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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/urea20>

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Published online: 10 Jul 2006.

To cite this article: John Dashiell Stoops Ph. D. (1906) The Psychological Basis of Religious Nurture, Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association, 1:4, 123-128, DOI: [10.1080/0034408060010402](https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408060010402)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0034408060010402>

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The Psychological Basis of Religious Nurture

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The Emotional Elements of Religion. The emotional element is a deeper and more fundamental characteristic of the religious experience than the intellect or the will, for the latter are individualistic and the former racial. The racial stratum of the mind, the instincts, impulses, emotions, is deeper than the individual stratum, reflection, will. Primitive man did not have nervous diseases, but he had great emotional instability because his mind was not stored with regulative intellectual principles of conduct. The mind of the savage and of the child tends to regard any subjective idea as objectively true because there is no system of truth with which it must enter into relations. His thinking is a form of imagination. The emotional element is more deeply seated to-day in religious experience because it is instinctive. And the emotions are more easily touched and aroused than the reflective will. The crowd, music and rhythm, emphasis on the startling and miraculous, the cross and its suffering, death and the uncertainty of life, the littleness of man's will and his intellect—all this sets loose the racial, instinctive, level and reduces to nought the higher, individual, inhibitive processes. They serve the same function which the soma juice of the Hindu or the fasting of the ascetic performed. And if it be true, as scientists tell us, that women are more racial and less individual than men, have we not here the explanation of the fact that more women than men are found in our churches? Nor is it difficult to understand why primitive man regards the emotional elements of his religious experience as peculiarly divine. They are not the work of the individual's own will; they are, therefore, the work of a spirit within him. Let one believe in the reality of spirits and auto-suggestion is sufficient to give rise to the belief in demoniacal possession. We can understand the emotional phase of religion only by comprehending the racial elements of experience. This is shown very clearly, as Davenport has pointed out, in the fact that the individual to-day who lives on the racial rather than the individual plane of religion will habitually respond on the same level in business and politics.

The Will. As the growth of the child brings a development of intelligence and will, so was it with the race. The emotional element, because it is a racial phase of experience, existed in full force long before the intelligent will, the individual aspect of experience, was developed. Accordingly, we can see at particular periods in the historical development of certain civilizations who have left us their literature, a distinct recognition of moral elements in their religious life. The teaching of Socrates is a clear example of such moral emphasis. In the teaching of Amos and the other great eighth century prophets in Israel, a very clear emphasis is laid on actual morality, as opposed to the merely emotional, racial, elements of religion. And indeed we may say that the recognition of the individual phase of religious experience, reflection and will, contained the germ of a universal point of view. This is especially clear in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, where religion springs out of the nature of the soul itself and is therefore free from local and national limitations.

There is too little recognition even to-day of the practical will in the religious life. The machinery of the church is more adapted to the emotional type of experience. Our emotions are the deepest elements in our religious experience, but unless they issue in practical results they really do not have the meaning they should have. And, again, to regard the emotions as more in touch with the divine than the intelligent will is to limit the divine to the racial tendencies of experience and to rule it out of the individual phase of our mental life. This is to recognize only the primitive type of religion, to make progress impossible and to prevent the development of the higher types of religion which are all based on an active co-operation between the inner experience of the individual and the divine life.

The Intellect. The intellect has had more recognition in the modern church than the practical will, but it has been made to follow certain pre-determined lines fixed by tradition and institutionalism. Rationalism has set up a system of established truth so formulated as to be regarded as an end in itself. The result is that the formulations of theology have become separated from our concrete experience until a real chasm exists between these abstract formulas and the actual concrete processes of experience. It may be that here is the explanation of the rise of so

many isms, such as Christian Science, Theosophy and Spiritualism.

Feeling, Thinking and Willing Are Only Aspects of Experience. For psychology, life is a unitary process. There are three distinguishable phases of the mind: activity, feeling and thinking, but no one of these can exist without the others in human experience. Hence no one of them alone can be made the basis of religion. Religion is the instinctive response of the whole self to what it feels to be a divine life. The rationalist regards religion as resting on some body of doctrine. Faith is the intellectual consent to a creed through which one is saved. The religious attitude is regarded as dependent on an intellectual attitude. This position psychology shows to be untrue. Thought regulates responses and their coincident feelings, but it does not and cannot create any fundamental tendency of the mind. The emotional method or usual revival method regards a certain set of feelings as a special manifestation of the divine life. But the emotional method is equally unpsychological for the reason that normal emotions come of themselves with the perception of characteristic facts. It is accordingly not necessarily religious emotion but sentimentality to isolate artificially these emotional elements from their relation to the total unity of normal experience. The grave defect of the emotional or revival method is its spasmodic character. Life processes never develop in a hurry. There are earlier and later stages of adolescent development, and there are, accordingly, no short cuts to the religious life. This method may be perfectly applicable to mature wills who have passed beyond the adolescent stage and for whom these precious years of religious development are impossible. But it is certainly inapplicable to the growing experience of adolescence. Their emotional life, already accentuated at this period, demands objective interests and balance, and not an emphasizing of their already hyper-sensitive condition. The emotional factors of the religious life are vital and fundamental, but they ought to come in through imitation, suggestion, personal atmosphere, architecture, painting, music, and other subconscious sources.

The Institutional Method. The institutional method of dealing with the adolescent, which regards the institution as a means of bestowing salvation on the individual through the sacraments, fails to take account of the fact, which is absolutely vital, that re-

ligion springs out of the fundamental instincts of the mind itself. The church is not a means of bringing religion from some outside source to the individual; it is rather the expression of a common religious experience. The rite of baptism, accordingly, must be regarded as a symbol of an inner transition of experience, a fully conscious giving up of self to the divine life. There is implied a development of will sufficient to enable the individual to understand the nature of the transition through which he is passing. Infant baptism belongs to the institutional or sacramental theory. The baptism of Jesus, symbolizing the personal consecration of his adolescent self to the kingdom of God is the ideal type of true baptism. To enter prematurely into the church is to be deprived of the real self-surrender which normally can come only at a later period. It tends to render the whole religious life a monotonous plateau with no mountain peaks of soul-stirring insight and personal readjustment. If there is any one thing on which psychology is agreed it is that things are understood only on the level of the child's development, and in the light of his actual experience. And this holds as truly for the religious phase of his experience as for any other.

Danger of Uniformity. It must, however, be kept in mind that although the mind responds as a totality yet different phases of the mind predominate in different individuals. And this makes impossible in the pedagogy of religion any uniform or standard method. McKinley has admirably distinguished four temperaments which he calls the weak-motor, or sanguine, the strong-motor or energetic, the weak-sensory or phlegmatic, and the strong-sensory or reflective. The energetic and the phlegmatic, he thinks, are the most difficult, the sanguine and the reflective the least difficult, to reach. Women, he thinks, belong to the two types most easily reached: they are also more inclined by nature to self-sacrifice, are more racial and less individual, and hence more responsive to whatever methods are in vogue. It is his opinion, accordingly, that "as a rule religion must hold its own through the women; it must make its chief advances through the men."

The Educational Method. There remains to consider the educational method of dealing with the religious life. This method must be fundamentally psychological. It rests upon the psychological fact that religion is an elemental attitude of the total human self toward what it instinctively feels to be a divine

life. It looks upon nature as the manifestation of a divine life because it is instinctively compelled to interpret its world after the analogy of its own inner life. No one can escape this point of view save the philosophical materialist, and even in him there exists the same religious impulse. The educational method does not attempt to create religion, or to prove its credibility, but to train and develop an already existing impulse.

From this point of view it would seem that the gréat desideratum in the present situation of religious education is a workable, pedagogical method of arranging the material to be taught in a graded system which shall provide material suitable to the changing and therefore different levels of the developing mind. The earliest strata of the mind are those of the play-instincts, habit-formation, memory, etc. Later on obedience to moral and religious laws will be the center of education. Finally, at adolescence will come a new sense of self, a consciousness of independence, a feeling of self-initiative. This is the beginning of the second-birth, a birth not of the body but of the soul. The attainment of this personal appreciation of the meaning of life is the absolute condition of all genuine morality and religion. The inner meaning of the world is now beginning to open before the growing soul. What is most needed is not a curriculum of hard and fast formulations according to which the adolescent mind is expected to model its own experience, but a Socratic method which shall furnish such a curriculum as shall draw out the developing soul of youth. In the early period when the new sense of self is nebulous and unformed, when the soul in its individual aspect is literally being born, there results a second childhood, not physical but mental, moral and spiritual. The development of this individual phase of experience marks a formative period, so that much ought to be made of unconscious imitation, suggestion and the formation of habits. In later adolescence, doctrines, the Bible, the life of Jesus, must be reinterpreted by each individual in the terms of his own experience as he faces life's problems for himself. The teaching of Jesus and his doctrine of the Kingdom of God is the ideal type of material for the adolescent, especially in its mature stage. The pre-adolescent youth must be taught to conform to the requirements of the objective world. The adolescent youth must work out through his own experience of self-discovery the principles of inner self-control, so that through his own self-gov-

ernment and self-direction he may personally co-operate with the objective world.

The study of the Bible from this psychological point of view rests in no way on any pre-existent theory about it, any doctrine as to what it must or must not mean. Psychologically regarded, the Bible is the fragmentary record of the moral and religious development of a race. What its value is depends alone upon the value of the actual facts which it presents. To approach it from the standpoint of our own doctrines, which is the usual doctrinal method, is to take the facts out of their setting and rearrange them according to our own intellectual point of view. This is to use the Bible only as a store house from which to draw material for the exposition of our own views. The real way to study or teach the Bible, if one wishes to study or teach the Bible itself and not to set forth one's own private views, is to become familiar with the history of the Hebrew people and to interpret their literature as a partial expression of their actual life process. When once the truth is grasped that religion grows out of the nature of experience itself, that it has its roots in life, in living tendencies and feelings, and not in any theory whatever, it becomes clear that the relation of the life and teaching of Jesus to human experience remains absolutely unchanged by the historical method of Bible study. Its spiritual significance for experience must remain so long as his life and teaching adequately reveal man's nature in its relation to the divine life.

The method of emphasizing some moral, which usually represents only a subjective attitude, or of extracting some doctrine and making this the central thing is again usually a reconstruction of the subject-matter according to an outside point of view. If we teach the actual facts we need not fear, if the material is properly selected, that these moral and spiritual elements will be absent. They can be taught as elements in the actual material itself. This will make them more, instead of less, effective. The normal mind is objective, not introspective, so that the isolation of the moral and spiritual elements from the total fact or situation will make them intangible and defeat its own end. In the actual world, in the world of poetry, history or religion, these elements are realized in definite events, embodied in actual persons; abstracted from their concrete setting, they are liable, except for those of philosophical turn of mind, to float in *vacuo*.