

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Theological Students Fellowship* (TSF) *Bulletin* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_tsfbulletin\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_tsfbulletin_01.php)

This is not entirely a caricature of our hopes and fears. On the one hand there is the hope that a study of psychology will give us a new weapon for our ministry; on the other hand there is the fear that it will be a threat to the simplicity of the gospel.

Psychology is basically the attempt to understand the reactions and behaviour of human beings. As such, it is no more an enemy of the gospel than is straightforward medical science. Facts are facts, whether they are discovered by atheists or believers, and since, as ministers, we are largely concerned with human beings, anything that we can learn about human behaviour will be useful. So far probably all who read this article will agree, and one can suggest two inexpensive books that will give a reliable introduction to psychology in general. The more academic of the two is *A Modern Introduction to Psychology* by Rex and Margaret Knight (University Tutorial Press, 9s.), and it is no handicap to the book that Mrs. Knight is an avowed agnostic. The other is *Teach Yourself Psychology* (6s.) by W. E. Sargent, who is a minister, and who should not be confused with the William Sargent who wrote *Battle for the Mind*. Sargent's book is rather more dynamic than Knight's.

Psychology of this type is foundational, but takes us only part of the way. Our concern is with deeper issues than instincts and IQs. We are meeting human behaviour as a strange and powerful thing, which has become terribly mixed up through the Fall. At times it becomes so confused that we speak of a complete breakdown. Continually we are finding elements below the surface, in ourselves and others, that cannot easily be understood.

Thus we look for help from the depth psychologists, who at least offer some hypotheses about the cause and control of these unruly elements. In looking to these men we must realize two things; (1) They are continually in touch with abnormalities, often gross abnormalities, while we are ministering chiefly to the normal. Yet *normal* and *abnormal* are relative terms, and I should not care to say where one shades into the other. This means that, although the depth psychologist sees exaggerations, and may make judgements that are too sweeping because they are based on exaggerations, yet we shall often find ourselves meeting drifts or currents of behaviour that flow in the same direction as the psychologist's flood.

(2) Unless we have ourselves had the full and specialized training that is necessary for a practising psychologist, we must not attempt to do the psychiatrist's work. We must recognize our limitations, as we do when we minister to those who have a straightforward bodily illness, but some knowledge of the basic concepts may well help us in our pastoral ministry to those who will never need professional psychiatric treatment, as well as to those who are, or who have been, under the care of the psychiatrist.

One point of value is that we may become less superficial in our judgements. The apparent problem may cover a deeper situation of which even the person himself is not aware. What about the difficult member of your Church, often in a position of influence, who is always at loggerheads with you? It is not wholly satisfactory to regard him as an emissary of the devil (he may be), or as someone who dislikes your views on prophecy, or who does not want you to introduce Christian stewardship. You can pray about him, argue with him, and try to love him, but until you can get a lead on what is really biting him, you are working very much in the dark. Psychology can throw no light at all upon the theological soundness of his views on prophecy and stewardship, but if you know something about his parents and his place in the family you *may* begin to see why he holds his views in such a belligerent way, and why you are such a villain in his eyes. In due course you *may* get an opportunity to help him sort himself out. And naturally the traffic needs to be two-way. The minister himself may never have come to terms with himself, and then his people will often be the victims of his inner mix-ups.

Our difficulty at first is which school of depth psychology to consult. On the whole this is more of a problem for the continental with his tidy mind than for the mind of the average Briton. Both among practising psychiatrists and among ministers who have studied pastoral psychology my impression is that there is a readiness to find help from all the schools as occasion offers. A typical example is Canon E. N. Ducker in *A Christian Therapy for a Neurotic World* (Allen & Unwin, 1961. 21s.). In some ways this is a dangerous book

## THE MINISTER'S USE OF PSYCHOLOGY

By the Rev. J. STAFFORD WRIGHT, M.A.  
*Principal of Tyndale Hall, Bristol*

CHRISTIAN MINISTERS are not immune from the temptation to look for Aladdin's lamp, something that will be a short cut to powerful results. Psychology seems to be just such a lamp. Once we can master a few techniques, we can romp away from success to success!

for a student, since Canon Ducker has the training and experience to use treatment at a deeper level than the average minister should do. Yet his principles of diagnosis and treatment are well worth studying, and the book shows how he draws freely from the leading schools, which often anathematize one another.

David Stafford-Clark's *Psychiatry Today* (Pelican) is an excellent introduction to the points at issue, and then one can try to understand the basic approaches of Freud, Jung, and Adler. Since the student and minister are concerned with economy, it is worth knowing that both Jung and Adler are well dealt with in Pelican books, and recently another Pelican book has been published dealing with Freud and the Post-Freudians. If you can read it without being driven mad by the general approach, *Freud and Christianity*, by R. S. Lee (James Clarke, 1948, 8s. 6d.) will give you a good outline of Freud's basic points in relation to religion. One line of development of Freudianism can be followed up in *Mental Pain and the Cure of Souls*, by H. Guntrip (Independent Press, 1956, 10s. 6d.).

This has taken us one step further, but we cannot stop here. It is the application of our knowledge that is so difficult. In America pastoral psychology is a basic part of the training of most theological students, and this normally includes clinical practice. It may be that this has sometimes been overstressed at the expense of a mastery of theology, but much has been written from which we can learn. There is a magazine, *Pastoral Psychology*, published at Great Neck, Long Island, New York; it can be ordered through big booksellers like Blackwells of Oxford, but costs over £2 a year. The same publishers run a pastoral psychology book club, where one is not obliged to have every book, but can choose from a review that is sent each month. Gradually good books are being produced in Britain. Canon Ducker's has already been mentioned; another good recent one is *The Healing of Marriage*, by W. L. Carrington (Epworth, 21s.).

In nearly all these books we find something that instinctively we resist. This is an emphasis on non-directive counselling. The idea behind this is that the 'patient' will be looking for you to give the solution to what he regards as his problem, and your impulse is to give what you conceive to be the answer, whether it is a text or a piece of advice. Yet generally this will not give the person the right and mature solution. He must work this through for himself, and you, as counsellor, are there to go through the experience with him. Your answers must not be answers, but promptings and further questions. You must be aware of what is likely to be happening, but at no point must you impose your solution on the conversation. Again, some may think that this is being over-emphasized today, but it brings mature results for those who have time to pursue it. Time is one trouble. The other is the tension in our mind between what we know to be true from the Bible, and what we must temporarily accept, without direct contradiction, while the person is working through what we hope will be the steps to a cure.

In many areas now there are both denominational and interdenominational group meetings of ministers to follow-up the psychological factors that are involved in pastoral counselling. Sometimes these are under the guidance of a competent psychologist. The classes conducted by Dr. Frank Lake, chiefly in midland counties, are a good example of what can be done. It is a tremendous help to be a member of a group like this, but anyone who has not first done plenty of groundwork study in books will lose much of the benefit and may at times hold up the group.

In this article I have deliberately kept to the subject of the psychological approach. The minister is concerned with far more than the psychologist, as psychologist, can be. He is a minister of the Gospel to bring wholeness to men and women, and he cannot be satisfied with adaptation to the general environment of life in the world. He has the medicine and the surgeon's knife of the Word to apply to the diseases of the Christian and the non-Christian. But his diagnosis of the disease and his understanding of its progress may be helped by a knowledge of psychology and of the principles that operate in converted and unconverted alike.

Very few books on these subjects have been written by conservative evangelicals. The books of Dr. Ernest White are a refreshing exception; one might mention especially his *Christian Life and the Unconscious* (Hodder & Stoughton, 10s. 6d.). I know of only one really deep book written by a symposium of

conservatives, and it certainly is deep. It is *What, then, is Man?*, with the subtitle of 'A Symposium of theology, psychology, and psychiatry'. It comes from the Missouri Lutherans, and is obtainable in Britain from the Concordia Publishing House, 42 Museum St., London W.C.1. My copy cost 25s. two years ago, but the price may be more now. We may hope one day to have a fuller book from Dr. Malcolm Jeeves, whose booklet, *Contemporary Psychology and Christian Belief and Experience* (Tyndale Press, 1960, 1s. 6d.) is well worth reading.