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A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

Current Trends in Psychology and Pastoral Work

IT is useful sometimes to pause and reflect upon the course of any subject of study or scheme of thought and to consider the direction in which it is leading us. The purpose of this article is to assess the relation of psychology to religion today, especially in its application to the pastoral ministry. We are concerned here with developments roughly over the last ten years.

It has been a decade rich in thought and experiment, in literature, and in the emergence of new and significant movements in psychology and psychiatry. It will be worthwhile to mention some of them separately and then to note some books of current interest and value to those engaged in pastoral work.

First we may mention a general movement which may be included under the wide term *Existential Psychology*. This has been gaining momentum, first on the continent of Europe and more recently here in Britain and in the United States of America. In general existential psychology emphasizes (1) the importance of the existing person in his emergence or becoming; and (2) the immediacy of experience in the here and now. From the days of Freud a great deal of emphasis had, rightly, been placed upon the past—especially upon past traumatic experiences—for later life and development. But there was a tendency to overlook the importance of the present. Furthermore, the deterministic element tended to be exaggerated. To say that I am what I am because of what my parents, did, or did not do, to me in early childhood, is a truth; but to imply that the result of my parents' attitudes is inevitable and that I am in no way responsible for what I am, is an exaggeration. It is against such an exaggeration that existential psychology protests. Existential psychology brings the functions of will and decision into focus. In a helpful essay, Rollo May writes: "A central core of modern man's 'neurosis' is the undermining of his experience of himself as responsible, the sapping of his willing and decision. And this lack of will is much more than merely an ethical problem: modern man so often has the conviction that even if he *did* exert his 'will' and capacity for decision, they would not make any difference anyway . . . The existentialists' central proclamation is this: No matter how great the forces victimizing the human being, man has the capacity to *know* that he is being victimized, and thus to influence in some way how he will relate to his fate. There is never lost that kernel of the power to take some stand, to make some decision, no matter how minute. This is why they hold that man's

existence consists, in the last analysis, of his freedom . . . Tillich phrased it beautifully in a recent speech, 'Man becomes truly human only at the moment of decision.' (*Existential Psychology*, pp. 41-42. See below).

Of course, there is much more to it than that. Existential psychology includes a number of insights from many different writers who may loosely or more exactly be called existentialists, each with his own emphasis or emphases, and covers the whole field of psychology in its various branches. But sufficient has, perhaps, here been said to indicate its importance for pastoral ministry. Once again—this time from the side of scientific psychology—we are being reminded of the importance of the individual. It is the person who matters.

A point of very great importance to the pastor in his counselling work is the existential concept of person-to-person encounter in the counselling situation. The counselled and the counsellor are persons relating to each other in a unique situation—a situation in which each has something to give and something to gain, and in which each is in the process of *becoming*. In other words, it brings to light the dynamic element in the counselling situation. It is not merely that a wise person gives advice to a less wise person; rather, it is two persons experiencing together, and both developing in the process.

Here we are face to face with the dynamics of meeting. In so many of our relationships we never really meet people; we make only a superficial contact. Today we are learning afresh what true pastors have always known—that it is not the pastoral technique or the theological expertise that matters most, important as these are in their proper place, but that what matters in pastoral work is the true meeting of person with person. A disappointed church member remarked after an interview she had sought with her pastor: "Oh! yes; he listened to me, but he did not hear me." Having ears he heard but did not perceive. She was really saying more than she said, and he did not hear her. He probably had a clear grasp of the woman's problem and perhaps gave good advice, but he had not met *her* and she knew it.

One form of existential psychology that has gripped my imagination is *Logotherapy* which is being called "the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy" (its predecessors being the Freudian and the Adlerian Schools). Its founder and chief exponent is Professor Viktor E. Frankl, M.D., Ph.D., psychiatrist and head of the Neurological Department at the Poliklinik Hospital, Vienna, Austria. Under the Nazi regime he was arrested, being of Jewish descent, and incarcerated in some of the worst of the concentration camps, at Auschwitz and Dachau. He was already a medical doctor in high standing, and he kept himself sane by studying his own reactions and the reactions of his fellow prisoners to their deprivations and sufferings. He tells the story in his books, *From Deathcamp to Existentialism* (published in the U.S.A.) and *Man's Search for Meaning*, a somewhat fuller work published in Britain (see below).

In the deathcamps Frankl found that those for whom life had lost its meaning more easily succumbed to their fate and lost heart than

those for whom life still had a meaning and who, in other circumstances, would have had much for which to live. The key, he found, was *meaning*; and so he developed his philosophy of healing. As its name implies, it is a therapy based on the concept of *meaning* (Logos = meaning). A few sentences taken from *Man's Search for Meaning* will sum up his basic outlook:

"Logotherapy, in comparison with psychoanalysis, is a method less *introspective*. Logotherapy focuses rather on the future, that is to say, on the assignments and meanings to be fulfilled by the patient in his future." "In logotherapy the patient is actually confronted with and reoriented toward the meaning of his life." "Logotherapy . . . focuses on the meaning of human existence as well as on man's search for such a meaning." ". . . the will to meaning is in most people *fact*, not *faith*." "I think the meaning of our existence is not invented by ourselves, but rather detected." "One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it." "As each situation in life represents a challenge to man and presents a problem for him to solve, the question of the meaning of life may actually be reversed. Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is *he* who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by *answering for* his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible. Thus, logotherapy sees in responsibility the very essence of human existence."

Here is a practical philosophy of life as well as a way of healing. Frankl sees man as living in three dimensions: the somatic, the mental, and the spiritual. The spiritual dimension in Frankl's language does not have a religious connotation. It means that which makes us human; but it is a dimension which has far too long been overlooked in psychology. Frankl sees that values give meaning to life, and he recognizes the uniqueness and singularity of every human person. He speaks openly of the meaning of life, the meaning of death, the meaning of suffering, the meaning of work, and the meaning of love. Every life has its own meaning for the individual if only he can find it; and every life has its unique opportunities and can have its own specific aims.

It does not take much imagination to perceive the relevance of this therapeutic outlook to the pastoral ministry. Many of us in this ministry are finding persons for whom life has lost its meaning, or for whom life has never seemed to have a meaning. "What is the meaning of it all?" we are asked. Well, the true pastor ought to have something to say to this question, for the Gospel is concerned with purpose and fulfilment.

Another approach which interests me is described in a book entitled, *Reality Therapy: A New Approach to Psychiatry*, by William Glasser (see below). Dr. Glasser and Dr. G. L. Harrington, working through

psychiatric problems with young delinquents and with other mentally sick persons, have in recent years arrived at a pattern of treatment which they call Reality Therapy and which appears to be having an encouragingly high rate of success. In brief, the theory behind the treatment consists in what has been called "a psychiatric version of the three R's, namely, reality, responsibility, and right-and-wrong." They view their patients as persons who are out of touch with reality, who have lost (or who have never had) a sense of responsibility and are therefore living irresponsibly; and work on the assumption that only as their patients learn to live responsibly will they begin to seek worthy ends and thus fulfil their real needs. This, of course, is only a tiny glimpse into the system and is intended here to whet the appetite of the serious reader.

An approach which calls for some amount of elaboration is that known as *Psychosynthesis*. It owes its inspiration to Roberto Assagioli, of Florence, Italy, whose book was published in the U.S.A. in 1965 (see below). For over fifty years Dr. Assagioli has been practising various methods of psychotherapy, and his theory and techniques are the fruits of his long and wide experience. As its name implies, Psychosynthesis is a drawing together of various strands of thought. It aims at synthesis. It sees the value of synthesizing all branches of knowledge for the good of mankind; more specifically, it seeks a synthesis in relation to psychotherapeutic theories and methods, and aims in its therapy at the synthesis within the individual of the separate and separative elements of the psyche.

Like other forms of existential psychology (some of which are mentioned above) psychosynthesis takes as its starting-point the *self from within*. It sees the person as *growing*, developing, and in the process actualizing many latent potentialities. It emphasizes the importance of *meaning*, that is, what each person gives to life and expects from life. It recognizes the importance of *values*, including aesthetic, ethical and religious values, for life in its fullness. It takes into consideration such aspects of human living as choices, decisions, responsibility, and motivations which determine choices and decisions; and it has a place in its philosophy for suffering. Its emphasis is on the future, with full recognition of its dynamic role in the present; for the future is in the present.

But Assagioli goes further than some other existentialists. In his scheme of things he lays an important emphasis on *will* as "an essential function of the self and as the necessary source or origin of all choices, decisions, engagements." He is also concerned with what he terms "the direct experience of the self, of pure *self-awareness*." At its highest, this is similar to that which would be called "spiritual experience" in religious terms. Indeed, the highest synthesis is, for Assagioli, spiritual. He believes that modern psychology has neglected this whole area of human life and experience. It would take us too deeply into the technicalities of the theory to enlarge upon this here, though I hope to write about it in other places in due course. What should interest us as pastors is the fact that this area of human life,

this dimension of human experience, should be receiving scientific investigation at the present time.

Assagioli is interested in the positive, creative, joyous experiences of life as well as in the tragic and painful ones which have been so much the concern of psychiatry. In his therapy Dr. Assagioli has learned to use active techniques in assisting his patients to a new synthesis within.

Psychosynthesis is more than a therapeutic technique. It is that, of course, but it is much more. It is a method of psychological development for the 'normal' person; it has something to say to educators; and it can be applied to the wider issues of interpersonal relationships on many fronts. Some of the active techniques of psychosynthesis are listed here, and in brackets those aspects of pastoral practice to which they are relevant or applicable are given: Catharsis (Confession); Critical Analysis of the self (Self-understanding and self-judgment); the Training of the Will (Self-discipline); emphasis on Spiritual Synthesis, Meditation, and the Use of Symbols (Worship, Prayer, Meditation, Spirituality); the Importance of Interpersonal Relationships (Fellowship).

It must not be thought that any of the movements mentioned above are religious movements. They are not. They are strictly psychological and stem from scientific research and professional experience in the field of psychology or of psychiatry. Nonetheless, they have an obvious bearing upon the work of the pastor, or, at least, the wise pastor can learn much from them that is applicable to his work. In this connection I would heartily recommend the reading of the book, *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion*, by O. Hobart Mowrer of the University of Illinois (see below). Dr. Mowrer sees both psychiatry and religion in a state of flux, and believes that there is need to re-introduce (albeit in an informed manner) some of the concepts of religion which have been overlooked or deliberately rejected by psychologists in recent years. This is a book which deserves careful study from both sides of the discussion.

Reference may now be made to movements which seek to bring medical doctors and ministers together. The Churches' Council of Healing continues its work of many years in uniting representatives of all the major denominations and Healing Guilds in doctor-clergy consultations. The most important development in Britain in the last decade has been the foundation of the Institute of Religion and Medicine which aims to bring together professional people concerned with healing in the widest sense—physical, spiritual and mental. In some ways it is similar to the Academy of Religion and Mental Health in the U.S.A., though not restricted to concern itself with mental health. Doctors of physical medicine are as much involved as those concerned with mental health, and nurses, social workers and others are included in its membership. The new Institute could well become the central policy-making body, to set (or, at least, to inspire) standards of training for this specialised ministry. The Institute has recently published a pamphlet, *Report on Consultation on Practical*

Training in Ministry, giving details of various opportunities for such training now open in Britain to clergy and ordinands. Copies of the *Report* may be obtained from The Secretary of The Institute of Religion and Medicine, 58a Wimpole Street, London, W.1. price 2/6d.

As we said earlier, the past decade has been rich in literature. So many books in the field of pastoral psychology are coming from the presses that it is impossible to keep abreast of them. But some must be mentioned. The following are but a selection of one person's reading. I could mention many others, though to do so would reduce the latter part of this article to a book list; whilst other workers in this field could recommend books which I have not read or of which I have not even heard. All I can do here is to recommend a few of the books which I have found most helpful.

A small book on existential psychology is one entitled *Existential Psychology*, edited by Rollo May. (New York: Random House, 1961). It has excellent articles by various writers on different aspects of the subject.

Viktor E. Frankl's works on Logotherapy in English are: *Man's Search for Meaning* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964), and *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965).

Reality Therapy, by William Glasser, is published by Harper & Row of New York (1965) and has a Foreword by Dr. O. Hobart Mowrer.

Roberto Assagioli's English publication is *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques* (New York: Hobbs, Dorman & Co., Inc., 1965).

The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion, by O. Hobart Mowrer, is published in New York by D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1961).

Dr. Paul Tournier's works are all relevant and valuable. I would particularly recommend *The Whole Person in a Broken World* (London: Collins, 1965).

The Faith of the Counsellors, by Paul Halmos (London: Constable, 1965) is timely. The author deals with values and value judgments in counselling.

Professor Erwin R. Goodenough's book, *The Psychology of Religious Experiences* (New York and London: Basic Books, 1965) is a contribution to the general subject of religious psychology.

Clinical Theology, by Frank Lake (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966) is a massive tome outlining fully Dr. Lake's own approach to therapy and giving a complete insight into methods of Clinical Theology.

A book to be recommended for its comprehensiveness and appeal to the whole Church as well as to pastors is *Community, Church and Healing*, by R. A. Lambourne (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963). Its sub-title gives the key to its message: A study of some of the corporate aspects of the Church's Ministry to the Sick. A very valuable book.

I would mention two of Dr. Harry Guntrip's books: *Mental Pain and the Cure of Souls* (London: Independent Press, 1956), and

Healing the Sick Mind (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964).

Healing for You, by Bernard Martin (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965) is to be recommended for its comprehensive approach psychologically, and pastorally. An excellent book.

Ministering to Deeply Troubled People, by Ernest E. Bruder, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., U.S.A.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963) is another such book. Dr. Bruder is Director of Protestant Chaplain Activities at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington, D.C., U.S.A., where for over a quarter of a century he has been engaged in ministry with the mentally sick and where advanced courses of training are offered to clergy to engage in this ministry.

Pastoral Care of the Mentally Ill, by Norman Autton (London: S.P.C.K., 1963) is an excellent guide to this special ministry.

C. Edward Barker's book, *Psychology's Impact on the Christian Faith* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964) is a thoughtful work worthy of attention by those who are concerned with the communication of the Gospel in this modern age.

Perhaps as a footnote I may be permitted to mention two books which I have written, for they are geared very much to the needs of the working pastor. They are: *The Battle for the Soul: Aspects of Religious Conversion* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 1960; 2nd Imp. 1964. Philadelphia, Pa., U.S.A.: Westminster Press, 1959), and *Christianity from Within: A Frank Discussion of Religion, Conversion, Evangelism and Revival* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 1965).

Not long ago it used to be thought that psychology was the greatest threat to the survival of religion. Today we are able to take a more moderate view. With the knowledge that psychology has shed on the processes and experiences within the human psyche we are now able to see that religion is sometimes used as an escape from reality, and is sometimes pathological in origin and expression. But we can see also that religion often serves as the means whereby persons achieve their highest bent and really "come to themselves."

I cannot do better than close with a reference to another book (a small paper-back) which is to be highly recommended. It is, *What Psychology Says About Religion*, by Wayne E. Oates (London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 1960). Dr. Oates discusses the attitude of psychology to religion in the past, and attempts to show how it views religion today. To quote his main propositions is, perhaps, the best way to indicate his theme. Religion *can* be a form of idolatrous bondage for the human spirit, but it *may* be a way of freedom for the human spirit. Religion *can* be childish, but religion *may* be a way to maturity. Religion *may* be a part of a mental disease in and of itself, but it *can* be a way to health. Religion *may* be an illusion, but it *can* be a way to reality.

This, I think, clearly states the position we have reached today. More thought and study, more research and experience, more understanding and insight will, I hope, carry us further along the way.

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