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and death are the critical elements that collectively identify and direct the self's search for authentic well-being and worth.

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Personality Adjustment and Religious Growth

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The process of becoming

The term "personality adjustment" is used to describe personal adequacy, self-fulfillment, and psychological maturity. Yet the term is one-sided, since it implies the individual's "coming to terms" with society, but not his active involvement. Does a well-adjusted person simply match his behavior with the norms of appropriateness set up within his culture? Does it follow that an individual is maladjusted when he disregards societal norms?

Objective observation of human behavior indicates what a person *does*, but not what he *is*. Diagnosis of personality adjustment merely by external criteria is misleading. A purely normative adjustment to society's expectations may be unhealthy, even degrading. Behavior patterns set forth as desirable by totalitarian governments are an example of such growth-inhibiting norms. Besides that, every man has a unique personality with particular characteristics and needs that should be considered.

Because of these considerations, contemporary psychology emphasizes the need for deeper insight into the individual's "phenomenal field." The internal frame of reference of the individual involved provides the clue. As Combs and Snygg indicate, a well-adjusted person perceives himself as striving toward self-fulfillment.¹ His goal is not conformity, but personal adequacy. If he appears socially adjusted, his attitude toward society is an outgrowth of the process toward self-enhancement from within.



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The dynamics of the process. Psychoanalytic determinism saw man primarily as a product of his environment. Contemporary personality theories are largely reversing this trend. The individual's role is not merely re-active, but also active. Man is influenced from the outside, but he organizes and controls his environment as well.

Rogers calls this dynamic interaction of the free behavior with his environment "existential living,"² while Combs and Snygg perceive the process in terms of the phenomenal field and man's self-concept: "Without a degree of fluidity, the individual would be unable to adjust to the changing circumstances in which he must live his life and find need-satisfaction."³ Man does not stand still. His existence is a constant process of becoming.

The dynamics of psychological growth find parallels in man's religious development. Aquinas interpreted these processes in terms of his "potency-act" theory.⁴ A modern theologian, Monden, echoes this age-old conviction:

Moral growth does not occur at the pace of technical development, in which an effort is made to reduce the time element as far as possible or even eliminate it altogether, but according to the rhythm of organic growth, slowly and gradually.⁵

In the view of Rogers, the process of growth is often painful.⁶ Gleason supports this view, and adds from his theological frame of reference that "... suffering is absent from almost no period of truly human growth. To cast off old attitudes and remake one's self is a painful, at times an agonizing experience. . . ."⁷

Psychology and religion move in the same general direction toward the individual's self-fulfillment, but they differ in motivation and goal-setting. Psychology perceives man in his natural milieu; theology views him in his relationship with God. Man is to exist fully in order to implement the plan of his Creator. Self-fulfillment is a goal that had been set for man by God's creative design.

Man and the world. Platonic and Manichaean influences within Christian theology obscured for too long the positive orientation of religious growth. Believers were taught that their growth to religious perfection depended on

their renouncing "the world." This is the predominant thesis of many religious classics, for instance *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis.⁸

The disdain for material things and for the principle of need-satisfaction persisted in spite of formal condemnations of Manichaeism in the Christian community. Occasional attempts were made by theologians to form a more positive attitude toward the body and the material world. But puritanical tendencies usually gained the upper hand.

In recent years several articulate theologians have attacked the problem with new vigor, among them Teilhard de Chardin. Francouer presents Teilhard's basic position as follows:

To remedy this un-Christian dualism, this schizophrenic dichotomy, which sees the spirit as good and matter as evil, was one of Teilhard's primary preoccupations. . . . First of all, in any material effort or accomplishment, a struggle is implied, a victory over inertia and laziness. . . . Besides this, in each piece of truth, beauty, knowledge or good, there is hidden the necessity and compulsion for a transcendence and passing beyond. "Nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see."⁹

Only in this joyful acceptance of all reality, including its secular sector, can a religious person find both psychological maturity and religious perfection.

Psychological views

The problem of adjustment and personal adequacy is psychologically perceived from different points of view. Some of the theoretical models are now briefly discussed.

The perceptual view. Combs and Snygg emphasize the internal frame of reference in defining personal adequacy. An adequate person views himself in positive terms. He accepts his assets and liabilities. Combs and Snygg state: "The admission of the existence of unflattering truth about self is often the first step toward more effective behavior."¹⁰ In spite of imperfections, the well-adjusted person recognizes his worth and integrity.



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Adequate people feel free. They feel no need to defend themselves against attacks from the outside. Such attacks are perceived as challenges, while security comes from within. Independent behavior is typical of personal adequacy. So is the generous acceptance of others with all their human characteristics. This spirit of freedom is strongly emphasized by Combs and Snygg:

One outgrowth of the combination of acceptance and identification in adequate personalities is a greater responsibility and humility where others are concerned. With less pressing need for self-aggrandizement they can be content with secondary roles.¹¹

Openness to reality produces more efficient behavior. Being less self-centered, adequate people can afford to be genuinely interested in their work and in social issues. They have “the feel” of reality and are optimistic about their chances in tackling problems. They are nonrigid, fluid, yet consistent. Since they perceive unusual relationships that other people miss, adequate persons develop a deeper sensitivity and genuine interest, and become creative in the true sense of the word.

Linked with personal adequacy are ethical values that Combs and Snygg equate with “. . . love, respect, and the dignity and integrity of man . . .” and that they describe as “. . . absolute essentials to the very existence of life.”¹²

The theory of personal adequacy as proposed by Combs and Snygg is supported by Carl Rogers.¹³

Maslow's view. Abraham Maslow is well known for his theory of human needs, which he structures according to a definite hierarchy.¹⁴ However, his scientific accomplishment reaches beyond this point. He proposes a fresh view on personality adjustment through his theory of “B-cognition” (cognition of being) and of “peak experiences” that accompany self-actualization.

Maslow's theory borders on psychological mysticism. Man is seen as merging with the fullness of reality, transcending his individual world of need-satisfaction. A vaguely described area of “productiveness, autonomy and self-realization” opens up to him. Maslow explains:

My findings indicate that in the normal perceptions of self-actualizing people and in the more occasional peak experiences of average people, *perception can be relatively ego-transcending, self-forgetful, egoless.* It is only in this existential sweep that man is more integrated, more open to experience, more spontaneous, more creative, more independent on his lower needs and on his environment.¹⁵

Marcel's view. Gabriel Marcel's philosophy proposes a parallel idea of man's participation in being. The individual is part of material reality (“incarnate mode of existence”) and of human society. Yet his presence is meaningless unless he relates to others in a truly human way. This happens when he freely chooses to become “available.” The term implies openness, readiness to respond, even to surrender. Man thus becomes an authentic person and is able to transform his “community” into a “communion.”

An authentic person approaches his fellow-men through the “I-thou” relationships. Breaking through his selfish shell, he opens himself to the “thou” of his fellow-man. Genuine existence of a human being involves “being with others.” In the “I-thou” relationship man offers himself to others with friendship and sympathy and becomes co-present to them, no matter how far away they may be physically. He creates an atmosphere of freedom.

In Marcel's view, the distinction between intelligence and love melts away in persons who relate on the “I-thou” level:

Between love and intelligence, there can be no real divorce. Such a divorce is apparently consummated only when intelligence is degraded, or if I may be allowed the expression, becomes merely cerebral; and, of course, when love reduces itself to mere carnal appetite. But this we must assert, and as forcibly as possible; where love on one side, where intelligence on the other, reach their highest expression, they cannot fail to meet.¹⁶

Marcel indicates that the “I-thou” relationships are marked by fidelity to one's own self and to the other person's “thou.” Fidelity is closely linked with hope and love. The three concepts have ontological significance. They are related to the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Marcel, the be-



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liever, spells out the rationale of his unitary view: Fidelity to one's fellow-man is based on hope in the absolute "Thou" that is God.

Fromm's view. Erich Fromm sees true self-enhancement in balancing the human need for love and belonging with the need for individuation and independence. The central theme of Fromm's theory is man's capacity for love:

Whatever complaints the neurotic patient may have, whatever symptoms he may present are rooted in his inability to love. . . . Analytic therapy is essentially an attempt to help the patient gain or regain his capacity for love. If this aim is not fulfilled nothing but surface changes can be accomplished.¹⁷

Fromm devoted an entire book to the topic of love, which, in his view, produces balance, maturity, responsibility, and a productive way of life:

In contrast to symbiotic union, mature love is union under the condition of preserving one's integrity, one's individuality. Love is an active power in man; a power which breaks through the walls which separate man from his fellow men, which unites him with others; love makes him overcome the sense of isolation and separateness, yet it permits him to be himself, to retain his integrity.¹⁸

Analytic views. In this context, other surprising parallels emerge. Even the biologically-oriented Sigmund Freud emphasizes the movement away from self-centeredness as the basis of maturation and psychological growth. In his view, there are two essential marks of maturity: the ability to love and the ability to work.¹⁹

Jung, too, points out the need of the mature man to transcend himself and to reach out beyond. Jacobi paraphrases Jung's position as follows: "Exclusive self-reliance makes for spiritual pride, sterile brooding, and isolation within one's own ego."²⁰ Jung postulates "the archetype of the God-image," which helps the individual reach out for the ultimate peak of transcendence.

Summary of the psychological views. The foregoing investigation has pointed out certain variables that are repeatedly linked with personality adjustment. It is fair to conclude that the process of growth toward adjustment and matur-

ity involves: 1) *self-enhancement*, 2) *in freedom*, 3) *through positive acceptance of self and others*, 4) *by transcending self-centeredness through love*, 5) *and made evident through creative work*. We ask now whether these five characteristics can also be found in the process of religious growth.

Religious views

Judaco-Christian theology deals with God's revelation. Building on revealed premises, it forms theological conclusions that cover every important area of life, including man's behavior. The latter is systematically investigated by moral theology. Criteria of morality are *objective*, such as the natural law summarily contained in the Ten Commandments, and *subjective*, such as the unimpaired reasoning power and the free will of the behavior.

Moral self-enhancement. The basis of religious morality is man's decision to structure his behavior according to God's law as it is inherent in the nature of reality. It is the index of direction toward human self-development. This is the man-centered level of morality, which aims at the establishment of "authentic humanity" in every individual. Sin is considered an offense of God, since it nullifies God's creative design for man's growth. Monden suggests that sin is for man a self-inflicted wound, a matter of growing in the wrong direction, an opportunity willfully spurned, a chance for progress turned into regression.²¹

When we read the stark, negative language of the Ten Commandments, we may have difficulties in relating God's moral code to positive self-enhancement. However, "Thou shalt not kill" can be expressed equally well as "You shall protect and maintain life." By creating an atmosphere of mutual respect among men, the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2-17) enhance personal growth in a society that accepts them. Conversely, a society typified by disrespect for the individual blocks both personal growth and community life. In this context, the Ten Commandments reveal their positive social character.

Freedom of option. The morality of any action is directly linked to the free-



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dom of choice of the individual. If freedom is lessened, the gravity of a transgression is lessened as well. By the same token, a positive moral act is valuable only insofar as it is done in freedom. Recent studies emphasize the need of freedom in any religious commitment that is contrasted by the compulsive over-determination of the immature.²² An inhibited individual may have committed little moral evil, but his life may also have been barren of positive moral accomplishments.

In certain cases, when repressed freedom is falsely equated with religious perfection, the individual in search for free self-expression may temporarily reject his faith. Such a "rejection of faith" would seem to fit the description of Rahner, who states:

... such an opposition to God, although objectively wrong, may nevertheless not be existentially culpable (i.e., in the very core of the person), because in such a case God is present in the objective concept but not with the real, fundamental grasp (Zugriff) which occurs in the basic act of freedom.²³

Acceptance of self and others. Judaeo-Christian theology always accepted man's existence in the world as God's creative design. The theological acceptance of reality should be extended to all experiences that the individual has through his intellect and sense perception. Man's experiences must be spontaneous if they are to be genuine. Spontaneity without responsibility leads to infantile immaturity. Repressed spontaneity that denies the existence of threatening experiences leads to immaturity of the inhibited, rigid type. Both extremes block personality adjustment and religious growth.

Mature spontaneity is found in man's openness to all reality as it enters his perceptual field. However, to remain responsible and loyal to his value structure, man should be able to examine his spontaneous experiences "from a distance" and to integrate them into his personal life style. Such stock-taking requires strength, since it involves setting limits to one's plans and desires. As Tyler points out, "Depth, solidity, and individuality depend upon self-limitation."²⁴ This is the psychological meaning of religious asceticism that has been argely overlooked.

The difference between the spontaneity of the believer and of the unbeliever lies in their respective value structures. The religious person takes stock of his experiences and inclinations in the light of God's revelation, while the unbeliever uses his own criteria.

The meaning of love. In theology, the concept of love is parallel with the psychological and philosophical constructs of Fromm and Marcel, respectively. However, it contains an additional dimension. Jesus teaches the love of self and neighbor, but he also emphasizes the duty to love God above all (Matt. 22:37-40). Love anchored in God is the supreme criterion of religious perfection.

Monden considers love the stepping stone from the "moral" to the "religious" level of human behavior because "... this intimacy itself must become the only norm of the new ethical conduct of the human partner in his dialog with God."²⁵ On this "religious" level, virtue and sin gain a new dimension that transcends the meaning of an action in terms of self-enhancement. All virtues are but facets of man's loving union with God; every sin is a deliberate rejection of God's love, an act of inner hatred. The basic orientation of love or hatred is equally directed toward oneself and other people. It grows into a general framework within which the individual organizes his behavior.

Creative work. Man's basic attitude of love finds expression through creative work paired with social responsibility. William Menninger views the capacity for consistent work as the ultimate result of the maturation process.²⁶ The well-known principle of Freud characterizing a mature person by his ability to love and to work has been mentioned earlier. Freud, the agnostic, reflects almost verbatim the sixth-century philosophy of St. Benedict, who asked of his monks that they pray and work. Prayer is, of course, verbalized or conceptualized religious love. A man of religion at the dawn of the Middle Ages and a man of science at the dawn of the modern scientific era formulated identical characteristics of a well-adjusted human being.



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Summary

In a summary of the findings of this study, the following conclusions and implications emerge.

Conclusions:

1. There are striking similarities between the processes of psychological and religious growth. The psychological and theological concepts characterizing the processes are not mutually in conflict.
2. The concept of freedom of option is identical in psychology and theology.
3. The concepts of self-enhancement, acceptance, transcendence through love, and creative work differ in the two disciplines only with regard to motivation and range, but not in basic content.
4. Since their goals are not identical, psychology cannot replace religion, and vice versa.
5. Natural personality adjustment precedes religious growth at least logically if not chronologically.

Implications:

1. Although the merger of roles of a psychologist and a clergyman in one person is usually not practical, clergymen need enough training in behavioral sciences to distinguish between psychological and religious variables.
2. To help their clients effectively, psychological counselors should not discount the religious dimension of behavior.
3. The most effective strategy in assuring personality growth can be found in concrete interdisciplinary co-operation of educators, psychologists, and pastoral counselors.

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