

RELIGION AND PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

By F. HILTON PAGE

IN discussing the relations between religion and psychology today I want so far as possible to stress the ground that is common to them both and the contribution which each may make to the other. I should love to be able to say that all is peace and good-will, sweetness and amity between psychology and theology at the present time. That would be too good to be true. Still we have now reached the point where we can recognize that the suspicion and hostility which at first marked the relations between religion and psychology were misplaced. We are able to agree now that the problems of an individual are never merely bodily or medical, never merely mental or psychological, but that the whole Person—body, soul, and spirit—is always involved. A man's personality includes his beliefs; and his religious beliefs, his interpretation of the meaning, purpose and value of his life, are the most important beliefs of all, and have a profound bearing on his bodily health and mental well-being. Psychological or personal problems are always religious problems, partly because nothing human is alien to religion, but largely because the spiritual man does not exist in isolation, apart from the physical or the psychical man, the body and the intelligence. G. K. Chesterton pointed out that a wise landlady should enquire of a prospective lodger not the amount of his income but the nature of his philosophy, because his philosophy will determine the way he will spend or squander his income, and, therefore, whether he will pay his rent at all or not. So a man's belief, his faith or the lack of it, is the most important thing about the man as a whole, and the most important part of the equipment with which he will arm himself to meet the strains and buffets, the excitements and anxieties of life.

But Chesterton was a deeply religious man and could see that this was so. What is more remarkable is that the psychologists and psychiatrists should now be beginning to see it too, and to realize its predominant importance in the work of healing and restoring the neurotic personalities and the split minds of our time. Thus the famous Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, in his book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, has stated quite categorically that of his thousands of patients over thirty-five years of age "all have been people whose problem in the last resort was

that of finding a religious outlook on life and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook." Other psychologists who are themselves unbelievers state quite openly that they make it a policy never to disturb the religious faith of a patient since they regard it as the decisive factor in effecting a cure.

There is, then, no doubt at all that it is quite generally agreed today that psychological problems are also religious problems and that the most fruitful mode of attack is a united effort in which all the resources of the sciences and of religion are pooled together. Psychologist and minister must cooperate, for only so can human needs be met.

I

I wonder whether we recognize what an extraordinary change of front is involved in this.

When psychologists first turned their attention to religion they almost invariably regarded it as a psychological weakness rather than as a source of strength to the personality. The psychology of religion was initially the attempt to explain how, in an age of scientific enlightenment, religion had managed to survive at all. This was a puzzle which required for its solution deep delving into the dark recesses of man's unconscious mind. Religion was a strange, antique, barbaric survival out of man's primitive past. It must, they thought, be due to uncivilized and lingering fears, or to some aberration of man's sexual instincts. It was assumed, almost without question, not only that it required psychological explanation, but that it could be explained only by being explained away, as being really something else in disguise. It was an anachronism. What right had it to intrude its incongruous presence into the scientific world of today? To the merely scientific intellect it remains a spectacle as appalling and bewildering as would be the sight of a mastodon shambling down the middle of Spring Garden Road among the trolley-buses. Alas! *Naturam expelles furca tamenusque recurret*. If you drive out what is natural to man even with a pitchfork, it will find a way back. It is baffling and disquieting.

The most valiant of these attempts to wield the pitchfork against man's natural piety and to expose it once and for all was that of Freud. The German word *Freude* from which, I take it, the name is derived, means "joy" and "gladness." But the irrationalities of his fellow human beings seem only to

plunge Freud into a settled gloom and sadness. Freud wrote a book called *The Future of an Illusion*. The illusion is religion and its future, he thinks, is not bright; or rather, it ought not to be bright but such is the perversity of human nature that we persist in clinging to this illusion in spite of the plainest evidence to the contrary. Freud will annihilate it with a magnificent and horrific phrase which rolls Teutonic thunder on our ears: it is "the universal obsessional neurosis of mankind." In calling it an obsession or a delusion he is drawing attention to the difficulty of getting people to give it up, since obsessions and delusions are among the most difficult conditions for the psychiatrist to cure. "No one who shares a delusion recognizes it as such," he tells us. That is why religion is such a galling thing to the scientific rationalist like Freud. He exposes it so cleverly, yet still we do not give it up. It is really great impertinence on our part thus to reduce the scientific intellect to impotence. Only one conclusion is admissible. In this particular we are all out of our minds.

On p. 42 of *The Future of an Illusion* he explains how this vexatious state of affairs comes about:

Now when the child grows up and feels that he is destined to remain a child forever, and that he can never do without protection against unknown and mighty powers, he invests them with the traits of the father-figure; he creates for himself the Gods, of whom he is afraid, whom he seeks to propitiate, and to whom nevertheless he entrusts the task of protecting him . . . The child's defensive reaction to his helplessness gives the characteristic feature to the adult's reaction to his own sense of helplessness i.e. the formation of religion.

In another book with the cheerful title: *Civilization and its Discontents*, p. 23, he expresses mingled lamentation and exasperation over the credulity of people like ourselves:

The ordinary man cannot imagine this Providence in any other form but that of a greatly exalted Father, for only such a one could understand the needs of the sons of men, or be softened by their prayers, and placated by the signs of their remorse. The whole thing is so patently infantile, so incongruous with reality, that to one whose attitude to humanity is friendly, it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life.

In a third book, *Totem and Taboo*, p. 242, he sums it all up in the concise statement: "God is at bottom nothing but an exalted father."

You may remember the story in *Punch* of the two little girls who had got into theological discussion concerning the nature and properties of the Devil. "Do you really think there is a Devil?" asked the first. "Oh! Silly!" replied the second, "Don't you know? It's just like Santa Claus. It's only your father." Freud's exposure of religion is a further extension of this line of argument.

We may remark in passing that it does not seem to have occurred to Freud that if belief in God is just the projection of the dependence, awe and love which we feel for our earthly fathers, then it follows with equal necessity that disbelief in God is just the projection of the negative feelings of hostility, animosity and hatred which some unhappy children feel for their fathers. Belief in God is just father-fixation. Denial of God is just father-rejection. We know moreover that Freud himself was one of these father-hating children. He tells us so in his *Autobiography*. Freud's argument has an unforeseen tendency to boomerang back on Freud's own head. His argument not only disproves religion, it disproves itself. The demon he has raised is so powerful that he cannot control it and in the end it turns against him. He is like the inventor of the super-vacuum cleaner who was delighted with the powerful way in which it sucked up the dirt until he found that he himself had been sucked in too. Freud, in short, has proved too much.

It is important to realize that what Christianity rejects in Freud is his bad logic and that it rejects it *because* it is bad logic. It is sometimes said that what is not nonsense in Psychology is only commonsense. There is both nonsense and commonsense in Freud. As Christians we reject the nonsense because it *is* nonsense. But the commonsense is perhaps not so novel or so unknown to Christianity as many people have supposed. The content of Freud's teaching about the devious devices of human self-deception, the dark and distorting mechanisms of the Unconscious, has always been understood in moral theology, and is indeed as much a part of the standard equipment of the minister who receives confessions, as of the psychologist who makes an analysis. That the intellect is darkened through the corruption of the will is a truth as old as St. Augustine's *Confessions*.

There are few forms of speculative literature more fascinating than the Imaginary Conversation between interesting people who in life have been separated widely in time and in intellectual culture. We may imagine that if such a conversa-

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tion should take place between St. Augustine and Freud, they would, up to a point, find much in common. It is possible, indeed, that St. Augustine might be found giving Freud a hint or two on some of the finer points of depth psychology which had escaped the genius of the father of psychoanalysis. But the inferences they would draw from the facts of human nature stripped bare would be surprisingly different. Freud would see all thought as hopelessly vitiated by unconscious mechanisms—except of course, the thought that gives rise to this thought. St. Augustine, equally conscious that “the heart is deceitful above all things,” knows where the cause of this deceitfulness lies. It is, to complete Jeremiah’s words, because the heart is desperately wicked. The darkening of the intellect is due, not to any failure of intelligence but to sin or the corruption of the will. And the improvement of the reason is possible because the regeneration of the will is possible. The regeneration of the will requires Faith. The believing Christian having faith that the remission of sins is possible, since Christ died for the remission of sins upon the Cross, finds that, through divine grace, he can bring his redeemed will into conformity with the Divine Will and that he then experiences a clarification of the intellect and an increased insight. *Praecedat fides, sequitur intellectus.* First, faith; then, purified and enhanced understanding. Thus St. Augustine comes to an optimistic conclusion about Reason. Indeed it is our Christian duty to be intelligent, by using the Christian means available for this purpose, by purifying our wills and so coming to terms with the influences that distort our thoughts. “To think well is to serve God in the interior court.” St. Augustine has the finer psychological insight here just because his religion teaches him that he cannot hope to remove the darkness from his mind until God has removed the corruption from his will. Because he believes that Divine Grace has just that power he has hope for Reason where Freud has none. In this respect the psychology of today is closer to St. Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries than to Freud who died only about ten years ago. For modern psychology too believes that religious faith clarifies the vision and by giving confidence and hope in Reason strengthens the intellect and so makes it more effective. It sees that emotion may be an aid as well as a hindrance to thought.

I mention all this to make more clear the point that the more or less friendly relations which prevail today between psychology and religion, and the recognition of the psychological value of

religion, reveal a marked change of front in quite recent years. It is now seen that a religious psychology is a very different thing from a mere psychology of religion and that a religious psychology is a better, because a truer, psychology.

I suspect that this is part of a broader shift in the way in which the relations between religion and the sciences in general appear to the rising generation, and that psychology, with which our young people are often well acquainted, is playing some part in drawing them closer together. In the Victorian era of exuberant scientific rationalism, science had all the fun and all the glamour. For one thing, it came to young people *after* they had been subjected to a perhaps somewhat stern and dogmatic religious upbringing. It was exhilarating to discover, for example, that Darwinism showed that the account of creation in *Genesis* could not be literally true in detail, particularly if you knew at the same time that your father's complacent assumption of authority in such matters was thereby being reduced to hopeless confusion and impotent indignation. To accept the new knowledge flattered your Ego. It made you feel superior, enlightened, and in the vanguard. But today the situation is almost completely reversed. Now the young person begins with science and often knows next to nothing about religion. Religion, if it appears at all, appears against a scientific background. That gives it the advantage of the second thought, of the thing that comes after. For the young look about them and see the horror and the havoc which the undirected application of scientific knowledge to human affairs has brought to the modern world. They see that knowledge, without anyone asking: Knowledge for what? is a dubious gain. They are familiar with the dreary, mechanical view of the universe, and of life and mind. They ask: "Can this, indeed, be all?" "How can this explain the behaviour of human beings and all their aspirations and misgivings?" Today religion, and not science, is the emancipator of the intellect from a stale and outworn dogmatism. Because science has failed so signally to answer such questions, religion is beginning to gain back some of the glamour, excitement and sense of adventure which so lately belonged to science. Familiarity with modern dynamic psychology may be partly responsible for this. At least young people learn from psychology something of what human needs really are. They may visit the mental hospital or the clinic primarily to satisfy a youthful and perhaps vulgar curiosity but what they see there, if it does not cause them to remain to pray, at least sobers the

exuberance of their faith in material and technological progress as answers to the deeper needs of the human heart in its hour of shame or sorrow. Kant, in a moment of unusual poetry found himself moved to wonder by the starry heavens above and the moral law within. Today the revelations of the clinic and hospital bring home to us the mockery of any merely material conception of human security.

Indeed, there is religious significance in that very craving for psychology which is so noteworthy a psychological phenomenon of our time. As a teacher of psychology I sometimes ask myself: "What is the explanation of this intensity of passionate craving for psychology? What, so to speak, is the psychology of psychology?"

I can think of many things that might be said in answer to these questions, by no means all of them creditable to ourselves or having much obvious affinity with religion. It might be said that there is nothing behind it; that psychology is just an American institution, a part of the American way of life, as mysterious and inexplicable and yet nearly as universal among our people as the popularity of chewing-gum, which indeed it might be thought to resemble as yielding a merely illusory satisfaction and combining a maximum of pre-digestive activity with a minimum of actual nourishment.

Again, it might be pointed out that the lust for psychology is, in reality, the lust for power over people, for popularity, influence, and success and that psychology is valued chiefly as a reputedly easy short-cut to that end. By discovering the weaknesses of human nature, by developing my own personality, I may be enabled to pick other people's pockets more effectively. The interest in psychology may be nothing more at bottom than self-interest.

Even the passion for child-psychology, in which perhaps more psychologists are engaged than in any other branch of the subject may not be as disinterested as it seems at first sight. The *Parents' Magazine* may sell well over a million copies a month but what parents are seeking is ready-made techniques for "handling" their children so as to make them less of a nuisance to themselves. At any rate the enlightenment it confers does not seem to have done much to increase the love of home and family for it coexists with an enormously high divorce rate. Nor does it appear to yield much popular understanding of age-needs for it is quite compatible with such horrors as Diaper

Queen Contests in which female infants of one and two years of age are made to display their fledgling charms before the appreciative and critical eyes of their elders.

Happy those early days when I
Shin'd in my anngell infancy.

All this and much more in the same strain the facts compel us to admit. There is an ugly, a selfish, and a stupid side to the contemporary craving for psychology. Yet beneath all these crudities and fatuities, may not a more penetrating discernment detect something deeper

And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity?

Is it merely fanciful to see in this popular passion for something vaguely idealised under the name of psychology the striving, in Hooker's words, "to touch at least the hem of Christ's garment?" However grotesque in expression, is it not at least in intention, the craving for wisdom and completion, for the transformation of existence, in a word for the blessings that only Religion can bestow? People say that they want psychology but are they not really struggling towards the recognition that what they need is religion? The Cynic might say that psychology is the religion of America in the machine-age, and that the psychologist, or perhaps better, the psychiatrist, is the real priest of today. But the constraints of Christian charity, and the age-long wisdom of the Church in such matters, may enable us to perceive that the fond fervour for Psychology largely conceals, but occasionally and fitfully reveals the sense of incompleteness in which we, who know the blessings of our religion, discern the loneliness and restlessness and dis-ease of the soul which stands trembling on the brink of the realization that "God is the meaning of human existence and the meaning of God is Love." Perhaps the craving for psychology in our time is religion's present opportunity. Like the pagan philosophy of the ancient world as seen by the first Christian apologists it may in our time be the modern preparation for the Gospel and the schoolmaster to bring the modern mind to Christ.

II

But let us descend from generalities to particulars. What is the common ground I spoke of in the opening words of this lecture, on which the modern science of psychology and historic Christianity find themselves together and at peace?

There is agreement, in the first place, that people are Persons. A human person is not a pure spirit, nor a biological organism, nor a mind, but a personal union of all three. In the history of Christian doctrine the idea of the Person is a very old one and it is indeed true that: "The idea of Personality is the gift of Christian theology to human thought." Thus in the creed of St. Athanasius it is said of our Lord Jesus Christ that He is "one altogether, not by confusion of substance but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man: so God and man is one Christ." "The reasonable soul and the flesh is one man." This ancient truth is fashionable psychology at the moment, under the guise of psychosomatics, a term which it is interesting to find Coleridge using well over a hundred years ago. Christian theology has always maintained the unity of the Person since the Gnostic heresies were first overthrown.

There is another emphasis upon the idea of personality which modern psychology and Christianity also share. For both are agreed that personality—the state of being a person—is a supremely valuable thing and one that demands a deep respect. Thus Berdyaev has said: "Human worth consists wholly in personality." The psychologist, for his part, would say that the ultimate aim of psychology is the creation of responsible personality, of reasonable, self-determining, individual human beings: reasonable—not necessarily highly intelligent in the sense of mere cleverness or animal cunning, but moved by reason rather than by force, caring for truth and seeking to convince others by the appeal to truth and not by physical or mental coercion; self-determining—not mere dummies, but responsible for their own thoughts and actions; individual—not massmen, not just one of a certain "model" like a motor car or a refrigerator, not just one of a herd all having the same thoughts all at the same time but uniquely themselves. And he would add, lest this give too much the impression of over-stressing independence and self-sufficiency, that persons only fulfil themselves in personal relations with other persons. For a person is that with which you can come into a personal relation and from whom you can get a personal response. The impersonal exploitation of others' personalities breaks the personal relationship. All this comes very near to that respect for the personal which lies close to the heart of our religion and which nearly all the secular forces of our world today seem to threaten.

We may well agree with Karl Barth that religion is not

primarily a matter of developing human personalities. Yet human personalities will persist in developing in one direction or another and, unless we are to make an undue separation between the natural and the supernatural, the direction of development must remain a matter of religious concern. The point of interest here is that what the psychologist calls the "mature personality" is coming to look very much like what the theologian has called the contemplative as distinguished from the activist disposition of the soul. I need not say that by contemplation is not meant just sitting down and looking at things like a lot of cows lying in a field quietly chewing the cud in a state of utter mental vacuity; but learning to understand, appreciate and enjoy things and people for themselves without wanting to grab, utilize and exploit them for ourselves. The following words by a contemporary Roman Catholic theologian, Fr. Vann, might have been written by one of our postwar psychologists:

It is surely good for modern Western man to be told just what other parts of the human family think of him. To many races at the present time he appears—as he would have appeared to most civilizations, if not all, in the past—as a naughty child playing with mechanical toys which he cannot control, and missing almost entirely the real meaning of life and the real business of life.

For the psychologist has become aware of the Nemesis that pursues the activist and the man of power, and the verdict of history is today reinforced by the verdict of the clinic and the hospital. The unreflective man of power, the exploiter of things and of people, invites hostility. The awareness that others are hostile creates in him feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and guilt. To assuage these feelings he must build up psychological defences which will enable him to pursue his aggressive course without inwardly felt insecurity. The increased ruthlessness which results only causes further anxiety and hence further defences. So it goes on in a vicious circle which if prolonged can only culminate in madness. If sin be making the self the centre, the wages of sin is death for it is the disintegration of the personality.

In the modern world it is sound psychology to assert that man's three greatest needs are Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. Few people think they need poverty but that is because the only poverty they know about is the shameful, grinding and debasing poverty of the very poor. But there is a Holy Poverty which elevates the soul, based on a positive desire for something

richer than riches and a healthy Christian disregard of worldly ambition. This is not to deny that material things are good. It is simply to assert that they fulfil the function assigned to them in the order of existence—to serve as the instruments of our perfection (or of our maturity, as the psychologist calls it)—when we enter into them and learn to understand and enjoy them without wanting to grab, utilize and destroy. Both psychological and religious goods are the fruit of a wise abstinence and detachment which, so far from taking anything away, positively add to and increase the satisfaction of living. The aim of religion is not just to keep people from doing wrong things. The aim of psychology is not just to keep people from going crazy. At bottom both seek the positive enhancement of life, the attainment of more abundant life. Psychology is coming to agree that the contemplative life is the abundant life.

III

Yet nothing is to be gained by failing to distinguish the things that are different. Religion and modern psychology may have discovered that they have much in common and may be working together today in new-found harmony. Yet it needs to be said that they are not the same thing. In view of some current tendencies a final note of warning may be salutary. For to try to turn religion into a kind of psychology would be a disaster as great to psychology as to religion itself. Yet some people seem to be trying to do just this. An eminent American pastoral psychologist calls our attention to the valuable aid rendered by religion in surgery: "a trustful, calm, prayerful state of mind reduces blood-pressure and so prepares the patient that anaesthesia is produced more readily." Others show that the difference between religion and psychology is largely one of vocabulary, many of the precepts of religion being just the expression, in more picturesque language, of principles well established in scientific psychology. The argument of this modish defence of the faith seems to be: "religion must be good because it is almost indistinguishable from psychology." If this is the line to be taken by contemporary Christian apologetics we may well tremble for the future of our Holy Religion. Crabbe's lines spring to mind:

Against her foes Religion well defends.

Her sacred truths, but often fears her friends

The psychologist says: Religion is justified and even valuable because it promotes the integration of the personality; it

gives unity and stability to the character, control of the emotions, the feeling of security, a more efficient utilization of our powers and capacities, an increased zest and vigour of living. Therefore, it is psychologically good to be religious.

But religion does not say this at all. Religion says: I recognize that there is something other than myself, infinitely more important than I am, namely God; and I accept God's will for me, whether it brings integration or disintegration, adjustment or maladjustment, security or insecurity. I am not thinking of what happens to me. Then, of course, the person who does this experiences release and the sense of fulfilment. But many people want it to work the other way round. They say: I want integration; therefore, I had better be religious. But the paradox of religion is that you cannot "get" integration any more than you can "get" happiness by self-consciously concentrating on it; you have to let yourself go in something so immeasurably greater than yourself that you never stop to think about yourself or what you are "getting" at all. You can't say your prayers and then immediately take your spiritual temperature and say: "Good! I really think I feel better integrated this morning. Don't let me forget to say my prayers again this evening."

Religion is the objective fact of doing God's will and not whether you feel more or less integrated as a result.

Anyhow, it is at least debatable whether, in the modern world, the practice of the Christian religion will integrate your personality in the purely psychological sense. For you can hardly have internal harmony in a world which is out of harmony with almost everything you hold to be valuable. The Christian today is caught up in a civilization which makes spiritual values impotent, whose brute power and materialism trample in all that the Christian wants for mankind, no matter how full of goodness and spiritual grace his individual personality may be. We have to remember that it is not always the personality that is maladjusted to the environment. The central symbol of our faith, the Cross, may serve to remind us that sometimes it is the environment that is maladjusted to the personality.

The robustly well adjusted are very often in fact just the spiritually insensitive, blind as bats to the moral and religious issues of the world around them. They have decided not to grow spiritually but to be comfortably integrated and well-adjusted personalities instead. The spiritually sensitive may not

be so well adjusted but they are at least aware of the conflict, the anxiety and the suffering induced by an honest facing of the realities of life and the refusal to gloss over the contradictions of experience. Conflict is the very stuff out of which character is made and our religion tells us that there are more important things in life than being a well adjusted and mentally hygienic personality. There is a sense in religion in which it is quite true that

———"Security
is mortal's chiefest enemy".

In any case it is not integration in itself that is religious but its quality, its level and the use made of it. For evil can integrate as well as good. Also one may be integrated at a low level simply because of the paucity of experience. I remember it was said of an old man in the country in Nova Scotia that, when he was asked how he was, he invariably replied: "Oh! I'm fine, as long as I have the 'Chronicle' and plenty of apple-sass." The apple-sass of our forbears has its modern and less innocent counterparts. Mere integration may mean a truncated personality and the lopping off of important aspects of the complete man. It is integration at the level of incompleteness. But completeness is as important as integration and if religion ultimately brings integration at the level of completeness it is because religion demands detachment from the urgency of natural desire, setting contemplation over mere activism and uniting us with Reality because it frees us from the heats and itchings of the Ego, the "I." Integration may only improve the efficiency of the natural man, making us indeed more effective grabbers, possessors and utilizers of things and of people, but only inflating our own Egos the more; making us more highly integrated pagans, more secure sinners, but bringing no growth in contemplation. But religion obstinately insists on changing ME and not just my adjustment.

So if it is just integration and adjustment we want we shall do well to stick to psychology. You remember Blake's words: "If Christianity is morality, Socrates is the Saviour." May we not add likewise: "If Christianity is integration, then Freud, not Christ, is the Saviour."

Religion is the objective fact of facing and refusing to evade Reality, and of accepting the demands made upon us by Reality. That is why it is the only ultimate and adequate answer to the human need for security. For security can only be based on Reality and not on our subjective feelings. And that is why

religion requires an act of Faith: that if we face, rather than evade, Reality, if we trust to that Reality and do not hesitate, nor pry into our own feelings, nor question whether we are being integrated or mentally hygienic, if we think only of It and not of ourselves, then we shall find the meaning and the fulfilment of life. The psychologist may call this "the transcendence of egocentricity." But, *ex ore infantium et lactantium*, can it be put more simply or more luminously than in the words of a child, who seeing the Cross in church for the first time, exclaimed: "Why, it is 'I', crossed out!"
