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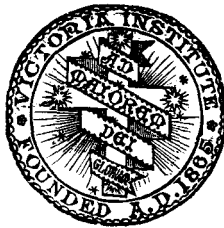
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866TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

HELD AT 12, QUEEN ANNE'S GATE, LONDON, S.W.1, AT 6 P.M. ON
MONDAY, APRIL 15TH, 1946.

E. W. CRABB, ESQ., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed and signed.

The CHAIRMAN then called on Ernest White, Esq., M.B., B.S., to read his paper entitled "The Relation of Instinct and Emotion to Religious Experience."

The following elections have been made: Walter J. Beasley, Esq., Fellow; Rev. Basil H. Williams, B.A., Member; Lieut. James Clark, R.N.V.R., Member; P. W. Petter, Esq., Fellow.

THE RELATION OF INSTINCT AND EMOTION TO RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE.

BY ERNEST WHITE, M.B., B.S.

INSTINCT has been defined in various ways by different psychologists according to their respective views of its relation to emotion, to intelligence, and to the environment. Amid all the varying attempts at definition, there are three common factors with which most psychologists, except those of the Behaviourist school, who appear to ignore instinct altogether, would probably agree. Firstly, that instinct is inherited and not acquired, secondly, that it produces behaviour of a definite pattern, and thirdly, that such behaviour occurs in response to an external stimulus. Instinctive behaviour is not due only to an urge from within, nor is it a series of mechanical responses or reflexes arising from external stimulation; both factors are present. A living organism cannot be seen in true perspective apart from its environment, and the true study of mankind is man, not as an isolated individual but in relation to the whole of the factors which constitute his environment. Much stress has been laid on this conception during recent years. The study of mental disease and of disease in general is directed more and more toward a study of social conditions. Behaviour, in the widest sense of the term, is the product, not only of causes lying

within the individual, but of action and reaction between the individual and his social and natural environment. If we add an ætiological concept, we may say that instinct is directed toward the successful adaptation of the individual to its environment, and to the continuation of the species. Failure of such adaptation leads ultimately to the death of the individual and the destruction of the species.

Before going on to consider the relation between instinct and religious experience, it is worth while to discuss briefly what is meant by the latter term. It is at once obvious that when we talk of religious experience, we imply a conscious mental process relating to a sphere of thought and activity which we call religion.

The late A. S. Peake, in his book *Christianity, its Nature and its Truth*, describes religion as "Fellowship with the Unseen." Although this definition is rather vague and inadequate, it brings out the essential difference between religion and other branches of our experience. While most of our experiences are concerned with ourselves and the material world in which we live, religion is concerned primarily with the invisible world of the spirit. In religious experience man is reaching out beyond the material universe in which he lives, behind the world of sense, to an invisible realm above and beyond anything directly or indirectly apparent to his sense perceptions.

There are two great facts about religious experience which have been confirmed equally by historical research and by study of the races of mankind living in the world to-day. The first is that religious observances evidencing religious experience of some sort are universal, and secondly that the conduct of man whether considered individually, socially or nationally, is profoundly affected by the nature of his religious beliefs. There is no need to bring evidence forward in proof of these assertions—they are self-evident to any thoughtful person with even slight knowledge of history and ethnology.

Various theories have been put forward as to the origin of religion, and the evolution of religious ideas, but it is more than doubtful as to whether some of these theories are more than guesses or speculations, with no satisfactory archæological or scientific background. It seems probable that religion is inherent in man, and that it is as much part of his nature to seek for fellowship with the unseen as it is for him to seek for food and drink. As one said long ago, "The God that made the

world and all things therein . . . made of one every nation of man to dwell on all the face of the earth . . . that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after Him " (Acts xvii, 24-27).

Any conscious experience is the product of a combination of stimuli reaching the mind from without, with instinctual force rising from the unconscious. The mind is no longer conceived as a purely receptive organ, registering and combining sensations received from the outer world, a clean slate upon which anything may be written. It has an active, selective function, and is causative and creative. These dynamic mental energies arise from instinctual urges driving toward expression in experience and conduct. No mental experience is purely passive. Therefore in considering religious experience, the question at once arises, what is the nature of the instinct which lies behind it, and supplies its energy? The answer to this question given by various writers may be divided under three different headings.

There are those who seek to explain the psychology of religion by saying that religious experience is a sublimation of one or more of the normal instincts, singly or in combination. The word sublimation is used here in the Freudian sense, and implies the partial repression of an instinct and its re-emergence on a higher level of consciousness. In this process the instinct becomes divorced from its primary biological goal and subserves an apparently different function. That process may be illustrated by the childless woman who develops a strong affection for animals, or takes up nursing, or orphanage work in an attempt to sublimate her unsatisfied maternal instinct.

Secondly, there are those who hold that religion primarily centres round a sentiment, with one or more instinctive forces in the background. T. H. Hughes (*The New Psychology and Religious Experience*, ch. 3) maintains this view. He defines a sentiment as an "organised system of emotions," and goes on to say that "The instinct of self-preservation is undoubtedly the basal one in the religious sentiment, because that is the basal and primary urge of life at its deepest." McDougall supports the emotional view of religion, making it arise as a feeling of awe and reverence, compounded of the elements of fear and curiosity.

In the third class, and in the minority, are those who hold that there is a specific religious instinct.

The first view, that religion is a sublimation of instinct, is put forward by the Psycho-Analyst school. Freud and Jung both regard the sex instinct as the basis of religion. In his book *Totem and Taboo*, Freud, after an elaborate and somewhat obscure argument, states, "I want to state the conclusion that the beginnings of religion, ethics, society and art meet in the Œdipus Complex."

In another book, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, he derives certain religious manifestations as seen in Church life, from the herd instinct, but argues that the herd instinct has a sexual basis. Many other statements scattered through his writings support the theory that religion is an illusion derived from the sex instinct and the relation of the child to the father. Jung, in his book, *The Psychology of the Unconscious*, while admitting the practical value of Christianity, regards religious feeling as due to a transformation of incestuous libido. It may be granted that in some religious experiences and expressions the sex instinct is sublimated. Some of our hymns, and many of the writings of the saints and mystics, and even some Bible language, as for example in the books of Hosea and the Song of Solomon, have a very strong and evident sexual basis. The facts that our instincts are drawn into and sublimated by religious experiences is not sufficient argument to prove that religion itself rests on a sexual foundation, and is derived from it alone.

Perhaps even more open to criticism is the theory that religion is the product of the self-preservative instinct. There is a certain line of teaching, now less to the fore than in former years, which overstresses the wrath of God, regards salvation as primarily a flight from the wrath to come, and deliverance from hell as a motive for serving God. To state that religion derives from the desire for self-preservation ignores many of the phenomena of religious, especially Christian, experience. Such a theory hardly accords with the words of one who out of the depths of his heart could say "the love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Corinth. v, 14).

The two greatest and chief commandments, to love the Lord thy God, and to love thy neighbour as thyself, the selflessness of saintly lives, the cheerful suffering of the loss of all things, even of life itself, for the love of Christ, can hardly be reconciled with a theory of self-preservation as motive, except on the

cynical principle that these things were obeyed and done with the ulterior motive of deliverance from hell and the attainment of final bliss.

It cannot be denied that, just as certain aspects of religious experience exhibit a sublimation of sex instinct, so some experiences, especially in connection with conversion, show the presence of a self-preserved instinct at work. An individual may be so terrified by the fear of a future hell, or so alarmed by the prospect of the possible future consequences of his sins, that he flees for refuge to the Christian faith; but this is, or should be, only a beginning.

Fear is ultimately an inhibitory influence, and does not make for liberty and fulness of life. It is negative rather than positive, and, if continued in, will prevent or stultify the experience of happiness and liberty in Christian life and service which otherwise might be enjoyed.

The truth appears to be that both the sex and the ego instincts play some part, varying in proportion according to the mental structure of the individual, and the kind of instruction he receives. Religion concerns itself with the whole life of man, and where it rises above superstition it makes demands upon his intellect and will, as well as bringing the whole instinctual and emotional life under its control. A true science of psychology will not be content with an analytical view which tends to regard the mind as formed by the common conjunction of many parts. Therein lay the error of the old faculty Psychology, and later the associationist theories. Analysis is of value in discovering the structure and function of the mind, but there is a risk of regarding the parts as separate entities, rather than as different aspects of an organic unity. The mind acts as a living whole, and every mental act contains elements of will, emotion, and intellect.

For these reasons, as well as for others which might be brought forward, the description of religion as a sentiment seems to be inadequate. A sentiment is a cluster of emotions centring round an object. The extent of its driving power depends upon the instinctual forces lying behind it, and it may be described as weak or strong according to the degree to which it influences conduct. Patriotism is a sentiment, and it is seen in varying quantities of manifestation from the calm, almost disinterested talk of the armchair philosopher to the fiery activities of a great

national leader. In both there is a sentiment present, but in the latter case conduct is altered and motivated by a sentiment plus instinctive drives. A sentiment may be regarded as a by-product of mental life, not in the direct line through which instinct is directed outward into conduct. Sentiments are concerned more with what a man is, than with what he does.

In contrast with sentiment, instinct motivates behaviour toward the achievement of a specific goal, with definite biological aims concerned ultimately with the preservation of the individual and the species. Instinctive behaviour is related to particular objects in the environment, and it is activated by stimuli arising from the presence of those objects in the perceptual field.

It is worth while to consider whether religious behaviour and experience can be satisfactorily explained by the hypothesis of a specific religious instinct. Does such a theory agree with our theory of instinct and with the facts observed ?

In the first place, the universality of religion suggests that it is due to an innate quality of mind. Wherever *homo sapiens* is found, there are traces of religious rites showing evidence of some consciousness, however dim, of a higher power, of something or someone outside and beyond the material environment. To describe this as merely an illusion raises more difficulties than it seeks to explain. Whence this illusion, and how are we to explain its universality ?

Secondly, if there is a specific religious instinct, what particular behaviour does it motivate ? Amid all the varying religious practices, from the lowest form of idolatrous and fetish rites, to the highest manifestation of monotheism, where can we find a common denominator of behaviour pointing to a common instinctual origin ? Surely the answer is to be found in worship in all its varying forms. Acts of worship are the essential and central feature of all religions. Worship is closely allied with submission and with sacrifice, and sacrifice is deeply connected with guilt, an emotion which seems to play an important part in both normal and abnormal mental processes.

Attempts have been made to regard religion as a system of ethics, and to banish worship of a higher power as an unnecessary appendage. Perhaps the most famous example of such an attempt was seen in the original conception of Buddhism. It has been thought that this religion was based at first on an ethical system which was atheistic, although this is a debatable question.

Even if we admit that Nirvana represents something more positive than annihilation, suggesting rather a fusion of the self with the Eternal Spirit, such high philosophy soon became unacceptable, because insufficient to satisfy the multitude who followed the new light. The Buddha himself became the object of universal worship amongst his numerous converts. Temples enshrining idolatrous representations of the venerated god were erected wherever the new religion spread, and priests, votive offerings, and all the paraphernalia associated with worship, appeared to minister to the religious sense of the devout.

Worship lies at the heart of religion. It is the means by which man seeks fellowship with the unseen. If he expresses submission, it is to win the favour of the god, and express his sense of a superior being to whose will he would be subject. If he offers sacrifice it is that he may at once placate the deity offended by his transgressions, and remove the guilt from his own soul by projection on to the sacrificial offering. Both these methods seek to win the approval and assure the future goodwill of the deity who is the object of his worship.

Seeing then that religion is an inborn trait of mankind, and that it is manifested in a specific response, namely worship, we must now look for the third factor concerned in instinctive behaviour if we are to regard religion as an instinctive phenomenon. That third factor has been described as behaviour in response to an external stimulus. Instructive behaviour is constantly brought into action by environmental influence. It might be said that the necessary stimulus is supplied by the instruction and example of those who train the growing child. This explanation is at once seen to be insufficient, for it merely pushes the question back in time. The deepest religious experiences are not the product of what a person has been taught, or of his reading, nor are they the product of imitation. They possess a quality different from anything realised on the material plane. An individual may be instructed from earliest childhood in the doctrines and practice of the Christian religion, and yet never know the experience associated with worship in spirit and in truth.

It is not in the material environment we find the stimuli which call forth the operation of the religious instinct. We believe that man is a spiritual being, and as such he has a spiritual

environment, and that environment is God "in Whom we live and move and have our being."

Reference has been made to the teleological aspect of instinct. The object and purpose of the religious instinct is to enable man to attain successful adaptation to his spiritual environment. He feels himself out of tune. There is a feeling of weakness and failure. An underlying sense of guilt at once separates man from joyful communion with God, and demands appropriate judgment and punishment. The idea of guilt and the necessity for some form of atonement are deeply embedded in mental structure.

The analysis of cases of neurosis, especially those of the obsessional type, has revealed in many instances the presence of a strong guilt complex, and the symptoms are found to be due to an unconscious self-punishment on the part of the sufferer conjoined with the desire to atone for sin. In effect, his illness is produced unconsciously as a means of attempting to satisfy a guilty conscience.

Various religious doctrines and observances seek to satisfy the same urge. If man is to find God, he must somehow get rid of the barrier of guilt which separates him from God. The Christian religion has solved the problem by its doctrines of the Atonement and the forgiveness of sins. Even in the Christian church, however, we find practices which suggest a failure to solve the problem of guilt. Asceticism lies in this category. By punishing his body, the ascetic hopes to purify his soul, and so obtain closer communion with God. He may argue that the object of his acts of self-denial or infliction of pain upon himself, or other harsh methods of treating his body, is to mortify his flesh. It is more than probable that a guilt complex lies at the root of these self-inflictions of punishment, and that the guilt is associated closely with sex. A young candidate for holy orders once related to the author that he had been advised by his superior at a training college to strip himself naked and beat himself with a stick should he ever be guilty of self-abuse. The obsessional neurotic who feels compelled to wash his hands repeatedly and at great length, is striving to wash away his sins, although he is unconscious of this explanation of his conduct, until analysis reveals the hidden guilt complex. Pilate, who called for a basin of water and washed his hands to demonstrate his innocence, rather demonstrated the opposite to those who can see beneath the surface of conduct the deeper motives which inspire it.

Freud states that an instinct may undergo one of four possible transformations. It may be turned in on the subject, changed into its opposite, sublimated, or repressed. It is not without interest to trace the vicissitudes of the religious instinct along these lines, and if it proves possible to do so, to perceive a reinforcement of the evidence for a specific religious instinct.

There has been a tendency both in ancient times and in modern thought to deify man. The Cæsars, by their own orders and with the consent of their subjects, asserted their divinity and were worshipped as gods. It may be doubted whether the Roman emperors actually believed in their own divinity, or whether they proclaimed their godhead in order to assure the allegiance of their subjects by ministering to their superstitions. The late dictators of the axis powers went far in the same direction, and tended to receive honours from their servile subjects suggesting their elevation above the common human species. We still see the strange spectacle of a nation which has in many respects accepted western ideas regarding their Emperor as divine, and of their prime minister excusing his attempt at suicide on the grounds that a successful outcome would have rendered him divine and given him the power to direct the future of his race from this exalted position. In worshipping man rather than the Creator we see perhaps an illustration of the first of the vicissitudes of instinct referred to by Freud.

Some writers go even further in this direction and suggest that to find God we must look within ourselves. The opinion is expressed that as the only God we can know lies within our own hearts it is superfluous to assume the existence of an external or supernatural Deity. The Humanism of the latter part of last century with Frederick Harrison as one of its chief advocates and apologists, maintained that we know of no God except Humanity, that the only object worthy of worship is man himself, and that the only rational religion would be exhibited in the service of man, and the denial of a supreme Deity. Thus the religious instinct has been turned in on the subject, seeking to find satisfaction within. Recent history has provided a revelation of the folly and error of such ideas, without perhaps thoroughly eliminating them.

Atheism may be regarded as an example of the religious instinct undergoing the second of the vicissitudes of instinct

described by Freud. For students of human nature it is a curious and interesting reflection that atheism thrives most in the countries where Christian teaching is most widely propagated. A missionary who had travelled widely and over a long period of years amongst the native tribes of Africa stated that he had never discovered a professor of atheism amongst even those tribes which might be considered the most degraded. The reason for atheistic opinion may be discovered in the lofty ethical and moral claims made by the Christian religion together with the natural depravity of human nature which it teaches. The self-regarding instinct, so often disguised as pride and self-satisfaction, prevents the educated, and perhaps still more the half-educated man from admitting the truth of a religion which allows no place for human pride, and declares human nature to be essentially evil. He finds himself equally unable either to admit the need for repentance, or to accept the necessity of humbling himself before a Power outside himself and infinitely greater. It becomes more convenient, and accords better with the conception of himself to deny the existence of God, and such denial offers the additional advantage of at once relieving him of any sense of guilt he may possess, and absolving him from moral responsibility. Thus his religious instinct becomes reversed, and leads him to decry and to affect to despise all religion. If he hopes for no future reward he is compensated by the absence of any fear of future punishment. In view of these apparent advantages, it is a matter for surprise that the doctrine of atheism is not more widely held, but this fact is further evidence of the compelling power of the instinct which drives men to seek God, and prevents them from denying Him altogether.

In the apparent indifference of so many of our fellow-countrymen to the claims of religion, we may discern the repression of the religious instinct. Repression in the Freudian sense is an unconscious process, the word suppression being reserved for conscious attempts to expel ideas from consciousness. This accords with the observation that, in the case of so many individuals, religion is ignored rather than consciously opposed or rejected. Men do not feel their need. They remain content to accept the many advantages which have accrued to society as the direct or indirect result of Christian teaching without troubling to discover for themselves the power of the Gospel. They are

often willing to approve and even to actively advocate the ethic of religion, whilst remaining blind to its dynamic.

One result of repression of an instinct is the formation of abnormal symptoms. Instinctive energy, denied its normal channel of discharge, finds a circuitous mode of expression, often far removed in quality from the original goal. Herein lies the reason for the flourishing condition of strange and various cults, entirely alien from Christianity. The widespread popularity of astrology and the growth of Spiritism illustrate this process. They may be considered as spiritual neuroses, and as attempts to find satisfaction for an instinct diverted from its true goal. Ignorance or rejection of truth provides fertile soil for the growth of superstition.

Finally, we may discern in the religious instinct a parallel with other instincts in its manifestation as a need demanding satisfaction. This satisfaction is never attained until the goal has been reached. That goal is God, Who made us for His pleasure, and without Whom no life is complete. The Spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, and without His kindling touch, man lives in darkness, for ever unsatisfied until he finds his fulfilment in God, through Christ the Light of the World.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Mr. E. W. CRABB) said: When I was invited to act as Chairman of the present gathering, my first doubt was "Suppose I disagree with Dr. White's conclusions." When I read the paper, however, I realised very forcibly the unifying nature of the Christian faith. Given a deep and balanced faith in the essentials of the Christian evangel there must always be an extensive common ground between Christians of widely differing cultures and temperaments. In the Christian faith we have a touchstone by which we may test the validity of contemporary life and knowledge.

With a deep knowledge and practical experience of psychology, Dr. White has been led to a diametrically opposed interpretation of his data to the interpretation arrived at by Freud, Jung and their followers. Freud has stated clearly his final viewpoint: "The extensive realm of the supernatural is to be swept away by scientific explanation" whilst one of his followers, Miss Hinkle, avers "Man may become a self creating and self determining being." Leuba

and Jung, whilst agreeing that religion has served a useful purpose in the past, suggest that that usefulness has now been outlived.

Dr. White's paper has demonstrated the variety of deductions which may be drawn from the available data. A common mistake of much contemporary thought is to assume that the expert who collects the data is necessarily the one best fitted to draw general principles from such data. Prat has pointed this out when he says "Psychology must however content itself with the description of religious experience. It cannot pronounce on the question of its truth." In so far as it does, it is trespassing on the realms of philosophy. The distinguished work of the Freudians in many branches of psychology does not give their words more weight than that of a theologian or philosopher.

I should like to draw attention to one or two points which the paper raises. The definition which Dr. White cites for religion is sufficient for its purpose but needs amplification such as is given in Waterhouses's definition, which though not a brilliant epigram, does endeavour to take into account the data which differentiates religion from cruder forms of thought "Religion is man's attempt to supplement his felt insufficiency by allying himself with a higher being which he believes is manifest in the world and can be brought into sympathetic relation with himself, if rightly approached."

The two great facts of religious experience which Dr. White emphasises are unassailable: It is universal and it profoundly affects human life. Many vested interests have combined to assail this position. Materialism in all its manifestations, political, artistic or philosophical, has done its best to explain away the evidence, but with no lasting success. The mighty edifice of Sir James Frazer is very far from being unassailable. Many very cogent arguments are cited by E. Bevan in "Symbolism and Belief" against the materialist conception of primitive man living without religion. The earliest kings were priests, the earliest law courts were shrines, the earliest medical service was bound up with the priest and the medicine man, whilst science was the handmaid of the priestly watcher of the stars. The origin of religion is inexplicable on any other grounds than Dr. White's "It is inherent in man."

I feel that the three views which Dr. White notes as being possible explanations of the underlying bases are not intended to be exhaustive ; other views are advanced which are not relevant to scope of the present discussion. There seems to be a real need for an examination of basal tenet of Freudian view of sublimation. The doctrine of infantile sexuality in the Freudian system is by no means fully proven and it would be both interesting and helpful to hear expert opinion on this matter.

Many psychologists have suggested that religion is a sentiment compounded of awe, reverence, fear, and curiosity and there is matter for some debate over Dr. White's choice in placing religion as a primal instinct with its characteristic motivation of worship. Drovers' statement that an instinct carries at its heart a vague sense of need and a sense of worthwhileness is of interest when one applies to religion and it will readily be seen that these criteria are amply fulfilled in the case of religion.

In conclusion I should like to direct your attention to the extraordinary interest of Dr. White's discussion of the psychology of atheism and of the spiritual neuroses which have such strange outcrops in our day. Their study is worthy of the closest study by every sociologist, for in its lies the analysis of a chief ill of our present very sick civilisation.