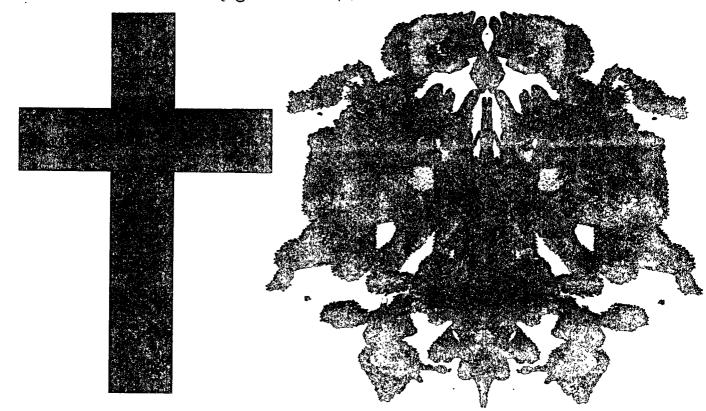
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WHAT IS THE CHURCH TO MAKE OF PSYCHOLOGY?

by John E. Benson*

A young man once came to my office all tied up in knots. Emotional problems had begun to affect his schoolwork and his marriage. He assumed I would be able to help since I was both a pastor and a college religion teacher.

Immediately feelings of uneasiness came over me. What was I to do? I had had no C.P.E. (Clinical Pastoral Education), let alone formal psychiatric or psychological training: nothing but a lot of theory, most of it in theology and philosophy. I remember wondering whether I should assume the role of "pastor," or "teacher" or just "friend" in this situation. And if a pastor, what exactly should I do? Become his confessor? pray with him? or just be an attentive listener?

I have a feeling this is a rather common occurence these days, not only in the religion teacher's office, but in the local congregation. We seem to be not at all clear about the relation between "soul care" and psychological counselling. In a recent article in *The National Observer*, Michael T. Malloy comments on what he feels is the current relation between the

psychological and religious establishments in this country. He concludes that, more and more, religion is turning over its role as moral leader and spiritual guide to the psychological counselling profession. The public today hears a great deal more about human behavior—not only what it is, but what it should be—from psychiatrists than from clergymen.

Several sorts of responses have been made by the church to this new institution of healing.² Some have chosen to ignore it altogether, or to treat it like an enemy. These are for the most part conservatives. Others have gone altogether in the opposite direction and have allowed their whole concept of ministry to turn in the direc-

- 1. Michael T. Malloy, "The National Observer, May 26, 1973, pp. 1 ff.
- 2. By this phrase and by the term "psychology" in this article, I shall mean all those professional counsellors in this country who are either doing research in, or are engaged in therapeutic activities having to do with man's mental health. For purposes of discussion I have lumped together psychoanalysts (Freudian and Jungian), Adlerians, Behaviorists, Gestaltists, and all the contemporary variations and blends of these, such as T.A., "Gestalt," "Primal Scream," etc. . As the argument unfolds it will become clear why this can be done.

^{*}Associate Professor of Religion, Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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tion of helping people with emotional problems. The latter may do a great deal of personal counselling, or they may interpret their preaching as a kind of emotional "preventative medicine." Malloy feels it significant the large number of clergymen who have simply left the ministry to enter fulltime counselling or research in the psychological field.3 Most of us, however, seem to stand somewhere between these two extremes. We outfit our seminarians with psychology courses or give them pastoral counselling internships at local mental institutions. Some of our larger parishes hire fulltime psychologists. Or we encourage our pastors to read as much psychology as they can, and, if possible, to get some C.P.E. We seem to have made our peace with psychology.

Malloy's article has made we wonder about all this, however. Is it possible that the parish pastor has become more convinced of the value of his counselling than of his priestly "religious" acts such as leading worship services, administering the sacraments, preaching, and performing ministerial acts? Are there those who consider these priestly functions worthless except as they lead to further counselling situations? I put my opinions in the form of questions because I do not know exactly how widespread these attitudes are. But I know there is enough of it going on to cause alarm.

In this paper I am going to argue that psychology can hurt us if we don't watch out. What we need to do first is to separate psychology and religion better than in the past. Then we will be able to bring them together again in a more fruitful dialectic. It will be argued here that the priestly and prophetic functions of the ministry need to be separated from "counselling." An imaginative recitation of the Christian story, "the Gospel," needs to be heard again from pulpits, purged of psychological jargon. And a new birth of respect for ritual performance needs to be effected. Our peculiar way or reading Bonhoeffer has led us astray. We need to learn afresh how to cut the "religious" functions of the church loose from false entanglements, allowing it once again to be itself, proudly expressing its own inner life. I.

The theoretical justification for separating psychology and religion comes from recent studies in the nature of language. For some time now, philosophy of language6 and hermeneutics have been showing us that religious statements do not answer to the demands made by other descriptive or prescriptive sorts of statements. They are more "expressive" than denotative, more emotive and aesthetic than practical. A unique kind of logic holds in myth and ritual too.7 Religious expression objectifies a level of consciousness quite different from that objectified by scientific factual expression; it is more fundamental and more comprehensive; and it comes to us in the form of dramatic ritual and myth.8

About ten years ago I first discovered what language studies can do for understanding the relation between religion and psychology. I was assigned a course entitled, "The Christian View of Man." It was designed to bring Christian theological anthropology into dialogue with various other contemporary views of man: psychological, sociological, political, biological, and literary.

Gradually my initial enthusiasm for the course turned into bewilderment, however. Something refused to jell. We studied all these other views of man, but somehow the relevance of the "Christian" view always eluded us. I'm somewhat embarrassed to admit it now, but many students seem to have left the course more enthusiastic about Erich Fromm's The Heart of Man,9 or B. F. Skinner's Walden II,10 than either Luther's or Augustine's anthropological writings. We all admired the contemporary theologians who have written on the modern secular views of man: Martin Buber,11 Reinhold

The number of former clergymen working with "Transactional Analysis" and "Gestalt Therapy" are especially striking in this regard.

^{4.} The precise meaning we intend by this term will be explained later in the body of the paper.

^{5.} By "religious" here—and throughout the paper—we mean those activities peculiar to the church over against the other institutions of society. The main argument of the paper will try to clarify this, too.

^{6.} Ian T. Ramsey, Religious Language, (London: SCM Press, 1957); Kent Bendall and Frederick Ferre, Exploring the Logic of Faith: A Dialogue on the Relation of Modern Philosophy to Christian Faith (N.Y.: Association Press, 1962); Frederick Ferre, Language, Logic and God. (N.Y.: Harper, 1969, 1961); Anthony Flew and Alasdair Macintyre, eds., New Essays in Philosophical Theology. (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1955); and others.

^{7.} Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. II: Myth (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1961, 1953).

^{8.} Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1967).

^{9.} New York: Harper & Row, 1964.

^{10.} New York: Macmillan, 1948.

^{11.} I and Thou (N.Y.: Scribner's, 1958); Between Man and Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955, 1947).



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Niebuhr, 12 Wolfhart Pannenberg, 13 and W. Norman Pittenger. 14 But for most of us the excitement seems to have been generated more by the way these men expounded and evaluated the non-Christian view of man than by the way they clarified the "Christian" view.

To be more precise: I had always worked with a "models" approach to human nature. When dealing with a thinker we tried to puzzle out how he "pictured" man. What metaphors does he select, and what work do they do for him? This helps locate the thinker's interests and his particular point of view.

I assumed a phenomenological methodology, more or less, in my aproach. By this I mean the commitment to withhold all pre-judgment about the nature of man, letting as many particular views as possible simply have their say in the hopes that the "essence" of man will slowly take shape before one's eyes. In studying the nature of man, therefore, we considered many models of human nature, as far as possible without bias. There is no need to fear "reductionism" using this method, i.e., the error of trying to squeeze the object into just one mould. All models of human nature are necessarily reductive, but this is good because we understand that this is the way consciousness builds for itself an objective "world."

Several examples may illustrate this procedure. It is not necessary, for example, to "disprove" B. F. Skinner's electronic, reflex-arc model of man simply because it does away with human freedom and responsibility. Human nature has involuntary aspects too, and therefore models appropriate to such aspects of behavior seem justified. They will be different, of course, from those models which articulate man's "higher" functions, 16 and the latter

12. The Nature and Destiny of Man (N.Y.: Scribner's, 1949, 1941); The Self and the Dramas of History (N.Y.: Scribner's, 1955).

13. Wolfhart Pannenberg, What is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

14. The Christian Understanding of Man (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964.)

15. Michael Polanyi, in his books, The Study of Man (Chicago University Press, 1959) and Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy (N.Y.: Harper, 1964, 1958), showed me how behavioristic models fit in. They deal with a "lower" level of organization in man when compared with that found in man's moral and spiritual universe; the latter is a higher level "Gestalt" never reduceable to the lower, though founded upon it.

16. The "philosophy of organism" presupposed here is discussed in Paul Weiss, Nature and Man (Carbondale, III.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965, 1947); also Hans Jonas, "Spinoza and the Theory of

should not be reduced completely to such deterministic models the way Skinner himself often does. Nietzsche's view of man as primarily "will-to-power" and Darwin's picture of man the animal struggling for survival can also be accepted for what they have to offer. They express the interests of the moralist and the biologist, respectively. Though they too are not the whole of man, at least their models describe certain important aspects which should not be ignored. This is also the case with Freud and psychoanalysis. Here we have a model of human nature constructed by a therapist whose model of the soul resembles that of the 19th Century surgeon who used to cut people open to "bleed out" the poisons. Here the doctor tries to "cut" the inhibitions of the emotionally ill so that all the stopped-up psychic poisons can flow out freely.

With this "models" approach to human nature, then, our theological anthropology course considered all these views of human nature as partly valid, but none as totally exhaustive of the object.

But just at this point our problem arose. Is the "Christian view of man" a "model"? Is it the same sort of thing as these other views? Or is it somehow unique?

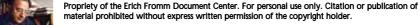
Here is where philosophy of language came in to help, especially Paul Ricoeur's Symbolism of Evil. 18 What I learned was that all cognitive approaches to man are not on the same level. Some have greater "compactness" and are therefore wider in reach and more pregnant with meanings. Such are religious views of man. Other mental constructs (such as the psychological) differentiate more; they produce clarity and explicitness. But for this reason they also sacrifice breadth. The rule seems to be this: the more encompassing a construct of human nature is, the less explicit; and the more explicit it is, the more danger it runs of leaving something out. I then decided not to speak of a "Christian model" of human nature. Some other term was needed.

Let me explain why I decided on "story." Following Ricoeur, we can say first that the religious construct of human nature assumes the form of significant action, the rite, plus that of

Organism," in S. F. Spicker, ed., *The Philosophy of the Body* (Chicago: Quandrangle Press, 1970), pp. 50-69.

^{17.} Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Geneology of Morals*, transl. Francis Golffing, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956.)

^{18.} What I found here in Ricoeur brought together my prior study of Ernst Cassirer, Michael Polanyi, and the Linguistic Analysts.



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imaginative stories of the gods, the myth.¹⁹ It is not possible to say whether one of these developed historically out of the other because we always find them together. But logically speaking ritual is primary, Ricoeur says, and myth secondary. Myth tries to raise the performative (rite) to the more explicit level of speech by "interpreting" it; otherwise, the rites remain significant, but mute.

The relation between religious and scientific constructs of human nature can be clarified further by observing a second characteristic of the religious story. As Ricoeur puts it, "the myth gives rise to thought."20 Just as ritual has a drive within it to change from the compact to the more differentiated, from the implicit to the explicit, so myth presses out of itself towards a second level interpretation Ricoeur calls "gnosis." I take this to mean, for example, that reciting the myth will continually suggest to me new perspectives of an explicit sort on the nature of man. So that the Christian "myth" (I prefer to call the Christian use of myth "sacred history" or "sacred story") can inspire a number of different "models" of human nature, none of which totally exhausts the original mythical construct. And psychology is one of the disciplines which constructs such models. Philosophy and the other sciences do too, as does ethics. But all these stand on a different level from that of the Christian story. They are more explicit and clear, but they are also more reductive. They are second-level, while the Christian story is first-level.

Permit an analogy. In my grandmother's attic used to be an old trunk. It was jam-packed full of fascinating things of all sorts. As children we would go exploring in that trunk, pulling out one treasure after another. Religion, that is, ritual and myth, are like a bottomless trunk. The Christian story can continually give rise to psychological constructs of human na-

ture without itself ever being exhausted by such models.

Psychology is "thought" about man for the purpose of healing, education, and other ends. Psychologists have unfortunately not always been clear about their relation to religion, and for this reason they have tended to depreciate ritual and myth as mere infantile fixations, throwing them out completely. Psychology correctly understands itself to "go beyond" religion. But it has erred in thinking that it can replace the symbolic performatives and stories of religious imagination. It has now become clear that psychology needs to outgrow its anticlerical bias and get back into a listening posture over against religion.²¹

II.

The anti-religion bias of psychologists, however, is not our real concern here. What we want to speak to is the current widespread lack of self-confidence and mission in religious institutions over against psychology. I think we can do this by taking three fairly concrete situations in the parish which seem to be particularly threatened by psychology: the pulpit, the pastor's study, and the church lounge. Our purpose will be to explore the implications of the theory just set out above.

A.

Let us begin by being somewhat argumentative: the Church has no more business doing psychological counselling from the pulpit than it does engaging in social welfare or political activities from there.

I would, of course, be the first to insist that political and social matters should be dealt with in the church: in the local parish as well as on the denominational level. And the pulpit could well be a starting point for this. But the

^{19.} We are using the term "myth" here in a broad, generic sense, without raising the question of whether there is "myth" in the Bible or not. By "Christian story" and "Gospel" I mean not only the content of the Christian message, but also its form, which is a particular hybrid of Ancient Near Eastern myth and narrative history. It is not really "myth," but it has the structure of the Seasonal Pattern of the Ancient Near East, which becomes the framework inside which the Bible remembers noteworthy events from the past. I have in mind here the thought of Von Rad and also Theodore H. Gaster's Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near Sast, Second revised edition, (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1961). There is no opportunity to go into this further here.

^{20.} Op. cit., pp. 347-57.

^{21.} Carl Jung, of course, has always argued this. But he never developed a proper methodology for distinguishing and relating his own religious and psychiatric work. Karl Menninger, Whatever Became of Sin? (Hawthorne Books, 1973), and O. Hobart Mourer, The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion (Van Nostrand), seem to be saying this too, although one needs to be careful about applying what they say—as the argument of this paper seeks to show. Freud himself, of course, allowed religion, both biblical and Greek, to influence the shaping of his thought, e.g., the "Oedipus" complex.



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point of this statement is not that these two activities should be excluded from the church's preaching ministry. It is that one should not be given special privileges over the other.

There seems to be a tendency these days to consider the pulpit a place for "personal counselling" on a mass scale, while talk about politics and social problems is "out of place" in church. This objection has point. Any minister will bring his own political biases into the pulpit, and this might tend to disrupt the congregation. It also might suggest (and this is the weightiest objection of all) that God is on one side of an issue and not the other. If politics is brought into the church, then some sort of dialogue is needed between the several positions and viewpoints bearing on a given issue. Whether such dialogue should be staged in the pulpit too, or whether it should be held only in the church basement or in the educational unit, cannot be decided here. I have no convictions on that matter. But what I am contending is that on psychological counselling matters too, then, the Minister should not be expected to have the one and only word, but that there should be dialogue between various psychological views. If political and social issues are discussed in the pulpit, only then should psychological matters be discussed there. If political and social issues are excluded from the pulpit, then psychological matters should be excluded. Psychological counselling and discussion of political-social matters are the same kind of thing. They are on a secondary level as far as articulation is concerned, while ritual performance and recitation of the sacred story are on a primary level.

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There is one example of this running together of pulpit and psychological counselling, to the disregard of the social and political dimension that comes to mind. It is Bill Gothard, Jr., and his immensely popular "Institutes in Basic Youth Conflicts."

Gothard is an evangelical/fundamentalist layman from Oak Brook, Illinois, a former youth worker, who has been in recent years drawing capacity crowds of from 10,000 to 18,000 daily for his intensive 32-hour week-long "seminars" in "A New approach to Life."22

This is not the place for a point-by-point analysis of content. Gothard takes the position that all secular psychology is off-limits to the Christian because it is part of "the world," and

that God has revealed to us in the Bible alone all the essential "Principles" we need in order to construct a secure and reasonable, godly way of life. It might be instructive, therefore, to analyze Gothard's teachings to see just how much of Victorian morality and contemporary conservative political-social ideology he has read into the Bible and how much he has let the Gospel speak out. I think on some points he would come out rather high; I like much of what he says. But on other points I have serious disagreements.*

The reason for mentioning Gothard here, however, is to illustrate what is being argued about the relation between religion and psychology. Here we were, 18,000 people jammed into the St. Paul Civic Center—a veritable sea of faces—being lectured in practical psychology. What kind of context was this, and what was it "saying" to those in attendance? We opened and closed every meeting with prayer, Gothard leading; and on occasion Gospel songs were sung. When we "enrolled" we were given the name of a former Seminar member who had promised to pray for us. It was quite clear to me, then, lectern and overhead projector notwithstanding, that these were really religious meeting. I was reminded of a Billy Graham evangelistic crusade.

Now, the effect of this setting is what interests me most here. It placed the authority of the Church, more particularly of the pulpit, directly behind what this one man thought about the Christian life. He said many fine things (his insights into the book of Proverbs were particularly astute!), but much of what he said was questionable in the light of what we have learned today from contemporary psychology. If you would ask most of the attenders of these Seminars what they think of this absence of dialogue with secular psychology, however, I am quite sure they would respond that, after all, Gothard gets his ideas "right out of the

^{22.} This title comes from the cover of the *Institute* loose-leaf notebook, which is available only to those enrolling in the Seminar. I attended the St. Paul meeting in October, 1973.

^{*}For example, his "chain-of-command" concept. I was reminded of the Lutheran doctrine of "the Orders of But Gothard interpreted his chain-of-command to mean that there is only one way for subordinates to deal with an unjust superior. Rebellion and revolution are never appropriate. And this extends to all institutions of society including husband-wife relationships. One must submit to the superior's authority no matter what. There is often much truth in this, but it is too one-sided. Even on purely biblical grounds it is questionable. Goddard lives too much in the wisdom/priestly side of the Old Testament tradition and not enough in the prophetic/apocalyptic side. Nietzsche and Marx might as well have never lived. There is no appreciation here of the radical nature of evil and of the tragic element in history.



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Bible," while these other psychologists "just use man's thinking."

I think this last response proves my point. This is why it's so dangerous to do pastoral counselling from the pulpit. It's just like preaching on political topics. The preaching format does double mischief: first, it suggests to people's minds that the Gospel story results in just this one way of living, and secondly, it tends to downgrade other wisdom from secular psychology as "just man's opinion."

Returning now to our main discussion: we were saying that the pulpit needs to be refashioned as a place different from the lectern of the popular psychologist or the platform of the politician. On occasion the preacher might deal with political or psychological issues (although how you do this so that all sides, or at least more than one gets heard, I'm not sure). But the most important need of our time is to find a way for making the separation clear.

We need to recapture the "story" structure in our preaching. We need to get back to a more fundamental level where the imagination of the preacher opens itself to the Gospel story and leads the congregation, perhaps through rejuvenated ritual, music and dance, as well as through myth and story, to a new way of dwelling within the wellspring of our Faith. The pulpit, after all, is a spot within the "holy place" set aside for worship. What Christians do at a certain point in their service is to recite the "story" of God's mighty acts on their behalf. Like a poem or drama, this Gospel story is not something to be analyzed to death by dissecting only its particulars. It is instead something to be retold whole, in different settings, letting the artistic imagination create new stories with structures paralleling the original paradigm. The minister may well be a psychological practitioner too, but let him first and foremost be an artist—an inspired man!

B.

The second and third areas of parish life that need to be reconsidered are the pastor's study and the church lounge. In the first the pastor meets with individuals for counselling and conversation, and in the second with small groups. Here again we make a similar suggestion. We need to recover a clearer understanding of "soul care" by separating it from psychological counselling. And in small group work we should not be more concerned with matters

of emotional adjustment and health than with social and political justice concerns.

How can we say that there is something more "Christian" about helping individuals who are disturbed emotionally than helping those in trouble with the law, or destitute, or crushed by an unjust social situation? Isn't it wrong for a pastor to think of himself as fulfilling the essence of his pastoral vocation when he is counselling an emotional problem, but not to think that way when engaged in political activity, insofar as this might enter his study? One would seem to be no more essentially "pastoral" than the other.

Small groups in the church are exactly the same. There might well be a "T. A." (Transactional Analysis)23 therapy group meeting in the church lounge, just as there might well be "Gestalt" groups,24 "Primal Therapy" groups,25 or other assorted Freudians, Jungians or Adlerians. It is on psychological grounds that we will decide which of these to encourage and which to discourage. But we should get over the idea that somehow therapy groups, being for many disturbed individuals (and perhaps for the pastor's sense of vocation) "more relevant," or "more practical" than anything else in church, are somehow "more Christian" than these other things. We must simply get over the idea that there is a "Christian psychology." There are only Christians who engage in psychology. Why, for example, do we seem to be currently deluged with T.A. groups in our churches, but not with other political and social action groups? I think this is a serious accusation.

But again: as in our discussion of the pulpit, might we not ask also here whether there might be specifically "religious" activities that could be returned to the pastor's study and to the small group meeting room? I think this too is worth considering. Just as we have suggested that more attention be paid to ritual and storytelling in the pulpit, could we wish for a rebirth of peculiarly religious, first level speaking in these other places too?

What would this look like in the pastor's study? Say a disturbed soul comes in to talk. What should the pastor do? Become a confessor? pray with him? or give psychological coun-

- 23. See the best seller, Thomas A. Harris, I'm OK—You're OK (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1967); also Eric Berne, Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy (N.Y.: Grove Press, Inc., 1961).
- 24. See Joen Fagan and Irma Lee Shepherd, What Is Gestalt Therapy? (N.Y.: Harper Perennial Library, 1970)
- 25. See Arthur Janov, The Primal Scream: Primal Therapy: The Cure for Neurosis. (N.Y.: Delta, 1970).



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selling? Might it not be a mistake, even a failure of one's pastoral vocation, not to bring that person, somehow, through language, into the context of the Christian story?

The problem is that many of us have been too scandalized by the pietists. They and the evangelicals around us have so trivialized Christian speech that we go to the opposite extreme and never use it at all. It is hard to distinguish our talk from that of any other totally secularized men, except at official functions where we can't escape it.

But with the help of phenomenology of religion²⁶ and other cross-cultural studies of myth and ritual,27 why could we not be a bit imaginative and develop our own, authentic kind of "God-talk"? Take, for example, this man who comes into his pastor's office. Why not, somewhere in the conversation, without forcing it or being unnatural, point out to him that the very fact that he has come to the church building seeking help—to a "holy place"—may be significant. He might be asked whether he sees any deeper symbolic meaning for him in this act of coming. Once having set the level of conversation in these more symbolic terms, the conversation might then very spontaneously develop into a kind of "communion of saints" experience that the psychological counsellor will never know. Could it be that this is one of the chief differences between "soul care" and psychological

counselling, that it uses a totally different, Gospel story language?

The same might be said of small groups in the church. The conventicles of Seventeenth Century Pietism met in homes and shared Christian experiences in terms of this Gospel story. Today we usually prefer the latest psychological jargon. T.A. now seems to be "in," with its "parent," "child," "adult," and its "stroking" language. All of this is no doubt fine in its place. But I wonder whether these same people might not profit also from communicating with one another using the first level language of the Gospel story? Would small groups feel any more awkward using this "pious" language than they feel, say, when they first use the affectatious phraseology of T.A.? I doubt it.

Let us now try to summarize. We have argued that a much clearer separation needs to be made today between psychology and religion. and that recent philosophy of language suggests how this can be done. The pulpit, the pastor's study, and the small-group room need to be reinfused with the peculiarly "religious" articulation of recital and ritual performance. Only after this unique dimension of the Church has been regained will we have the proper foundation for moving into these other areas, counselling and political-social action. As we move into politics and personal counselling, however, we should watch not to give more attention to the counselling side. Finally, the result of this separation can only mean good for psychology too. Only when these practical areas have been cut loose from all religious sanctions and prohibitions will they become truly free to be themselves.

^{26.} I have in mind here the works of Mircea Eliade, G. van der Leeuw, and W. Brede Kristensen.

^{27.} Here I have in mind Joseph Campbell's various writings, such as The Masks of God, 4 vols. (N.Y.: Viking Press, 1959-68); also The Hero With a Thousand Faces (N.Y.: World, 1969, 1949).



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by Bob Friederichsen, Augsburg College Minneapolis, Minn.