



Foreword II in Fromm “Psychoanalysis and Religion”

Erich Fromm
(1967f-e)

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When one writes a new foreword to a book that was published sixteen years ago, the first question the author asks himself is whether he will want to correct the text in any essential points that he now considers to be erroneous. Since, during these years, my ideas have been constantly changing and, as I hope, developing, I was quite prepared in rereading the book to find a number of statements I might like to change. To my surprise I found that I felt no need for changes in essential points and have no objection to having the book reprinted again as it stands.

The next question an author would ask himself is whether he should expand on what he wrote many years earlier. The answer to this question is definitely in the affirmative. I stressed in the text the importance of differentiating between the religious thought concept and the human experience behind it. But I did not go far enough in describing what it is that could be called „religious experience,“ regardless of what the thought concept may be. If I were to write the book today I would expand the chapter on „Some Types of Religious Experience.“ This is not the place to do so, but there is one point I want to mention: for the religious person, whether he is a „believer“ or not, life is a problem; the fact of having been born raises a {VII} question that man must answer. The most important task of his life, then, is to find an answer to this question; not an answer in thought only, but an answer in his whole being, in his way of living. For this person life is not something „given“ which requires no other meaning than to eat and drink, survive, have pleasure, and take part in events in accordance to one’s ethical norms. He senses the profound existential dichotomies that beset life: that between being free yet determined; separate yet united; filled with knowledge-yet profoundly ignorant. He suffers from his feeling of separateness. His activity is directed toward finding the optimal solution to these contradictions, while at the same time he knows that there is no solution; and there is no goal in life that is not subordinated to this attempt. Here lies, in fact, the difference between the hedonistic and the ethical man on the one hand, and the „religious“ man on the other.

Rather than to yield to the temptation to continue to present thoughts about the nature of religious experience which, even if correct, must necessarily be insufficient in this context, I would point to a phenomenon which seems to make this problem particularly relevant in our time. The phenomenon I refer to is the humanist renaissance that is taking place within the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches. This move-



ment, greatly stimulated by Pope John XXIII, has led to a new dialogue, not only between Catholics {VIII} and Protestants but also between theistic and nontheistic humanists. This dialogue does not proceed on the basis that its participants should relinquish their respective theistic or nontheistic thought concepts. But it implies that those involved in the dialogue must recognize that, beyond what man consciously thinks, there exists another dimension that of what he feels. This inner experience is hardly expressible in words, yet those who share the experience know that what they have in common is more than that which divides them because of differences in thought concepts.

The names of Teilhard de Chardin, Hans Küng, and Karl Rahner are only a few of those who are representative of this developing humanism. The same development has occurred within Protestantism in an even more radical form. The position I refer to has become well known in recent years under the concept of „Godless Christianity.“ Dietrich Bonhoefer, Karl Bultmann, and, in a less radical sense, Paul Tillich are representative names for this Protestant radical humanism.

Perhaps nothing could express the spirit of this type of humanism better than a sentence by Abbé Pire: „What matters is not the difference between believers and unbelievers, but between those who care and those who do not care.“

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Erich Fromm