

RELIGION

"A man's religion"

is the question
did he make to himself? How
tion and to the Deities. It is the attempt
attempt to enlarge and to complete his
personality by finding the degree to which
which he rightly belongs. In these pages I have
undertaken the task of discovering the place of
religion in the life-structure of the individual, in
giving a psychological understanding of the
functioning of the religious sentiment, and
the full course of religious development in the
normally mature and productive personality.

— GORDON ALLPORT, *Journal of
Social Relations Department, Harvard
University, and past president,
American Psychological
Association.*

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The Individual and His Religion

\$1.50

A classic study of the function of
religious sentiment in the personality
of the individual

Gordon W. Allport



THIRIFRACKS

THE INDIVIDUAL
and
HIS RELIGION

A Psychological Interpretation

by GORDON W. ALLPORT

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The Religion of Youth

The Religion of Maturity

Conscious and Unconscious Religion

The Nature of Faith

The Nature of Faithfulness

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PREFACE

EVER SO MANY PEOPLE at the present time find themselves interested in both psychology and religion. Psychology is a solidly growing science: there is hope that it may emerge as the decisive science of the twentieth century. It is also currently fashionable—perhaps too much so for its own good. While popular interest in psychology mounts, religion remains as ever one of the prominent concerns of mankind. This concern has existed since the dawn of history—probably long before—and has not been diminished by the social and moral catastrophes of the past three decades. Those who are interested in both psychological science and religion are quite naturally asking what the two subjects have to do with each other. Both seem so intimately tied to the future destiny of the human race.

As every reader knows, modern empirical psychology initially separated itself sharply from religion. "Psychology without a soul" became its badge of distinction and of pride. There was good reason. Too long had the understanding and cure of man's spirit been regarded solely as the province of religion and philosophy. In order to bring to bear the demon-

strated merit of the scientific method and inductive thinking psychologists were forced to chart a new course. Turning their backs upon the altars of religion and forsaking the philosopher's armchair they adopted the methods of the laboratory and clinic. Their reward came promptly in the accumulation of verifiable facts and in a growing area of agreement with fellow scientists. If the agreement was not perfect it at least surpassed by far the agreements previously reached by religionists and by philosophers. Since the progress and prestige of psychology depend upon its preserving a strictly scientific orientation there is no prospect—unless an authoritarian darkness should engulf the world—that the historical separation of inductive psychology from deductive ideology, whether philosophical, political, or religious, will end.

At the same time there is inherent absurdity in supposing that psychology and religion, both dealing with the outward reaching of man's mind, must be permanently and hopelessly at odds. As different as are science and art in their axioms and methods they have learned to co-operate in a thousand ways—in the production of finer dwellings, music, clothing, design. Why should not science and religion, likewise differing in axioms and method, yet co-operate in the production of an improved human character without which all other human gains are tragic loss? From many sides today comes the demand that religion and psychology busy themselves in finding a common ground for uniting their efforts for human welfare.

It is my belief that before such a harmony of effort can arise the parties of both parts will need a greater flexibility of outlook than they customarily display. A narrowly conceived science can never do business with a narrowly conceived religion. Only when both parties broaden their perspective will the way to understanding and co-operation open.

In these pages I have not concerned myself with possible programs of joined effort (excepting in Chapter Four where I examine the respective roles of psychology and religion in advancing mental health). Rather have I undertaken the task that has logical precedence, namely the task of discovering the place of religion in the life-economy of the individual. For without a psychological understanding of the nature and functioning of the religious sentiment all talk of mutual policy on the one hand, or of "opiates" and "superstition" on the other, is prejudiced or empty.

My effort, as I say, is directed solely to a portrayal of the place of subjective religion in the structure of personality whenever and wherever religion has such a place. My approach is psychological, some would call it naturalistic. I make no assumptions and no denials regarding the claims of revealed religion. Writing as a scientist I am not entitled to do either.

In defining my approach as psychological I do not mean to imply that every psychologist would agree with the analyses I make. Although psychology is certainly a science, it is not yet a unified science. There are many self-consistent frames of psychological interpretation, each covering the facts available. Whether in the distant future, when many more experiments and observations have accumulated, it will be possible to impose a univocal set of interpretations upon all human conduct, we cannot yet say. Many think such a unified science will come to pass. Others believe that the explanations of mental life will always be subject to philosophical disagreements. I do not pretend to know the answer to this riddle, but offer my own interpretations in the light of what I understand to be the most acceptable tenets of modern dynamic psychology.

The system of dynamic concepts upon which my analyses rest is set forth in my book *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation* (1937). In one sense the present volume may

be viewed as a specialized expansion of this earlier work. But, unless I err, the concepts I employ and the basic conclusions I reach are in line with much of the advanced thinking in modern psychotherapy, in phenomenology, in neo-Freudianism, and in other departments of current psychological research and theory. Whether a given representative of these schools will accept in every detail my account of subjective religion I cannot, of course, predict.

One underlying value judgment flavors my writing. It is a value that to my mind every supporter of democracy must hold: the right of each individual to work out his own philosophy of life, to find his personal niche in creation, as best he can. His freedom to do so will be greater if he sees clearly the forces of culture and conformity that invite him to be content with a merely second-hand, and therefore for him, with an immature religion. It is equally essential to his freedom of choice that he understand the pressures of scorn and intimidation that tend to discourage his religious quest altogether. Such pressures emanate from narrowly conceived science, and from some teachers and writers who, in the face of the bigger issues of life, are as ignorant and helpless as any other seeker.

Critics may complain that I have divided my attention somewhat unevenly between these two obstacles to freedom of choice. Perhaps I have said less about the operation of second-hand, authoritarian, and immature religion in personality than I should. On all sides we see how bigotry and escapism accompany certain forms of piety. One travels through America and notes its Jim Crow churches, its storefront tabernacles, its anti-Semitic "Christian" crusaders, and marks how often the darkness of the human mind is sanctified with a religion of superstition. Religion in many lives seems merely symptomatic of fear and frustration.

My reason for not dwelling more fully than I do upon the

function religion plays in infantile and neurotic personalities is that I am seeking to trace the full course of religious development in the normally mature and productive personality. I am dealing with the psychology, not with the psychopathology, of religion. The neurotic function of religious belief, its aid as an "escape from freedom," is indeed commonly encountered, so commonly that opponents of religion see only this function and declare it to dominate any life that harbors a religious sentiment. With this view I disagree. Many personalities attain a religious view of life without suffering arrested development and without self-deception. Indeed it is by virtue of their religious outlook upon life—expanding as experience expands—that they are able to build and maintain a mature and well-integrated edifice of personality. The conclusions they reach and the sentiments they hold are various, as unique as is personality itself.

William James perceived this point when fifty years ago he wrote his incomparable *Varieties of Religious Experience*. I should not presume to restate his thesis if I did not feel that the progress of dynamic psychology in the past two generations has been great enough to warrant its sharpening and reinforcement. James did not have access to modern theories of personality. It is a tribute to his genius that in most respects these theories readily accommodate his earlier findings and interpretations.

These chapters represent a revision of the Lowell Lectures delivered by me in Boston during the spring of 1947. They were read in their present form as the Merrick Lectures at Ohio Wesleyan University in the spring of 1949. I am grateful to the trustees of both foundations for providing the incentive and opportunity to formulate my thoughts on the subject.

I have been fortunate in my critics and helpers. In many ways I have depended upon Mrs. Jacqueline Sutton and Mr.

James Gillespie, especially in connection with the research reported in Chapter Two, and upon the constant assistance of Mrs. Eleanor Sprague. Dr. Seward Hiltner, a shrewd student of the psychology of religion, has given me many helpful suggestions and strategic encouragement. Generous aid came likewise from Professor Edgar S. Brightman of Boston University and from Swami Akhilananda, of the Church of the Vedanta in Boston. The former strove to keep me from undue psychocentrism, and the latter from ethnocentrism. Professor Peter Bertocci of Boston University was a vital source of encouragement and in a friendly way endeavored to repair my inexperience in dealing with certain philosophical and theological issues.

The combined efforts of these kindly critics have not fully corrected my failings; for in an area as large as religion, and so extensively studied, a psychologist is an intruder. Theologians, philosophers, religious workers, historians, have long had prior rights. It is impossible to treat the subject, even from the limited psychological point of view, without trespassing upon their territory. At the same time the psychologist—this psychologist at any rate—cannot forever keep silent. He too has something to say. Specifically he wishes to be heard on the function of the religious sentiment in the personality of the individual.

GORDON W. ALLPORT

March 21, 1949

THE INDIVIDUAL AND HIS RELIGION