

Psychotherapy, Religion and the Teilhardian Vision

John Ryan

In this essay I intend to discuss the importance of Teilhard's vision to psychotherapy in the context of my understanding of psychotherapy and its relationship to religion. The discussion will be guided by two questions: what is the relationship of psychotherapy and religion? and what might the Teilhardian vision have to contribute to psychotherapy? As an underlying principle, I take it that the person we become in the course of our lives-and, consequently, the person we are at any moment of life-is a matter of primary importance. All that we do, think, accomplish, and feel as well as all of our relationships, end in that.

I. Psychotherapy

The general aim of psychotherapy is to lead one towards becoming the person she or he is to be, hence towards the realization of a person's unique fullness of life. Although this fullness of life is potentially ours, we are in some way prevented from finding it. We yearn for it but cannot reach it; perhaps not even reach for it. The specific purpose of therapy is to break free of what holds us back: to create the freedom to reach the life we desire and a healing from what impedes us so that we can become fully alive.

What holds us back? All forms of psychic pathology appear to be rooted in some trauma or deficit at or near the core of a person's being. (A sin at the origins, one might be tempted to say) Some central part of us has been wounded or crushed, has been seriously restricted, or subsists in a weakened, undeveloped state.¹

What constrains us is not only the result of mistreatment at the hands of others, but is also something we create within ourselves in responding to that mistreatment. We develop in one way or another in order to survive and to succeed in spite of the destructive elements of our experience. And we often do well. Nevertheless, even in relatively good development, a determinate self-structure forms which is, to a greater or less degree, compensatory and results in its own particular constrictions of the self. We emerge into mature life with certain debilities.²

The way we take in order to survive is a way we take; a certain way we...

This publication may be ordered from the American Teilhard Association, c/o Prof. John Grim, Department of Religion, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA 17837. (570) 577-1205 grim@bucknell.edu