

# Psychology as Religion

The Bible is full of explanations of why people behave the way they do and how they change. Beginning with Genesis, God demonstrated the basic problem of mankind: separation from God through sin. And, God provided the only lasting remedy for change: a restored relationship with God by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. A person's separation from God or his active relationship with God will affect every attitude, every choice, and every action. The study of mankind from any other perspective will bring about a distorted view. Although we can observe, record and report external aspects of human nature, we must turn to Scripture for explanations of why people behave the way they do and how they can change. Every other explanation must be fully in agreement with Scripture to be accurate.

Psychology deals with the very same areas of concern already dealt with in Scripture. Explanations of why people behave the way they do and how they change have concerned philosophers, theologians, cultists, and occultists throughout the centuries. Since God has given an Instruction Book on how to live, all ideas about the why's of behavior and the how's of change must be viewed as religious in nature. Whereas the Bible claims divine revelation, psychotherapy claims scientific substantiation. Nevertheless, when it comes to behavior and attitudes and morals and values, we are dealing with religion, either the Christian faith or any one of a number of other religions including that of secular humanism.

Psychotherapy fits more reasonably into the category of religion than into the field of science. Those who look at psychotherapy from an analytical, research point of view have long suspected the religious nature of psychotherapy. Psychiatrist Jerome Frank says that "psychotherapy is not primarily an applied science. In some ways it more resembles a religion."<sup>1</sup>

Many who practice psychotherapy embrace its religious aspects. According to Victor Von Weizsaecker, "C. G. Jung was the first to understand that psychoanalysis belonged in the sphere of religion."<sup>2</sup> Jung himself wrote:

Religions are systems of healing for psychic illness. . . . That is why patients force the psychotherapist into the role of a priest, and expect and demand of him that he shall free them from their distress. That is why we psychotherapists must occupy ourselves with problems which, strictly speaking, belong to the theologian.<sup>3</sup>

Note that Jung used the word *religions* rather than *Christianity*. Jung himself had repudiated Christianity and explored other forms of religious experience, including the occult. Without throwing out the religious nature of man, Jung dispensed with the God of the Bible and assumed his own role as priest.

## **ROOTS OF RELIGIOUS ALTERNATIVES.**

From its very beginning psychological theories and methods of counseling created doubt about Christianity. Each great innovator of psychological theories sought an understanding about mankind apart from the revealed Word of God. Each created an unbiblical system to explain the nature of man and to bring about change. Men like Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Carl Jung (1875-1961) eroded confidence in Christianity and established systems in direct opposition to the Word of God. Occultism, atheism, and antagonism towards Christianity were disguised by psychological, scientific sounding language.

Sigmund Freud reduced religious beliefs to illusions and called religion “the obsessional neurosis of humanity.”<sup>4</sup> Jung, an early follower of Freud, however, viewed all religions as collective mythologies. He did not believe they were real in essence, but that they could affect the human personality. While Freud viewed religion as the source of mental problems, Jung believed that religion was a solution. Freud argued that religions are delusory and therefore evil. Jung, on the other hand, contended that all religions are imaginary but good. Both positions are anti-Christian. One denies Christianity and the other mythologizes it.

Religious bias colored the psychological systems of both Freud and Jung. They were not dealing with science, but with values, attitudes, and behavior. And because they were working in areas about which the Bible gives the authoritative Word of God, they were developing antibiblical religions. Jay Adams says:

Because of the teaching of the Scriptures, one is forced to conclude that much of clinical and counseling psychology, as well as most of psychiatry, has been carried on without license from God and in autonomous rebellion against Him. This was inevitable because the Word of the sovereign God of creation has been ignored.

In that Word are “all things pertaining to life and godliness.” By it the man of God “may be fully equipped for every good work.” And it is that Word—and only that Word—that can tell a poor sinner how to love God with all of the heart, and mind, and soul, and how to love a neighbor with the same depth of concern that he exhibits toward himself.<sup>5</sup>

Professor of psychiatry and author Thomas Szasz contends, “The popular image of Freud as an enlightened, emancipated, irreligious person who, with the aid of psychoanalysis, ‘discovered’ that religion is a mental illness is pure fiction.”<sup>6</sup> He says, “One of Freud’s most powerful motives in life was the desire to inflict vengeance on Christianity for its traditional anti-Semitism.”<sup>7</sup> Freud used scientific-sounding language to disguise his hostility towards religion. However, Szasz declares, “There is, in short, nothing scientific about Freud’s hostility to established religion, though he tries hard to pretend that there is.” Freud was not an objective observer of humanity, nor was he an objective observer of religion.

While Freud grew up in a Jewish home, Jung's father was a Protestant minister. Jung's description of his early experience with Holy Communion reveals his disappointment with Christianity. He wrote:

Slowly I came to understand that this communion had been a fatal experience for me. It had proved hollow; more than that it had proved to be a total loss. I knew that I would never again be able to participate in this ceremony. "Why, that is not religion at all," I thought. "It is an absence of God; the church is a place I should not go to. It is not life which is there, but death."<sup>8</sup>

This significant experience could have led Jung to deny all religions as Freud did, but he did not. For him all religions were myths which contained some truth about the human psyche. For him, psychoanalysis was a religious activity. And, since all religions held some elements about truth, he denied the authority of Scripture and the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ to be the only way of salvation.

Carl Jung repudiated Christianity and became involved in idolatry. He renamed and replaced everything Christian and everything biblical with his own mythology of archetypes. And as he moved in his own sphere of idolatry, the archetypes took form and served him as familiar spirits. He even had his own personal familiar spirit by the name of Philemon. He also participated in the occultic practice of necromancy.<sup>9</sup> Jung's teachings serve to mythologize Scripture and reduce the basic doctrines of the faith into esoteric gnosticism.

Rather than objective observation and scientific discovery, Freud and Jung each turned his own experience into a new belief system and called it psychoanalysis. Freud attempted to destroy the spirituality of man by reducing religion to illusion and neurosis. Jung attempted to debase the spirituality of man by presenting all religion as mythology and fantasy. Repudiating the God of the Bible, both Freud and Jung led their followers in the quest for alternative understandings of mankind and alternative solutions to problems of living. They turned inward to their own limited imaginations and viewed their subjects from their own anti-Christian subjectivity.

Because they rest on different foundations, move in contrasting directions, and rely on opposing belief systems, psychotherapy and Christianity are not now, nor were they ever, natural companions in helping individuals. The faith once delivered to the saints was displaced by a substitute faith, often disguised as medicine or science, but based upon foundations which are in direct contradiction to the Bible.

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen indicates the impetus psychology received from those who sought to repudiate Christianity by saying, "It appears that certain of the most influential pioneers in American psychology found in it an ideal vehicle for renouncing their own Christian upbringing in the name of science."<sup>10</sup>

Carl Rogers is another example of one of those influential pioneers. While attending Union Theological Seminary, he and some of his fellow classmates "thought themselves right out of religious work."<sup>11</sup> He did not find what he was looking for in Christianity and thus turned away from his Christian upbringing and Christian calling.<sup>12</sup> Carl Rogers renounced Christianity and became one of the most respected leaders of humanistic psychology. He confessed, "I could not work in a field where I would be required to believe in

some specified religious doctrine.”<sup>13</sup> Psychology was attractive to him since he was interested in the “questions as to the meaning of life,” but did not want to be restricted by the doctrines of Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Not only did Carl Rogers embrace another religion, secular humanism; he later turned to the occult. Rogers engaged in the forbidden practice of necromancy, which is communication with the dead through a medium.<sup>15</sup> What does a man who has repudiated Christianity have to offer the church about how to live?

From its inception, psychotherapy was developed as an alternative means of healing and help, not as an addition or complement to Christianity. It is not only a substitute method of helping troubled souls; it is a surrogate religion. Szasz contends:

Contrition, confession, prayer, faith, inner resolution, and countless other elements are expropriated and renamed as psychotherapy; whereas certain observances, rituals, taboos, and other elements of religion are demeaned and destroyed as symptoms of neurotic or psychotic “illness.”<sup>16</sup>

### **RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF MESMERISM.**

The religious nature of psychological theories and methods of counseling reaches back beyond Freud to Franz Anton Mesmer. Mesmer believed that he had discovered the great universal cure of both physical and emotional problems. In 1779 he announced, “There is only one illness and one healing.”<sup>17</sup> Mesmer presented the idea that an invisible fluid was distributed throughout the body. He called the fluid “animal magnetism” and believed that it influenced illness or health in both the mental-emotional and the physical aspects of life. He considered this fluid to be an energy existing throughout nature. He taught that proper health and mental wellbeing came from the proper distribution and balance of the animal magnetism throughout the body.

Mesmer’s ideas may sound rather foolish from a scientific point of view. However, they were well received. Furthermore, as they were modified they formed much of the basis for present-day psychotherapy. The most important modification of mesmerism was getting rid of the magnets. Through a series of progressions, the animal magnetism theory moved from the place of the physical affect of magnets to the psychological affects of mind over matter. Thus the awkward passing of magnets across the body of a person sitting in a tub of water was eliminated.

Mesmerism became psychological rather than physical with patients moving into trance-like states of hypnosis. Furthermore, some of the subjects of mesmerism moved into deeper states of consciousness and spontaneously engaged in telepathy, precognition, and clairvoyance.<sup>18</sup> Gradually mesmerism evolved into an entire view of life. Mesmerism presented a new way of healing people through conversation with an intense rapport between a practitioner and his subject. Those involved in medicine used mesmerism in their investigation of supposed unseen reservoirs of potential for healing within the mind.

The theories and practices of mesmerism greatly influenced the up-and-coming field of psychiatry with such early men as Jean Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, and Sigmund Freud. These men used information gleaned from patients in the hypnotic state.<sup>19</sup> The followers of Mesmer promoted the ideas of hypnotic suggestion, healing through talking, and mind-

over-matter. Thus, the three main thrusts of Mesmer's influence were hypnosis, psychotherapy, and positive thinking.

Although hypnosis had been used for centuries in various occultic activities, including medium trances, Mesmer and his followers brought it into the respectable realm of Western medicine. And, with the shift in emphasis from the physical manipulation of magnets to so-called psychological powers hidden in the depths of the mind, mesmerism moved from the physical to the psychological and spiritual.

Mesmerism incited much interest in America as a Frenchman by the name of Charles Poyen lectured and conducted exhibitions during the 1830's. Audiences were impressed with the feats of mesmerism because hypnotized subjects would spontaneously exercise clairvoyance and mental telepathy. While under the spell, subjects could also experience and report deeper levels of consciousness in which they could feel utter unity with the universe beyond the confines of space and time. Furthermore, they could give apparent supernatural information and diagnose diseases telepathically. This led people to believe that great untapped powers of the mind were available to them.<sup>20</sup>

The thrust of mesmerism also changed directions in America.<sup>21</sup> In his book *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls*, Robert Fuller describes how it promised great psychological and spiritual advantages. Its promises for self improvement, spiritual experience, and personal fulfillment were especially welcomed by unchurched individuals. Fuller says that mesmerism offered "an entirely new and eminently attractive arena for self-discovery their—own psychological depths." He says that "its theories and methods promised to restore individuals, even unchurched ones, into harmony with the cosmic scheme."<sup>22</sup> Fuller's description of mesmerism in America is an accurate portrayal of twentieth-century psychotherapy as well as of so-called mind-science religions.

The users of mesmerism did not suspect the occultic connections of hypnosis. Both the practitioners and subjects believed that hypnosis revealed untapped reservoirs of human possibility and powers. They believed that these powers could be used to understand the self, to attain perfect health, to develop supernatural gifts, and to reach spiritual heights. Thus, the goal and impetus for discovering and developing human potential grew out of mesmerism and stimulated the growth and expansion of psychotherapy, positive thinking, the human potential movement, and the mind-science religions.

Mesmer's far reaching influence gave an early impetus to scientific-sounding religious alternatives to Christianity. And he started the trend of medicalizing religion into treatment and therapy. Nevertheless, he only gave the world false religion and false hope. Professor of psychiatry Thomas Szasz describes Mesmer's influence this way:

Insofar as psychotherapy as a modern "medical technique" can be said to have a discoverer, Mesmer was that person, Mesmer stands in the same sort of relation to Freud and Jung as Columbus stands in relation to Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Columbus stumbled onto a continent that the founding fathers subsequently transformed into the political entity known as the United States of America. Mesmer stumbled onto the literalized use of the leading scientific metaphor of his age for explaining and exorcising all manner of human problems and passions, a rhetorical device that the founders of modern depth psychology subsequently transformed into the pseudomedical entity known as psychotherapy.<sup>23</sup>

## **PSYCHOLOGY OR RELIGION?**

Critics of the scientific facade of psychotherapy have especially noted its religious nature. Nobelist Richard Feynman, in considering the scientific status of psychotherapy, says that “psychoanalysis is not a science” and that it is “perhaps even more like witch-doctoring.”<sup>24</sup> Lance Lee refers to “psychoanalysis as a religion hidden beneath scientific verbiage” and as a “substitute religion for both practitioner and patient.”<sup>25</sup>

Professor Perry London, in his book *The Modes and Morals Of Psychotherapy*, points out that psychotherapists constitute a priesthood.<sup>26</sup> Psychiatrist Jerome Frank says that the psychiatrist “cannot avoid infringing on the territory of religion.”<sup>27</sup> One writer refers to “the ‘Jehovah effect’ in which the therapist recreates patients into his own image.”<sup>28</sup>

Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, in his book *The Myth of Psychotherapy*, says, “The basic ingredients of psychotherapy are religion, rhetoric, and repression.”<sup>29</sup> He points out that while psychotherapy does not always involve repression, it does always involve religion and rhetoric. By “rhetoric” Szasz means “conversation.” Just as conversation is always present in psychotherapy, so too is religion. Szasz says very strongly that “the human relations we now call ‘psychotherapy,’ are, in fact, matters of religion-and that we mislabel them as ‘therapeutic’ at great risk to our spiritual well-being.”<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere Szasz refers to psychotherapy as religion:

It is not merely a religion that pretends to be a science, it is actually a fake religion that seeks to destroy true religion.<sup>31</sup>

He warns us of “the implacable resolve of psychotherapy to rob religion of as much as it can, and to destroy what it cannot.”<sup>32</sup> Christopher Lasch, author of *The Culture of Narcissism*, would probably agree since he says, “Therapy constitutes an antireligion.”<sup>33</sup> It is a fake religion that is “anti” the true religion of the Bible.

## **CURE OF SOULS OR CURE OF MINDS?**

There was a cure of souls ministry which existed in the early church and was practiced up to the present century. In this ministry there was a dependence on the Bible for understanding the human condition and for relieving troubled minds. Prayer and healing in the early church were not limited to small problems, but covered all personal disturbances. The cure of souls ministry dealt with all nonorganic mental-emotional-personal problems of living.

With the rise of psychological counseling in the twentieth century, biblical counseling waned until presently it is almost nonexistent. The cure of souls, which once was a vital ministry of the church, has now in this century been displaced by a cure of minds called “psychotherapy.” The authors of *Cults and Cons* note this shift:

For many, traditional religion no longer offers relevant answers and more and more people are seeking answers in strange, new packages. Thousands, if not millions, are turning to that part of psychology which promises the *answer* and an effortless, painless ride into the Promised Land, perfectly meeting our present and prevailing need for quick solutions to hard problems.<sup>34</sup> (Emphasis theirs).

Martin Gross observes:

When educated man lost faith in formal religion, he required a substitute belief that would be as reputable in the last half of the twentieth century as Christianity was in the first. Psychology and psychiatry have now assumed that role.<sup>35</sup>

Carl Rogers confesses, "Yes, it is true, psychotherapy is subversive. . . . Therapy, theories and techniques promote a new model of man contrary to that which has been traditionally acceptable."<sup>36</sup> Bernie Zilbergeld, in his book *The Shrinking of America: Myths of Psychological Change*, says:

Psychology has become something of a substitute for old belief systems. Different schools of therapy offer visions of the good life and how to live it, and those whose ancestors took comfort from the words of God and worshipped at the altars of Christ and Yahweh now take solace from and worship at the altars of Freud, Jung, Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis, Werner Erhard, and a host of similar authorities. While in the past the common reference point was the Bible and its commentaries and commentators, the reference today is a therapeutic language and the success stories of mostly secular people changers.<sup>37</sup>

Christopher Lasch charges that the "contemporary climate is therapeutic, not religious," and says, "People today hunger not for personal salvation . . . but for the feeling, the momentary illusion of personal well-being, health and psychic security."<sup>38</sup>

Lasch says, "The medicalization of religion facilitated the rapprochement between religion and psychiatry."<sup>39</sup> As soon as religious problems were medicalized (made into diseases), they became psychiatric problems. Problems of thought and behavior, once considered to be the concern of clergymen, were transformed into medical, and therefore supposedly scientific problems. They were then transferred from the church to the couch.

In referring to this change from the spiritual to the psychological and from religion to science, Szasz says:

Educated in the classics, Freud and the early Freudians remolded these images into, and renamed them as, medical diseases and treatments. This metamorphosis has been widely acclaimed in the modern world as an epoch-making scientific discovery. Alas, it is, in fact, only the clever and cynical destruction of the spirituality of man, and its replacement by a positivistic "science of mind."<sup>40</sup>

As we have noted elsewhere:

The recipe was simple. Replace the cure of souls with the cure of minds by confusing an abstraction (mind) with a biological organ (brain), and thus convince people that mental healing and medical healing are the same. Stir in a dash of theory disguised as fact. Call it all science and put it into medicine and the rest is history. With the rise in psychotherapy, there was a decline in the pastoral cure of souls until it is now almost nonexistent.<sup>41</sup>

Szasz also says that “psychotherapy is a modern, scientific-sounding name for what used to be called the ‘cure of souls.’”<sup>42</sup> One of his primary purposes for writing *The Myth of Psychotherapy* was:

. . . to show how, with the decline of religion and the growth of science in the eighteenth century, the cure of (sinful) souls, which had been an integral part of the Christian religions, was recast as the cure of (sick) minds, and became an integral part of medicine.<sup>43</sup>

The words *sinful and sick* in parentheses are his. By replacing the word *sinful* with the word *sick* and by replacing the word *soul* with the word *mind*, psychological practitioners have supplanted spiritual ministers in matters that have more to do with religion and values than with science and medicine.

Of course the central aspect of the cure of souls was to bring a person into a right relationship with God. Souls were “cured” through confession, repentance, and forgiveness. By following the biblical patterns set forth by Jesus and the Apostles, individuals will learn to live abundant lives. They will find comfort and strength in the midst of problems and wisdom to know what to do. Furthermore, as ordinary human beings receive the life of God into their own being through the Holy Spirit they have an inward Guide as well as the written Word.

## **PSYCHOTHERAPY AS RELIGION.**

Although all forms of psychotherapy are religious, the fourth branch of psychology—the transpersonal—is more blatantly religious than the others. Transpersonal psychologies involve faith in the supernatural. They include the belief that there is something beyond the natural, physical universe. However, the spirituality they have to offer includes mystical experiences of both the occult and Eastern religions. Although they are very religious and attempt to meet the spiritual needs of individuals, they are in direct contradiction to the Bible. Any religion that claims to be the only way is anathema to transpersonal psychologies. According to them, it’s all right to believe anything, no matter how ridiculous, as long as one does not contend that there is only one way.

Through such transpersonal psychotherapies various forms of Eastern religion are creeping into Western life. Psychologist Daniel Goleman quotes Chogyam Trungpa as saying, “Buddhism will come to the West as psychology.” Goleman points out how Oriental religions “seem to be making gradual headway as psychologies, not as religions.”<sup>44</sup> Jacob Needleman says:



A large and growing number of psychotherapists are now convinced that the Eastern religions offer an understanding of the mind far more complete than anything yet envisaged by Western science. At the same time, the leaders of the new religions themselves—the numerous gurus and spiritual teachers now in the West—are reformulating and adapting the traditional systems according to the language and atmosphere of modern psychology.

He further notes:

With all these disparate movements, it is no wonder that thousands of troubled men and women throughout America no longer know whether they need psychological or spiritual help. The line is blurred that divides the therapist from the spiritual guide.<sup>45</sup>

Karl Kraus, a Viennese journalist, wrote,

Despite its deceptive terminology, psychoanalysis is not a science but a religion—the faith of a generation incapable of any other.<sup>46</sup>

The same could be said of the various psychotherapies which have followed psychoanalysis. The tragedy is that few in the church recognize that psychotherapy, though attiring itself in the garb of science, is as naked as the emperor in “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” And sadder yet is the great admiration for this pseudogarment.

Because psychotherapy deals with meaning in life, values, and behavior, it is religion in theory and in practice. Every branch of psychotherapy is religious. Therefore, combining Christianity with psychotherapy is joining two or more religious systems. Psychotherapy cannot be performed and people cannot be transformed without affecting a person’s beliefs. Because psychotherapy involves morals and values, it is religion.

Psychological theories and methods continue to subvert Christianity. Rather than being directly antagonistic, however, promoters of psychology have covertly weakened the faith. By offering a substitute for the cross of Christ, purveyors of the psychological way encourage the pseudo faith described by A. W Tozer:

Many of us Christians have become extremely skillful in arranging our lives so as to admit the truth of Christianity without being embarrassed by its implications. We arrange things so that we can get on well enough without divine aid, while at the same time ostensibly seeking it. We boast in the Lord but watch carefully that we never get caught depending on Him. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

Pseudo faith always arranges a way out to serve in case God fails it. Real faith knows only one way and gladly allows itself to be stripped of any second way or makeshift substitutes. For true faith, it is either God or total collapse. And not since Adam first stood up on the earth has God failed a single man or woman who trusted Him.

The man of pseudo faith will fight for his verbal creed but refuse flatly to allow himself to get into a predicament where his future must depend upon that creed being true. He always provides himself with secondary ways of escape so he will have a way out if the roof caves in.

What we need very badly these days is a company of Christians who are prepared to trust God as completely now as they know they must do at the last day.<sup>47</sup>

Christianity is more than a religion. It is relationship with the Creator of the universe. It is relationship with God the Father through the costly price of the cross of Christ. It is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Christians are called to live by the very life of God. Paul prayed for believers to live by faith:

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:9-14).

Paul then admonished:

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:6-10).

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**Footnote references are available at the end of the book *PsychoHeresy: The Psychological Seduction of Christianity*.**

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[BOOK CHAPTERS](#) ~ [BOOKS](#) ~ [ORDERS](#)

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