

PSYCHOTHERAPY AND RELIGION

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Among the dramatic changes of the past two decades, none is more striking than the rapprochement between psychiatry and religion. Sworn enemies in the days of Freud, each has since discovered that it can learn from the other.

I should like to mention two points at which psychiatry and religion together have reached a deeper understanding than either had done alone: the nature of guilt and the importance of love.

Freudian analysis discovered that nothing was more crippling to the personality than a gnawing sense of guilt. The removal of guilt-feelings was therefore one of the goals of therapy. At the same time, religion was attacked as one of the principal sources of guilt-feelings, with its talk of sinners in the clutches of an angry God.

Thoughtful Christians listened. Driven to re-examine the foundations of their beliefs, they discovered that the primary emphasis of the Bible is not on sin and punishment at all, but upon mercy and new life. Christ, like the psychiatrist, encountered people tortured by guilt. Like the psychiatrist, his aim was "not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might have life.

There is, however, a condition which must be met. Before a person can be forgiven, he must first repent. And here the psychiatrist balks.

Repentance implies that not all guilt can be explained away as an unhealthy condition of the mind. Rather, a person really can become guilty, in the objective sense, and such guilt can hardly be explained away by scientific techniques.

True to the experimental method, the psychiatrist tries to discover how far these techniques can succeed. The results are chastening. At best, the patient becomes a man without a compass, an easy prey toward the pressures of conformity in a mass produced society, with *no* point of leverage from which to resist the creeping mediocrity.

At worst, he becomes a man without a conscience, not too far removed from the psychopath.

In either case, Freudian treatment leads to an ironic result. It leaves the neurotic as irresponsible as it found him.

As a result, the psychiatrist has begun to take a second look at what he once despised. If a person can be objectively guilty, then he needs forgiveness. At this point, psychiatrist and Christian are talking the same language.

For its part, the church is re-learning from the psychiatrist the important distinction between true and false guilt and the crying need for sympathy and insight.

The Church has also learned from psychiatry the healing power of love. Where Christians sometimes tended to "spiritualize" love until it was of doubtful application in the real world, the psychiatrist testifies that without love, we are all potential neurotics. In fact, mental health seems to depend in part on whether or not a person is loved.

One school of psychiatry flatly declares that the love of the therapist cures the patient. Christians have reminded that love in the abstract can become just another hypocrisy, while love in the concrete remains not only the spice of life, but its staple as well.

Religion and psychiatry thus make common cause in the great enterprise of understanding and healing the human race.

From the side of religion, one is tempted to ask whether, in the last analysis, science alone can provide from its own resources the forgiveness and love which man requires, or whether instead science itself might have stumbled on a problem which only God himself can solve. However incredulous the scientist might be, this is after all what the Christian would expect.

The doctrine of creation contains the promise that all men are called to become coworkers with God for the transfiguration of the world.