



The Integration of Religion and Psychology

by FRITZ KUNKEL

I. RELIGIOUS PSYCHOLOGY AS ART, NOT SCIENCE

IT IS OFTEN SAID that we need a combination of religion and psychology. And it is true enough; the great tradition of religious life, especially with regard to prayer and meditation, should be combined with the recent discoveries of depth psychology, meaning the psychology of the unconscious. But there are powerful voices which warn us that such a combination would be an inconsistent monstrosity, a mixture of immature opinions and unproven speculations. Therefore we have to go slowly, clarifying first the exact position of this religious psy-

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chology in the system of our sciences and the other cultural activities. We have to answer the question: "What exactly is this Religious Psychology, is it an art, a science, or something else?"

The best way to answer such a question is to think of both psychology and religion in terms of subject and object.

The natural scientist is interested in objects which he finds in the outer world. Everything, to him, becomes an object of research, even his own body and the functions of his own mind. He can investigate his memory, his will power and his dreams. Thus he creates a psychology which fulfills all the requirements of a natural science: it is objective, can be verified by controlled experiments, and its acceptance can be enforced by results which are beyond question. The starting point of all this is the fact that the human being *has* objects.

Besides having objects, however, man *is* a subject. And this is the starting point of a group of new activities. Man is happy or unhappy, confident or afraid. A great variety of anticipations, desires and other feelings keep him alive. These so-called subjective experiences cannot well be investigated in a laboratory. The adequate way of dealing with them is not scientific research but artistic understanding.

The chemist can create new combinations of elements, but they remain "objects," and he never "knows" them in the sense of immediate experience. He can explore the qualities of a new material, but he can never "be it"; while the artist remains identified with his characters and actually "feels" what they feel. And if they experience something new, this new feeling might represent growth and the discovery of new possibilities within the artist and therefore in human life itself. The whole race is growing.

What we said about the artist and his development holds true, of course, also in the field of religious discoveries. There must have been a time when the discovery that we can forgive an evil-

doer, accept an injustice and love an enemy was completely new and unheard-of. The decisive growth of emotional and moral attitudes must have come as a surprise to the explorers of the human soul. It was the breakthrough of something new into human consciousness.

Some psychologists prefer to investigate human beings as objects; others are convinced that man always is a subject, and consequently cannot be explored as an object. They always see man as subject and therefore speak to him in a similar way as the poet does, only in a different language. He is the subject which never can become objectified.

The natural scientist can say in favor of his method that the results must be identical, whenever the same conditions prevail. Natural laws do not allow for exceptions; and the observer is as strictly bound by them as the observed objects. Whenever we deal with the natural law, there is no freedom, no choice, and therefore no responsibility. The client of a Freudian analyst may be "carried away" by his libido. Since it was his libido which did the deed he is not guilty. He was unable to act differently except, perhaps, for his stupidity. Had he been better informed, e.g. had he been analyzed earlier and better, he would have avoided certain mistakes and the results would have been less painful. Psychology as a natural science is limited to the exploration of causes and effects. Its thought form is causality, and therefore its explanation is amoral. It is noteworthy that this well-known fact has hardly been recognized by our Christian ministers and theologians.

The artistic psychologist, who can see man only as a free and therefore responsible subject, cannot understand him in terms of cause and effect. He must interpret his actions by using the thought form of teleology (his category is means and ends).

The natural scientist may boast that he can enforce his conclusions. The religious psychologist cannot eliminate his client's

freedom of choice. He is striving not only for intellectual consent but for changes in the emotional reaction-pattern. He does not convey insights, he develops characters.

II. THE TASK OF DEVELOPING CONSCIOUSNESS

The burnt child dreads fire. If some one has been ridiculed several times when he tried to convince his hearers, he is very likely to develop a stage fright which will make it impossible for him to speak in public. This nervous symptom can be cured in many different ways, from simple encouragement and suggestion to carthartic processes and full-fledged hypnosis.

It is very unlikely, however, that the client should suffer only from one single symptom. He has been discouraged, and it is probable that his discouragement expresses itself in several different symptoms. The more ground the symptoms cover, the more he is cut off from life and reduced to a kind of sham-existence. He is not really himself and is, as it were, waiting for the beginning of his real life.

When the client recognizes this situation he is almost always bound to ask: "Why does this happen to me? Why had I to meet with an environment which forces me into this neurotic pattern and deprives me of the ordinary joys of youth and adolescence?" This philosophical question should be answered carefully every time. And the natural scientist (who cannot answer it) should be taught to realize that, without an answer to this question, he cannot really help his client.

Actually, this question is more important than all the details which would explain the origin and development of the different symptoms. The sum-total of the neurotic difficulties can and should be interpreted as *one* big problem; the client is separated from his real life, divorced from reality, or, in religious language, cut off from God.

And again he will ask: "Why did this happen to me? The tragedy occurred long before I could do anything bad." Before we can answer, we must explain what we mean by "the living answer" or "the dynamic answer."

The opposite is the "dogmatic answer," which is taken from a book and is supposed to be accepted without argument. It is, as it were, learned by heart. The "dynamic, or living, answer," is growing within the questioner himself. The psychologist may say something like this: "Could it be that the purpose of your predicament is to give you a chance to discover something about yourself, or to turn your attention to a certain difficulty or problem which was already in existence before you were born?" This, of course, brings up new questions and new answers and leads into all the philosophical recesses of predestination, guidance and freedom of will. Out of this welter of thoughts finally develops an answer which is completely alive and convincing to the client. He has found it himself, perhaps in one of the deepest meditations that we can teach him, the so-called "birth-meditation" ("Why was I born in this particular family, at this particular place and at this particular time?").

The clarification of the client's doubts in regard to his personal mission on earth is not the only question he will ask. There are other problems of equal importance, for example his preparedness for death: "Are you ready to die? Would you regret it if you had to die tomorrow? Why are you not eager to die?" Many questions will come up in the same connection.

The characteristic quality of all these discussions is that they are not limited to a particular symptom but require a consideration of all the different fields of interest that the client may have, and even those that he does not have. We do not limit our field to neurotic symptoms, alone. Since we discuss the client's relationship to life as a whole and to the power behind his life which is God; a loss of money at the stock exchange is just as important

as a quarrel with his wife. That some one broke into his garden to steal the apples is as significant as a nervous headache. God speaks to him in many languages. Nothing that happens is accidental.

Consequently the religious psychologist has to have some experience in all the different fields of life. He must not limit himself to the study of nervous diseases or psychiatry or even theology. Maybe his most important clients are politicians and God speaks to them by their successes or failures at the polls.

The psychologist's training has to be based on psychology as well as on theology, but beside these two fields he has to be familiar with all the different aspects of modern life. And where his own experience fails him, he should at least know enough to choose the right experts to help out with their knowledge.

III. "CREATE OR DIE!"

The process of becoming a Christian, the conversion experience, has often been described as an "awakening."

See especially St. Paul's famous quotation of an unknown poet in his letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:14):

"Awake, oh sleeper, and arise from the dead,
And Christ shall give you light."

Or, in Goodspeed's translation,

"Christ will dawn upon you."

A higher, more intensive or more comprehensive form of consciousness is here experienced as a higher degree of awareness, or wakefulness, or, in St. Paul's words:

"that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." (Colossians 1:9).

And again (Ephesians 1:17-19):

"That the God . . . the Father, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you . . . and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe."

The question "Why does this happen to me?" now finds an ever growing answer: God is working, pain should change into insight and bewilderment into revelation.

It has been said that religious psychologists should be the re-interpreters of evil who help to transform human suffering into learning. ("Suffering" here includes only physical and mental pain; "evil" refers to suffering which comes to us from outside, and not through fault). But that is the wrong approach. What the client should learn by the "living answer" cannot be the result of a general dogmatic interpretation "evil is the invitation to learn a new lesson which could not be taught otherwise." That is not enough.

Apologetics do not enter into religious psychology. What the client learns has to be his own voluntary and personal discovery. Otherwise it could never be convincing.

It is probably true, in general, that progress, e.g. in our conquest of nature, is a test and invitation to improve our lives and to do away with injustices and inequities. Consequently, if we misuse our growing power destructively, mutual destruction will be the result. But more helpful and closer to the truth would be the statement that that suffering and pain which accompanies our mutual destruction is at the same time an eye-opener: Create or Die! Find constructive ways to use your power; grow, help, love—or perish!

The universal invitation to "wake up and see the dawn of Christ" leads to a much more personal and intimate experience.

The decisive step in our days has to be an individual reaching out, a unique discovery. The psychologist can teach to pray and to meditate but he cannot do the "asking, seeking, and knocking" for his client. The answer which he would get is slightly different from the answer which the client gets. The breakthrough of light can only be experienced by each individual.

At this point, the help which the religious psychologist can provide begins to change. The teacher now becomes a companion or a friend. At first it was his guidance that the client needed; now it is his fellowship. The conversion experience remains a mystery, in spite of the many instances which are known and in spite of the good descriptions which have been published.

The best we can say is that the acting subject seems to switch; up to a certain point the seeker does the seeking, and he seems to know rather clearly what he is after. But at the decisive moment some one else seems to take over. Is it Christ? Is it the spirit? The seeker finds himself at a loss and in a passive role. He is acted upon; he is guided. Some one else or something is leading him. All he has to do is to accept the guidance and act as he is told.

The forms which this experience takes show an infinite variety and it will take the psychologists a long time until the different approaches are described and classified. What they all have in common is the transformation of pressure and suffering into a joyful discovery, and the change from darkness to light.

This process, as far as we can see, is best described as an awakening to a higher degree of consciousness, or as the appearance of a new light in the center of the personality. The disappearance of nervous symptoms is often—but not always—a by-product. There are cases in which certain symptoms do not disappear but remain as "a thorn in the flesh." The goal of our work is the development of the religious consciousness. It is not healing as such.

The time of mass conversions seems to have come to an end. We are living in a generation of individualism. The experience, as well as the responsibility, rests with one person alone. That is the dignity and the democratic birthright of every one! The result will be the living creative answer.