a distinguished psychiatrist who had graduated with the highest honors from Harvard Medical School where he later taught. The death of a colleague provides a wonderfully reparative opportunity to reappraise and heal splits.

Towards the end of his career, he was accused, ironically, by an academic rival of plagiarism regarding his 2003 book, *The Ethical Dimension of Psychoanalysis: A Dialogue*. Although he was not found guilty of the accusation of plagiarism, it did have a harmful effect. Rightly, Bill did not engage in an ongoing undignified rebuttal of these charges. It was widely said on his behalf at the time that a more appropriate appraisal would have considered the many established facts we know about Dr. Meissner’s prior relevant work, character and professional life; not to mention his personal values. Perhaps history will employ attentiveness and common sense about the many relevant contributions that this unquestionable scholar has made.

He resigned from BPSI much to the sadness of many of its members. However, Bill was welcomed warmly by the Psychoanalytic Institute of New England and continued to be available both locally and internationally to all members of the many psychoanalytic communities.

Among his countless activities, he also offered his expertise in supplying psychoanalytically informed consultations relative to the areas of special interest of some members of Harvard's Program in Psychiatry and the Law. When Harold asked that I take up this activity after he was no longer able to, I often felt his presence in my work ego just before I pressed the 'send' button. I am sure many analysts still feel his presence on occasion just as we are about to make an analytic interpretation to a patient, as befits the legacy of this great man. The last word goes to our Boston colleagues, who say they will remember him simply as a 'mensch.'

Extending our heartfelt condolences,

William J. Massicotte Ph.D.

Co-Chair for North America, the Public Information Committee of the IPA

April 21, 2010

Co-authored and researched by Dr. Meissner's friend and advisor,

Harold J. Bursztajn, MD

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Time, self, and psychoanalysis By William W. Meissner, Jason Aronson, 2007

NOTICE – He is survived by his sister Gretchen Meissner of Buffalo, NY. Concelebrated Funeral Mass in St. Ignatius Church, Chestnut Hill on Wednesday, April 21 at 10 AM. Relatives and friends are invited. Interment in the Jesuit Cemetery at the Jesuit Martyrs Shrine, Auriesville, NY. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Jesuit Community, Campion Center, 319 Concord Rd., Weston, MA 02493 to support its ministry of care for elderly and infirm Jesuits. BRADY & FALLON FUNERAL HOME, 617-524-0861.