THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

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TO A VERY HUMAN PERSON

To know you
is to behold the splendor of life
and its mystery

To know you
is to discover that religious faith
if it is possible
is necessary

How can I know you
and still be without religious faith?

Therefore to you
I dedicate this study of the human
naturalness of religion

PREFACE

This work is intended primarily as a handbook for beginners in the psychological analysis of religion. The foremost concern, therefore, has been to make clear the nature of the problems, the kinds of data, the methods of research, and the achieved results.

The justification for attempting such a handbook lies partly in the inherent difficulty of analyzing religious experience, and partly in conditions that grow out of the extreme youth of the psychology of religion. We are still in the beginnings—plural—of this enterprise. Of ten recent writers who have published volumes of a general character devoted largely or wholly to the subject, no three pursue the same method, or hold the same point of view as to what the religious consciousness is. I refer to Ames, Durkheim, Höffding, James, King, Leuba, Pratt, Starbuck, Stratton, and Wundt. Such disparity is not a reproach to a scientific inquiry in its first stages, but rather a sign of its vitality. But students who are approaching the subject for the first time are likely to be confused by the seeming babel, even though it be more apparent than real, or else—and this is a more common and a greater evil—to suppose that the first tongue that they happen to hear speaks the one exclusive language of science. I have therefore attempted, not only to sharpen the outlines of problems, but also to provide, particularly in the alphabetical and topical bibliographies, convenient apparatus for following up

problems, and especially for setting them in a scientific perspective.

My first intention was to make this work simply a handbook. But inasmuch as even an introduction to the researches of others is bound to represent some standpoint of one's own, and inasmuch as candor is best served by making standpoints explicit, I decided to include a rather extended statement of certain inquiries and conclusions that I have found more and more interesting and, as I believe, fruitful. The upspringing of functional analysis of mental life is likely to prove immensely significant for the sciences of man, *who contemplates and judges his own functions.* But functionalism in psychology is still in its infancy—it is only now discovering its own fingers and toes. It is working with categories borrowed from biology, not clearly realizing that it has taken for its parish the whole world of values. To meet this situation I have felt it necessary, not only to assume the standpoint of functional analysis, but also to investigate it. The result is a view of religion that does not separate it at all from instinct, yet finds its peculiar function elsewhere.

I have not attempted a balanced treatment of the whole subject of the psychology of religion. Rather, I have brought into the foreground the problems that seem to be most pressing at the present moment. Here, without doubt, my own mind reveals its leanings. I have no desire to conceal them. All attention, in fact, is selective; all investigation is moved by a greater interest in something than in something else.

It is not always necessary to make one's interests explicit, but investigation of the more intimate aspects

of experience that we call valuational proceeds best upon a basis of frank self-revelation. The investigator of the psychology of religion, whatever be the case with others, cannot afford to neglect the psychology of his own psychologizing.[1]

That the reader may duly weigh my tendencies, they are made explicit rather than carried along as suppressed premises in supposedly impersonal thinking—as though there could be thinking without a motived will-to-think.[2] As a further aid to critical reading of this work, I here and now set down a list of my attitudes with respect to religion and to the psychology of religion. The reader may then

[1] One writer, Professor J. H. Leuba, has set a good precedent by frankly letting his readers know something of his religious experience. Naturally, he thinks that his own experience has brought him into "the ideal condition for the student of religion" (*A Psychological Study of Religion* [New York, 1912], p. 275, and note)! On the danger of the "psychologist's fallacy" in the psychology of religion, see W. F. Cooley, "Can Science Speak the Decisive Word in Theology?" *Journal of Philosophy*, X (1913), 296-301.

[2] Such limitations are not peculiar to investigations in which, as in the present instance, the valuational aspect of consciousness is in the foreground. It is a general rule that scientific men are more certain of their generalizations than of their data. The least certain parts of psychology, for example, are revealed in current discussions of the nature of the psychical, and of the nature and method of psychology. In the same way the biologist finds himself hard pressed to say just what the difference is between a vital phenomenon and any other. Every investigator, whatever his specialty, as a matter of fact (1) selects his data, and (2) treats them from the standpoint of a particular interest. What a blessing it would be if a catalogue could be made of the principles of selection actually employed, and of the particular interests that determine analyses, in each science! But—this would plunge us into the problem of values, and into philosophy! Rather than take this plunge let us keep up the delusion that as scientific men we depersonalize ourselves into "clear, cold logic-engines"!

judge for himself the extent to which they act as prejudices.

1. The religious enterprise is to me the most important undertaking in life. Much is at stake. This importance of religion attaches to some extent also to efforts to analyze religion. For such efforts, by focusing attention on one point or another, may result in either the heightening or the lowering of appreciation for something valuable.

2. I do not appeal to any religious experience of my own as settling for me any question of psychology. Nor do I accept as authoritative the report of anyone else that such questions have been settled by his experience. Every religious experience, without exception, is to me a datum, to be examined by analytic processes that do not appear or that are undeveloped in the experience itself. Now, it is of the essence of religious dogma to assert that somebody—pope, council, prophet, inspired writer—has had a religious experience that does settle certain psychological questions concerning itself—such questions, for example, as the difference between this experience and ordinary experiences, the way in which certain ideas have got into the mind, and much more. This fact, as well as general considerations of history and of scientific method, make it impossible for me to reconcile the psychology of religion with any dogmatic authority.

3. On the other hand, the religious urgency that I have already mentioned makes me more or less cautious with regard to the content of religious tradition—particularly the Christian tradition in which I have been reared. Here I find, not a dead body awaiting dissection,

but a living being—one needing surgery, I am sure, but alive, and to live. Freedom from intellectual authority and the practice of psychologizing religious facts have rather intensified than lessened my conviction (1) that within the historical movement broadly called the Christian religion the human spirit has come to demand more of life than it has demanded elsewhere, that is, that in this religion we have the greatest of all stimuli; and (2) that this stimulus both proceeds from and points to reality. I entertain as my own, in short, the Christian faith in divine fatherhood and human brotherhood, and I work cordially within a Christian church to make this religion prevail. Quite naturally, no doubt, I assume that looking at religion from the inside helps rather than hinders analysis, and I certainly find no motive in the Christian religion for undervaluing other religions or even non-religions; the principle of brotherhood makes me expect to find something of myself in the other man's point of view. But if any reader thinks that being thus religious has warped my psychology, I request that he will do two things: (1) not rest in any general surmise or assumption, but find the specific facts that have been neglected, misrepresented, or misanalyzed, and (2) examine his own way of getting at the inside of the same facts, that is, confess his own interests as I am now confessing mine. In this way he will not only correct my one-sidedness, but also hasten the correction of his own, and science will move the faster up its zigzag trail.

4. My religious experience has been as free from mysticism as it has been from dogmatism. Indeed, the chief incitement to seek mystical experiences came to me wrapped up in dogma, and the disappointment of

my adolescence, when the promised and sought-for mystical "witness of the Spirit" did not come, caused me to turn away from both the dogmatic and the mystical approach to religion. Not far from the middle of my college days it was settled—though I could not then realize how well settled—that thenceforth I should look for the center of gravity of religion in the moral will. I do not rely upon intuitions, nor make the subconscious my refuge in the day of critical adversity. Life seems to me to be an ethical enterprise; my life problem concerns the choice of my cause, the investment of my purposes; and this, surely, implies distrust of anything that evaporates in the sunlight of my most critical self-possession.

5. From the standpoint of the moral will, the rational possibility of faith in a personal God and in life after death seems to me to be immensely important. For I conceive the ethical in social terms, and therefore for me persons are the paramount reality. If I had any merely individual self-consciousness, its continuance after death, or before death, would not be clearly worth while. Our life gets its meaning, its reality, by being social. But when once it has this meaning, how can one consent to perish or to let others perish without moral protest? If our current social thinking does not view the question of survival after death as an acute social problem, it is because we have already made an unsocial assent to the idea of a death that ends all; it is because our sociality is truncated. So with regard to God. It is socially desirable that "an ideal *socius*" should exist. If this desire is only slightly in evidence in much of our social thinking, the reason, as before, is that we have steeled

ourselves not to desire too great a social good. I, for one, am unwilling to subject myself to any *such* self-discipline. I will not curb my heart as long as its desires are truly social. My personal religion, in fact, consists, first and foremost, in the emancipation of social desire.

6. Finally, I own up to a strong aversion to dogmatism in science as well as in religion. In scientific circles, just as in religion, politics, and business, there are orthodoxies and heresies, and both orthodoxy and heresy may be dogmatic. I am inclined to think that science takes itself too seriously at times. Possibly we could become more scientific by cultivating a sense of humor! How would it do to start a "Scientific Gridiron Club" for the purpose of "roasting" our foibles? Once a year we could play the harlequin with our freshly discarded convictions and with our freshly adopted ones alike. We could see ourselves following scientific fads and running in scientific herds, being moved, like the profane, by suggestion. We could coolly gaze upon the heat and the haste with which we have endeavored to preach and to legislate for life. We could, in short, behold science as an exhibition of human nature. The psychology of religion may be expected, of course, to modifiy to some extent our religious practices and our theological notions, but it is not likely to fill with great success the rôle of prophet, or of pope, or even of business manager!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

RELIGION AS AN OBJECT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

The closing years of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth mark the beginning of a definite determination to use the resources of scientific psychology in the investigation of religion. The roots of modern science reach far into the past, of course; yet a distinctly new departure was made when systematic, empirical methods were employed in order to analyze religious conversion and thus place it within the general perspective of the natural sciences.[1] Associated with the interest in conversion there quickly arose inquiry into the wider problem of mysticism.[2] Coincidently with such

[1] The earliest articles bearing on this topic are as follows: G. Stanley Hall, "The Moral and Religious Training of Children and Adolescents," *Pedagogical Seminary*, I (1891), 196 ff.; A. H. Daniels, "The New Life," *American Journal of Psychology*, VI (1893), 61 ff.; J. H. Leuba, "A Study in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena," *ibid.*, VII (1896), 309 ff.; W. H. Burnham, "The Study of Adolescence," *Pedagogical Seminary*, I (1891), 2 ff; E. G. Lancaster, "Psychology and Pedagogy of Adolescence," *Pedagogical Seminary*, V (1895), 1 ff; E. D. Starbuck, "A Study of Conversion," *American Journal of Psychology*, VIII (1897), 268 ff.; "Some Aspects of Religious Growth," *ibid.*, IX (1898), 70 ff. These articles were succeeded by the following volumes devoted largely or wholly to conversion and kindred phenomena: E. D. Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion* (London, 1899); G. A. Coe, *The Spiritual Life* (New York, 1900); W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London, 1902).

[2] Typical of this interest are: J. H. Leuba, "Tendances fondamentales des mystiques chrétiens," *Revue philosophique*, LIV (1902), 1–36 and 441–87; "On the Psychology of a Group of Christian Mystics," *Mind*, XIV (1905), 15–27; M. Delacroix, *Etudes d'histoire et de psychologie du mysticisme* (Paris, 1908). James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and J. B. Pratt's *Psychology of Religious Belief* (New York, 1907) are to a considerable degree arguments for the truth of mysticism.

studies of individual life came investigations of the earliest forms of religion.[1] Investigation of origins both included and stimulated attempts at a critical determination of the nature of religion and its relation to human evolution.[2] Finally, the systematization of results in general surveys of the whole field has begun.[3] The whole constitutes a fresh chapter that belongs on the one hand to psychology and on the other to the science of religion.

Attempts to psychologize this or that phase of religion are not new, of course. What is new is the use of critical, empirical methods, and the specific results of applying them. One could write a long history of what may be called, in no opprobrious sense, the quasi-psychology of religion, that is, attempts to conceive religion, or parts of it, in terms of mental structure or of mental process, but without a method sufficiently critical to correct erroneous statements of fact or of law. Inner religion, when it becomes reflective, commonly attempts to psychologize. Thus the New Testament writers, Paul in particular, have views concerning the structure of the mind (soul, spirit, the flesh, etc.) and the inner working

[1] For example: Irving King, *The Development of Religion* (New York, 1910); E. Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris, 1912); W. Wundt, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie* (Leipzig, 1913).

[2] G. M. Stratton, *Psychology of the Religious Life* (London, 1911); J. H. Leuba, *A Psychological Study of Religion* (New York, 1912).

[3] E. S. Ames, *Psychology of Religious Experience* (Boston, 1910). J. B. Pratt, in his article "The Psychology of Religion," *Harvard Theological Review*, I (1908), 435–54, gives an outline of the movement up to the date of his writing.

of spiritual influences, divine and demonic.[1] Tertullian (*ca.* 155–222) defends Christianity against its detractors by declaring that "The soul is naturally Christian,"[2] and that the persecutors themselves bear unintentional witness to the things that they would stamp out.[3] He goes so far in his treatise on the soul as to attempt a psychology of the Christian soul. Augustine, Pascal, and unnumbered others found God, as they thought, by studying the soul of man.

To dissect out the quasi-psychological elements in theology would require a survey of very nearly the whole history of Christian doctrine. The natural man, creationism and traducianism, dichotomy and trichotomy, inspiration, regeneration, free will, the person of Christ—these are some of the angles from which theologians have made the mind of man, as they have believed, an object of study. Schleiermacher (1768–1834), with his insistence that religion is neither belief nor action, but feeling, gave a psychologic direction to all progressive theology. We must look for the essence of religion, he argues, in the interior of the soul itself. "Otherwise," he says, "ye will understand nothing of religion, and it will happen to you as to one who, bringing his tinder too late, hunts for the fire which the flint has drawn from the steel, and finds only a cold and meaningless particle of base metal, with which he cannot

[1] See M. S. Fletcher, *The Psychology of the New Testament* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton Co.). The title of this work seems hardly fortunate. In these days the term psychology should connote scientific method, which, of course, the New Testament writers lacked.

[2] *Apology* xvii.

[3] *Testimony of the Soul* vi.

kindle anything."[1] Again, arguing that the reality of religion cannot be found in sacred literature, but only in the soul's experiences, he exclaims, "If you only knew how to read between the lines!"[2]

Philosophical as well as religious interests have inspired attempts at a psychological account of religion. Lucretius, quoting Petronius, declares that the basis of religion is fear: "It is fear that first made the gods." Hume opens his *Natural History of Religion* (1755) with a distinction between questions that concern the rationality of religion and those that concern its "origin in human nature." Many philosophers, indeed, have had theories of the relation of religion to human nature. Hegel, for example, regarded religion as a particular stage in the process whereby God comes to self-consciousness in man. Ludwig Feuerbach, reversing this position, held that the gods are merely projections of man's wishes, so that in religion man comes to consciousness merely of what he himself is.

Finally, the history of religion, which has made great strides during the last two generations, has commonly called psychological conceptions to its aid. What, indeed, can a history of *religion* be—as distinguished from a history of doctrines or of institutions—but an account of certain mental reactions as related to the situations in which they arise and grow?

Nevertheless, neither theology, philosophy, nor the history of religion has succeeded in producing a psychology of religion in the present sense of the term "psychology." They have turned attention to one or another phase of the enormous complex called "religion,"

[1] *Reden* (ed. of 1806), p. 33. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

and thereby they have stimulated inquiry. The history of religion has, in addition, accumulated large masses of data for the psychologist's use. Isolated views have been reached that may claim a permanent place in psychology. But a scientific psychology of religion is something more than an incident of philosophy, theology, and the history of religion. It implies, in particular, critical systematic methods for ascertaining data and for placing them within the general perspective of mental life.

The present movement for a psychology of religion is due to several new and favorable conditions. In the first place, psychology itself has just become an independent science, with many men devoting themselves exclusively to it. The first psychological laboratory, that of Wundt, was established as late as 1875. Since this date we have witnessed the upspringing of such fairly well-organized branches of the science as animal psychology, genetic and educational psychology, and abnormal psychology. Beginnings have been made, also, in social and anthropological psychology. In the second place, recent anthropological research, conducted with unprecedented thoroughness, has uncovered a vast quantity of material that bears upon the evolution of religion. Thirdly, there has occurred, chiefly in these years, a general assimilation of the historical-evolutionary principle as applied to the higher elements of culture. Notable, from the standpoint of our present interest, is the firm establishment of the historical study of the Bible, commonly called the higher criticism. Fourthly, and finally, an ancient obstacle to the scientific study of religion, the assumption of dogmatic authority, is in