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RELIGION AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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When one raises the question of Religion and Mental Hygiene, there are some who would question at the outset the serious importance of any *mental* hygiene at all in the prevention of mental disorders. Though the number of those who take this attitude is relatively small at the present time, nevertheless it is well to give some evidence that mental hygiene has a place in the prevention of mental disorders; and, therefore, there is at least a possibility that religion has a contribution to make in warding off the mental breakdown.

The following facts are very significant. For some years the Commissioner of Mental Diseases of the State of Massachusetts has given in his annual report the incidence of insanity in the single, the married, the widowed and the divorced as a ratio expressed in units of 100,000 of the same marital status.

The ratios of incidence for the year 1936 were as follows: single, 299.7; married, 187.6; widowed, 866.1; divorced, 1030.0.¹

Why do the married have a lower incidence of insanity than the single? Perhaps the happi-

ness of married life is a factor; but perhaps also there are a number of queer pre-psychotics who are so queer that they can find no one queer enough to "pop the question" or answer yes.

And why are the divorced in the highest category of all and have an incidence of insanity nearly three times that of the widowed? Perhaps, some one will say, they were divorced because they were insane, and did not become insane because they were divorced.

But why is the incidence for the widowed about double that of the married? Death widows without much discrimination. It strikes the young and the old, the rich and the poor, all races and classes. It would seem that the widowed are subjected to a severe mental pressure arising from the stress and strain of life. Owing to the increase in mental strain arising from sorrow, toil and years of anxiety, the mother who must fight her way alone and the father who must scatter his children and live as best he can, eventually are no longer able to cope with life's problems and any inherent weakness of character manifests itself as a definite psychosis. Evidently when individuals are confronted with a hopeless situation, there is a real need for some kind of mental hygiene.

¹ The Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Annual Report of the Commissioner of Mental Diseases for the Year Ending November 30, 1936. P. 158.

Religion, as it is often misunderstood, is evidently of no avail.

How is religion misunderstood? Let us make a few statements concerning what religion is not.

Religion is not fear born of ignorance.

Religion is not a blind drive to the supernatural in search of security.

Religion is not a kind of sporadic emotional experience of a more or less consoling character while it lasts.

Religion is not a flight from reality.

Religion is not a life within one's own interior, where one is occupied with ideals and neglects realities.

Religion is not a trait of temperament which makes it possible for some individuals to utilize religious ideals of which others are constitutionally incapable.

Were religion fear, it would add to mental problems rather than eliminate them. Were it a blind drive to the supernatural in search of security, it could no more offer a way out of mental difficulties than a blinded chauffeur could take us home through the evening traffic. Were it sporadic emotionalism, it would often be lacking in the hour of need and be impossible to many at any time. Were it living with ideals and neglecting realities, it could never adjust us to actual difficulties and would invite calamity in the time of trial. Were religion a trait of temperament, like musical ability,

it would be possible only to a fraction of humanity and it would not consist essentially, as it does, in certain intellectual ideals to which any man can be true or false and so give or refuse to God the service that is His due.

If religion has seemed to be any of these things at any time, or if supposedly religious persons have acted in any of these ways, we are only stimulated to ask ourselves: what after all is religion and how may it be of value in mental hygiene?

Let me at this moment lay down a definition which may serve as a starting point for the concept of natural religion as a basis for mental hygiene.

Natural religion is a moral virtue by which man gives to God the service that is His due. This concept implies that a religious person has acquired a realization of God as a living personality, the source and origin of all that is; and because He is the ultimate source and origin of all that is, all things belong to Him, man himself included, and so man must have his duties to God.

Nor is this concept so difficult to acquire as some would have us believe. One generation of men succeeds to another; but it could not always have been so. Philosophically and historically our race had its origins in something antecedent to itself. One geological period has succeeded to another, but not through infinite time; for the earth itself had its origin in something antecedent to itself.

The very universe itself must have had a beginning. Like a vast engine it is running; but it has not been running forever. For like all engines it consumes energy; and energy is finite, for it is equal to one-half the product of mass and the square of the velocity. But these are no infinite masses and all velocities are finite. And so within a finite period of time the universe itself had its origin in that which transcends the universe itself: God, the source and origin of all that is.

When we look at the libraries of the world and consider for a moment the vast labors of human minds to understand how some of the things in nature are accomplished, and when we compare the little that we know with the boundless extent of what we do not know, our mind stands aghast before the Infinite Intelligence that is the source and origin of all that is. God is the supreme intelligence in a world of intelligent beings.

From these considerations springs the essence of all natural religion.

Let us turn now for a moment to look at the world about us. We take a walk and see here and there the idlers on the streets. We look into the shops and stores and we see men working and waiting for the end of the day to seek their round of pleasures. We might try to get a peep at the labors of statesmen and scientists and if, after our visits were over, we asked ourselves who are the aim-

less and who those who labor with a goal, a purpose, an end in all they do, we would arrive at an important conclusion: The nobler the intelligence, the more does it make all activity converge in the accomplishment of an end which is worth while and truly valuable in itself. God, the supreme intelligence in a world of intelligent beings, is not like the idler who sits and whittles a stick; and when he is through, throws away the whittlings.

God, therefore, directs all things to an end worthy of His Infinite Majesty. To do one's best to cooperate in this divine work is to give to God the service that is His due, and this is the essence of natural religion.

Nor can anyone say that the divine plan is wholly unknown to me and, therefore, I can do nothing to cooperate in its accomplishment. For an intelligent being wills the perfection of all his works. If God is the source and origin of all that is, then directly or indirectly I myself am the work of His hands, and I myself can cooperate in attaining my own moral and intellectual perfection. And now our philosophy of religion commences to make contact with mental hygiene.

Let us attempt a definition of mental hygiene. The phrase comes to us from the hygiene of the body, which has to do with the prevention of disease and the development of a healthy organism. Mental hygiene may, by analogy, be defined as a practical science

which studies the human personality and its deviations from ideal perfection with a view to the prevention of character defects and the development of a wholesome personality.

If the supreme intelligence in the world of intelligent beings wills the perfection of all His works and I myself am one of the unfinished products of His hands, with a mind to know and a will to do, can I really plead total ignorance of the divine plan of the universe which directs all things to an end commensurate with the Infinite Majesty of God? Is not my work laid out before me as clearly as it could possibly be defined? I have been given the tools and the task is at hand: the perfection of a human personality, my own self; and there is nothing that can possibly prevent the work that God Himself wants me to do.

Can I really say that I know nothing of the ideal perfection of a human being? I may not know all, but is there nothing that I know? Must I not rather confess that my plight is much like that of an astonished housekeeper confronted with a dirty house? There is so much to be done that I can commence anywhere at any time, and labor to good purpose at the vast task that lies before me.

What about that hasty temper, those sarcastic words, that spirit of grumbling and complaining, that cowardly giving in to pain, those many defects of personality that make me an annoyance to

others and a burden to myself? How much can be done by a change of attitude, and how much can one who has a good will do to change his attitude of mind and see things in a new light?

One can of course take the position of moral philosophy to these problems of personal defect. The dignity of human nature is, after all, an end that is worth striving for. But to borrow an illustration from other fields, this attitude is likely to be atomistic, that is to say, the individual remains isolated and not a part of a configured whole. But religion brings before our mind the concept of the Divine Being as giving form and shape to human society, organizing it, directing it, leading it to an ultimate end, known in its fullness by Infinite Intelligence alone. If the individual is to be organized into the structure of the perfect society that God is gradually bringing about, the individual must be perfect. The stone must be hewn till it fits perfectly the place for which it is destined. The individual must be made perfect and freed from every flaw and blemish before he can finally be assimilated to the living organic social order over which Divine Intelligence will rule forever by Charity.

Let us recall for a moment our definition of natural religion: a moral virtue by which man gives to God the service that is His due. Behold how the development of a wholesome personality stands forth as a religious duty; for as-

surely one service that the creature owes to the creator is to cooperate in the perfection of his own personality, so that nothing whatsoever can prevent his assimilation to the society of the holy.

If religion is going to be a real factor in the development of the personality and the individual is to rise to the idealism of cooperating in a personal transformation that prepares him for assimilation into a social order over which God reigns supreme, it is perfectly clear that religion must become a major factor in all one's thoughts and desires, aspirations and actions.

Religion remains an accidental and more or less inadequate factor in one's life till one awakens to the realization: I do not live for myself, but for God. I have a work to do for God in the world and I must set about its accomplishment, for the night cometh wherein no man can work. This attitude is incompatible with that selfishness which seeks what it wants in spite of God and man. With the death of selfishness there is removed the main cause of friction between the person and the environment. It is this constant irritating friction which makes life more and more unendurable and prepares the way for a mental break.

Selfishness is overcome in countless ways; the accomplishment of something worth while is made possible by endless opportunities, as soon as one commences to live for God and not for himself.

In order that this may come about, there is a fundamental necessity of personal honesty when one faces God and nature; and a profound need of a will to be faithful to the dictates of reason,

Honesty in the face of God and nature leads to the inner realization of God as the source and origin of all that is and a consequent open profession of one's interior convictions; and so interior and exterior worship is seen as a part of natural religion, which is a moral virtue by which one gives to God the service that is His due. For worship is the inner statement: that God is the supreme Intelligent Being, the source and origin of all that is: a statement which is also on due occasion manifested by an honest man by some form of external expression.

Evidently religion, as a moral virtue, is not dependent on any peculiar type of temperament but on the possession of a modicum of intelligence; and a willingness to follow the dictates of reason. Intellectual honesty is clearly an indispensable condition.

Natural religion, therefore, is a source of mental hygiene open to all normal human beings. Often, however, its availability is blocked by misunderstandings arising from the fact that in childhood the patient has received no religious training or even been subjected to anti-religious influences, which have distorted the concept of religion and hedged it about with all manner of emotional antagonism. The lack of

religious training is often the result of a fallacy. So many say, I am going to be perfectly fair and objective in training my children. I will let them grow to maturity without any religious teaching and then they may choose for themselves. Some are guilty of the more patent fallacy: I will explain all religions to my children and then let them choose what they think is best. All this sounds so fair and reasonable. But how can the child understand all religions and how can he know enough to choose wisely between them? And what household can keep from giving the children any ideas at all about God, morality, and religion; for the child absorbs these ideas from the daily life and conversation of the home, even if there is no intention to preach religion on the part of the parents.

This being so, and seeing that parents have a duty to provide for the welfare of the children, and that the child who faces the trials and calamities of life without principles and ideals is at a serious disadvantage, it becomes an important duty for every parent to work out to the best of his or her ability a philosophy of life, a system of moral and religious principles, and do what is possible to implant the results of his sober thought into the mind of the child.

But, you say, why not cross the bridge when we come to it? Why do we have clinics and psychiatrists if it is not possible for psychoanalysis and psychology to

come to the rescue when life presents insurmountable difficulties?

Clinics and psychiatrists are very important aids in dealing with the stress and strain of life; and psychoanalysis and psychology offer valuable therapeutic assistance in the treatment of many mental patients.

It is, however, a matter of major importance for psychiatrists and the public in general to realize that there are no tricks of psychoanalysis or psychology by which a fundamental discontent and deep-rooted unhappiness may be banished like magic, and the individual come forth from his psychotherapy whole and hearty and filled with interest in accomplishment and the joy of life. No human being can be essentially and truly happy, unless his intellect is illumined by ideals worthy of the dignity of human nature and a will that is consecrated to this realization.

But when the days draw near that please one not, and when one can only look back on a wasted past and forward to a hopeless future, well may he feel with Francis Thompson:

In the rash lustihood of my young powers,

I shook the pillaring hours
And pulled my life upon me; grimed
with smears,

I stand amid the dust o' the mounded
years—

My mangled youth lies dead beneath the
heap.

My days have crackled and gone up in
smoke,

Have puffed and burst as sun starts on
a stream.

When such a realization clouds the days of a human being and he reacts by mental mechanisms peculiar to his temperament and suffers the torments of anxiety or is overwhelmed in the depths of a depression or slouches away in the silence and negativism, the sullenness and cynicism, the antagonism and hatred that flow from a schizophrenic trend, one must not expect to work a permanent transformation merely by some kind of mental surgery on the Super-ego and the Id.

But you say, what can religion do for you in the trials of life? It has in the first place a certain prophylactic value, ruling out various mental disorders. And how does it do this?

You will remember that I have just pointed out that the philosophy of religion leads to the concept of God organizing a social order as the soul vivifies the body. In the same way, God in the natural order by the virtue of religion organizes the life of the individual and directs it to an end that is worth while. There are many people whose fundamental disorder is a disorganized life. They have no object in life. They may perhaps have been to college, but throughout their college years there was no coordination between the college program and a future career. And when they entered life, they had no idea of accomplishing anything worth while. As a result, we have various types of undesirable behavior and unfortunate

consequences and finally a mental crisis.

Fidelity to the ideals of a mere natural religion would be sufficient to prevent the development of this condition. No man lives for himself. Every man should live for God and, therefore, do a work for God in the world. What is God's work in the world? Many things are open to you; you have a wide field of choice. But when you have chosen, you must realize that success in your career is not a matter that concerns yourself alone. For your career is the role in life that God wants you to unfold and your work is the work that God wants you to do; and, therefore, it must be well done. Perhaps you will tire of your work. Every career in the actual living, loses some of the glamor with which it was enhaloed in adolescent imagination. But when that time comes and the dreams of youth are replaced by the toil of a man, one may suffer fatigue but never be wearied, if one's life is vivified by the virtue of religion, and the mind is illumined by the ideal of consuming oneself utterly in doing all one possibly can do to finish the work God has given him to do.

As there are individuals whose life is disorganized, so also there are families in which family life is disorganized. For those families, the home is a kind of boarding house. There is no time for rising or retiring. Meals are prepared at irregular hours and are seldom family functions. All

scatter in the evening to personal interests and affairs. The family group is atomistic, devoid of an organizing principle, without any consciousness of itself as a social unit. It is a temporary collocation of individuals that will soon disintegrate, having performed no function of real value to God or man and perhaps in some instances being a focus of evil.

Religion is capable of organizing family life. The religious family is a school of the service of God. The day dawns with prayer and breakfast is finished in ample time for each one to go leisurely to his allotted task. "What is more blessed," wrote Basil to Gregory, "than to imitate on earth the choir of angels, rising with the dawn to pray and adore the Creator with hymns and canticles; and then, when the sun is shining brightly, betake ourselves to work, accompanying it everywhere with prayers, and as if with salt to season the products of our art with holy songs."²

In this religious family life time is organized that all may do their work well, for what is done for God must be well done. Children are educated to do a work for God in the world, and parents sacrifice time and energy laboring for the welfare of the child, who is one day to find a place in the social order over which God reigns supreme.

The social worker will be able

to solve the apparently insoluble problems of many a juvenile delinquent, if the home can be reorganized and vivified by the principles of religion.

But to impart religion, one must be religious oneself.

Those who cannot see beyond the broken home and state care of the children have not much to offer beyond mere clinical service as their contribution to the problem of mental hygiene.

When Aristotle was considering the consolations of philosophy, he was bound to make a restriction and own that philosophy was the source of human happiness, if one enjoyed an adequate sufficiency of the goods of this world and were not overwhelmed with the sorrows of Priam.

But it happens all too often that one does not enjoy an adequate sufficiency of the goods of this world and at the same time has to endure trials and calamities of overwhelming intensity.

It is in such crises that philosophy and natural religion seem wholly inadequate and in which, explain it as you may, supernatural religion is capable of transcending the virtues and giving peace in the midst of thorns by means of the beatitudes.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake. Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake: Be glad and rejoice,

² Ep. ad Gregore, II; Migne P. L. XXXII, 225-228.

for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you."

I am well aware that there is a tendency in certain circles to call in question the value of these principles in the modern world. And it is true that they have little value to one whose mind is not imbued with the principles of a religion that transcends all natural religion and embraces the mystery of the Cross. Fortunately for this world, the mystery of the Cross and the consolations of the Eucharist enlighten the minds of millions not as mere poetic fictions, but as the expression of the Divine Reality of Him Who dwelt among us and Who illumines the mind of every man that cometh into this world.

Let us take an example of the consolations of religion to a soldier in France. Joyce Kilmer thus describes an experience typical of a doughboy's life in France in the great European war.

"We had hiked seventeen miles that stormy December day—the third of a four days' journey. The snow was piled high on our packs, our rifles were crusted with ice, the leather of our hob-nailed boots was frozen stiff over our lamed feet. The weary lieutenant led us to the door of a little house in a side street. We at once climbed to the chill attic, our billet for the night. First we lifted the packs from one another's aching

shoulders; then, without spreading our blankets, we lay down on bare boards."³

And then there was the emptiness and uncertainties of a soldier's life in France and the loneliness, the separation from those he loved, which in Kilmer's case was soon to be terminated by death. But Kilmer has expressed in a poem how the time he took for prayerful meditation gave a meaning and a value to all he suffered. The poem was first entitled: *Meditatio militis*: The meditation of a soldier, and runs as follows:

My shoulders ache beneath my pack
(Lie easier, Cross, upon His Back.)

I march with feet that burn and smart
(Tread, Holy Feet, upon my heart.)

Men shout at me who may not speak
(They scourged Thy back and smote Thy cheek.)

I may not lift a hand to clear
My eyes of salty drops that scar.

(Then shall my fickle soul forget
Thy agony of Bloody Sweat?)

My rifle hand is stiff and numb
(From Thy pierced palm red rivers come.)

Lord, Thou didst suffer more for me
Than all the hosts of land and sea.

So let me render back again
This millionth of Thy gift. Amen.

One who can look at the dangers and endure the hardships of war with the spirit of Joyce Kilmer is not likely to succumb to the cowardly, hysterical mechan-

³Joyce Kilmer. Holy Ireland. I, 11.

isms of shell shock. And that same spirit of religion can carry one through the storms of life, so that in the midst of the keenest suffering there is a peace and a happiness that cannot be destroyed by any anguish, however keen.

But in order that this may be, religion must be honest and true. It must play a real part in daily life and be the expression of the life of man in the presence of God.

And so if one will consider the all-important truth that God is the supreme intelligence in which

world of intelligent beings, he will realize the necessity of the conscious relationship in which the human mind must stand habitually in the presence of God. Man must take part in an active relationship to God if he is to attain the fullness of his perfection.

Without this intellectual communion with God, the human personality must fall far short of its ideal perfection. Since the function of mental hygiene is to enable the human personality to attain its full perfection, there can be no adequate mental hygiene from which religion is excluded.



ANCIENT MATERIA MEDICA AND THERAPEUTICS

Among the many clay tablets from Nippur preserved in the University of Pennsylvania Museum collection, there is a remarkable document, inscribed in the cuneiform character of early pre-Sargonic style—about 2600 B.C.—which roused considerable interest at a recent surgical convention held in Philadelphia.

The tablet—16 x 9.5 cm.—long dormant in the Museum, is well preserved on the reverse. The obverse is unfortunately almost illegible, except for a few lines. Photographs, transliteration and translation, as far as possible, will help to realize the early use of drugs, prescriptions, and the

elaborate treatment of a burnt foot.

The drugs include various herbs, plants, seeds, flour, wheat, barley, cassia, balsam, salt, sesame and cedar oils, powdered woods, thorn root and twig, hot beer, water, etc., which, it is prescribed, “to wash, pound, boil on fire, pour, sprinkle, plaster, anoint, clean—peel!—and mix with the water.

For the treatment of a burnt foot, strange things like a water snake, a cow’s teat—perhaps as an artificial skin—are prescribed; also an ingenious dripping machine for washing the dust from the foot.—*Merck Report.*