

Religion and Spirituality in Paradigm of Contemporary Psychoanalysis

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“Whether we believe in God or no believe, we all live in the shadow of Absolute - in the shadow of the last questions without the last answers”

Herling- Grudzinski.

Abstract

The role of the religion and the spirituality in the structure and in the psychodynamic of the personality was studied. The phenomenon of the spirituality is considered as the axial factor of personal integrity that defines the ego strength and the cohesiveness of the identity, as both in the cases of mental health as well in the case of mental pathology. The link of the ideal transference with the spirituality is emphasized, and it is established that the absence or the insufficiency of this link causes the development for the tendency of the fragmentation of the personality and the activation of the regressive ego. The compensatory enhance in the psyche the mirror and the twin transferences does not decide positively the problem of personal integrity on the continual period and can be effective only shortly.

The significance of the framework of depth psychology of human experience purified of the mechanistic reification of traditional psychoanalytic metapsychology is emphasized. Its connection with an inner feeling of the righteousness and the moral in the sphere of the content of the thoughts and in the performance of the concrete deeds is discussed. The differentiation of the short-time mental disorders that can occur during some sectarian religious practices and the endogenous psychoses is provided.

Making a man a human being a plastic creature susceptible to any kind of deformation is the main idea of totalitarian ideologies. Who says no, is a believer, religious person, though she/he would avoid the churches of all confessions and replace the word “soul” by the word of “humanity.”

Keywords: Religion; Spirituality; Paradigm; Contemporary Psychoanalysis

Religion and spirituality

What are the commonalities and differences between them? Religion is born of awareness of the Transcendent that is very closely connected with the expression of that awareness in conceptual, cultural, and social form [1], Religion operates with a specific shared sys-

tem of beliefs which are the content of dogma and has communal rituals realized in the process of liturgy. Spirituality connotes a direct, personal experience of the sacred “unmediated by particular belief systems prescribed by dogma or by hierarchical structures of priests, ministers, rabbies or gurus” [2]. Spirituality is “harmonious interconnectedness - across time and relationships” [3]. Spirituality is “the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives [4].

According to Benner [5], “Not all spirituality is religious, and not all religious spirituality is Christian”.

Symington J and Symington N [6] in an article on psychoanalysis and religion divided religion into two groups: revealed and natural religions. Revealed religions are more or less institutionalized and impose a set of mandatory beliefs and practices. Natural religions are not so much concerned with conformity to the Law as with inward questions to do with the meaning of life, involving intuitive appraisal of the inner person.

Korolenko Dmitrieva [7] in “Handbook of Addictology” (2012) have analyzed the situations when revealed religion in the form of “toxic faith” [8] was transformed in the religious addiction and presented the detailed description of this form of mental disorder.

In the recent time, we become the witnesses of the increasing hunger for the use of the spiritual component in the theory and practice of mental health professionals connected with growing understanding that religion and spirituality can positively influence mental health and psychological well-being. The psychotherapy and counseling are beginning although rather slowly, to reverse their negativism and resistance to the involvement of spiritual and religious issues in the psychoanalytical assessment and analytical approaches.

Shafranske [9] reported that according to US National Survey, a majority of American adults (63%) believe that doctors should pray with patients if the patient requests it; and 14% believe that prayer should be a standard part of medical practice. 58% of psychiatrists declared that they would pray for a patient if requested, but only 15% would pray with the patient. 37% interviewed psychiatrists believed in their ability to realize the spiritual intervention independently from the clergy and 57% would recommend the patient consult with priest.

Spirituality as the trait that is present in the structure of personality and the component which defines its significant content during the long time was practically ignored in the analyse of the motivations and existential experiences. This situation was connected with the traditional Freud’s view who assumed that atheism was normative and religion was but a vestige of the childhood of humankind. Psychoanalysis was to complete the philosophical project of the vanquishing of religion by science, extending the hegemony of Darwinian naturalism into the depths of the soul. All profound experiences were to be broken down into their physiological instinctual components and the dynamic of lust and aggression.

Freud [10] diagnosed religion as an “obsessional neurosis”, as an attempt to ward off guilt from the unconscious wishes of the son desiring to kill the father. Freud believed that this desire was acted out in history when the sons of the first tribe killed their patriarch, and then, out of guilt, idealized the dead father and enshrined him as their god. Thus, the origin of religion lies in the oedipal cause that is re-enacted in the life of every boy, laying down the psychological foundation for religion. These foundations, according to Freud, are the guilt and the oedipal wishes, which are enhanced through the obsessive repetition of the ritual and the reconciliation to an idealized patriarchal father god.

Freud suggested that, through fantasy, religion reduces the terror of the threatening nature by personalizing of the natural order, and, first of all, by removing the fear of death introducing the belief in immortality with the hope to receive the reward for her or his good deeds after earthly life Freud, 1912, 1952.

Contrary to Freud, Carl Jung [11] accepted the religion as the source of an universal form of wisdom. Jung asserted the autonomy of psyche; he never limited its function to the dynamic of biological instincts. For example, in working with dreams, he did not limited the understanding of dream images to the play of instinctual wishes, and emphasized that each dream has a psychic integrity of its own that is beyond the system of libidinous and aggressive drives.

Jung believed that the neurosis arises not from repressed instincts but from split-off parts of the self (complexes) that are repressed because they do not fit with our image of ourselves or with the persona that is adapted to contemporary culture.

According to Jung, all men contain a feminine aspect (anima) which they periodically tend to repress, whereas women contain their masculine side (animus) which they also may try to suppress. For Jung the basic psychological task is to make conscious and integrate these hidden in unconscious dimensions of the self in the process called by him "individuation". Jung's theory considered that individual unconscious is only a part of the psyche and that a large part of the psyche is universal for all humans and in this sense can be called "collective unconsciousness".

Religion has leading role in the process of individuation. It served in the past to keep the people open to their depths of the individual and mainly collective unconsciousness. However, in the modern and especially in postmodern culture the role of religion declines and as its result the people had lost touch with their collective unconsciousness, with its themes and images called by Jung "archetypes of collective unconsciousness". In this way the humankind loss the healing power of archetypal psyche.

The task of Jungian analysis was the recovery of the Sacred component buried within the self. This therapeutic process becomes inevitably theological because it involves an activation of universal spiritual power outside of conscious control that brings the wholeness of personality when accessed through the analyse of dreams, daydreams, reveries and intuitive experiences.

Contrary to Jung, Freud portrayed in his intrapsychic theory of psychopathology the conception that neurosis arises from the inherent biological conflict of instincts that detaches individual illness from any particular interpersonal context. Culture is present in Freud's model under the rubric of superego, which tends to become weaker over time as the rational ego gains the dominance over the blind id and moralistic conscience. Spirituality and religion do not have any real space in this schema. For Freud atheism was normative and the mature person was ipso facto an atheist. He believed that religion was false because it had no place in reality as seen through the eyes of Newtonian science He was so convinced in the falsity of religion that he failed to notice that just as there can be a psychoanalysis of belief, so there can be psychoanalysis of unbelief [12]. Just as there are neurotic causes for believing in God, so there are neurotic causes for refusing belief. Such a psychoanalysis of unbelief was thoroughly conducted by Meissner [13], who used Freud himself as a case history and explored the psychodynamics of Freud's atheism.

Meissner suggested that a psychoanalytic examination discloses other function that religion performs besides the neurotic ones.

The post-Freudian and the post-Jungian conceptions of psychoanalytic theorising contributed to newest psychological investigation of the significance of these items for theory and practice of contemporary psychoanalysis bringing into the open aspects of spirituality and religion that were overlooked in the past.

Meissner writes, "The conception of religion as a neurotic adaption to infantile wishes then shifts to that of a more positive adaptive function of the ego".

Hartmann (1958) argued that sanity and maturity of person require a moral ordering of life, a set of values to guide and sustain action. Without it, life disintegrates into chaos and discontinuity.

Psychoanalyst and professor of literature Christopher Bollas [14] makes some important observations about the psychology of the religious feeling. Bollas investigated the early experiences of the child and has concluded that these early experiences called by him “the shadow of the object” fall on the ego, leaving some trace of its existence in the adult. Bollas identified the content of the earliest days of awareness, the primary consciousness of the child-mother dyad and recognized that our first awareness is not of an object but of a relationship. The rhythms of this process inform the nature of the object relation rather than the qualities of the object as object. The infant does not internalize an object, but “a process derived from the object”.

Bollas focused on the feelings of the teenagers and the adults and interprets their behavior as re-creations of the internalized infantile interpersonal environment. The affectivity of those internalizations is termed by him as “moods”. When a person goes into a mood, he or she may be some former primary self. This state may be reflect in becoming of someone he or she knew itself to be in their childhood period; a neglected wrongdoer or an object of admiration. The kernel of the mood Bollas calls a “conservative object” because it preserves a childhood experience of self or childhood psychological state. The function of moods is especially important if conservative objects arise primarily at times of troubles or fracture in the parent-child relationship. This way the child may effectively try to preserve positive feelings to the parents freezing them in her/his memory.

These experiences occur before the appearance of discursive thoughts; they are recorded not in words but in diffuse sense impressions. Such primary emotional states correspond to the W. Bion’s conception of beta elements that are transformed through the alpha function (by mother and the infant himself) into alpha elements, which can be united in complex compounds with an ability to utilize them in dreams and thinking. The primary experiences cast their shadow without a child being able to process this through the language or mental representation. Bollas defines it nothing that “while we do know something of the character of the object which affects us, we may have thought it yet”. These primal senses are the “unthought known” and represent a knowing prior to speaking and are the precursors of thought.

Bollas terms the most primarily maternal milieu the “transformational object” because in this milieu the child learns to transform experience into information about self and world. The transformational object (or the sense of transformational relationships) includes the experience that is close to the religious feeling. This experience appears in the condition of the moments of special psychobiological unity between the child and the mother when the desires of the child for nurture in the general sense are fully satisfied (or fully rejected) by an empathic reflexive or by a lost of empathy mother who does not feel or reject the needs of her child. The state of positive support of the infant’s needs arises the feeling of ecstatic bliss. The content of the experience of such bliss is impossible to express verbally, but this content is internalized and transmuted in the psyche and preserved during all period of life although its form can be changed. Developing the ideas of Bollas, its possible to postulate that in the human being exists a special unconscious drive - drive of the search of the transformational objects. The transformational objects are the objects that have some similarity with primary transformational object relationships in the child-mother dyad. The existential strength of the ecstatic bliss is connected also with its closeness to the state of the interruption of the existence. It is experience of being overwhelmed and awe stuck.

For Paul Tillich (1952) it is experience he calls “ontic shock”. The term “ontic” and its kin “ontological” comes from the Greek word for “being” or “existence”. Ontic shock is the question of existence, of why things exists, of why there is something and not nothing. What is the meaning of existence? Or more personally: why I am here? What is the meaning of my life? Tillich calls the basic of religion that concerns itself not only with the general question of the origin of the universe or the humans but also with the personal question of the possible source and significance of one’s own life.

To exist, for Tillich, is to overcome the threat of nonexistence. Existence is precarious, it is always shadowed by the possibility of ceasing to exist, by the threat of not being. This anxiety is inexorable. Such anxiety Tillich calls “ontological”, for it is woven in the dynamic of

existence and no psychotherapy can remove it. Such anxiety is distinguished from “neurotic” anxiety, which is a function of a person’s life history and can be therapeutically remedied.

The overcoming of the threat of not-being is possible only because there is a power or force of being that keeps the threat of not-being at a bay and sustains everything in existence. Things exist because this possibility of nonexistence is overcome by a “power of being”. This power is what men and women call God.

God, for Tillich, is the source of existence, “the ground of being”, the power of existing itself. Being is the activity of overcoming the possibility of not-being and of sustaining in existence everything from the basic physical particles to the universe. God is the ultimate answer to the question of why there is something rather than nothing.

In this context, the search for the transformational object relationship is similar to the unconscious search for the spirituality which can be absent or unsatisfactorily. Many things or events can play the role of transformational object; this is dependent of the individual early experience of every person. Transformational experience may be called by the listening music, by the seeing of stars in the sky, by the meeting with some person, activated in some place, becomes the effect of meditation, praying; develops as a result of sleep deprivation or sensory under-stimulation. It should be emphasized that the psychodynamic of the search for transformational object reflects the search for the realization of the ideal transference, the search of the activation of religious feeling inside oneself as the necessary component of personal integrity and wholeness.

From the other side the intensification of religious feeling can lead to the development of the mental disorders on the psychotic level. In our clinical practice we have observed the cases when the normal psychobiological drive of the search for the transformational object becomes unusually strong and had transformed into some sort of pathological chase that gradually dominated the content of thoughts and behavior. These clients were overwhelmed by the idea that somewhere near them exists some hidden object that is extremely significant for them. Meeting with this object will radically change their life, not only in economical sense but also psychologically making them “specially elected persons” which have an ability to interfere positively on the development of human beings. The formed pathological chase for transformational object have expressed itself in the loss of most previous motivations, including learning, profession, significant interpersonal relations. The activity connected with the search of transformational object took place in the night periods. The clients hanged over the city when nobody practically can disturb them trying to find some magical object that “waited for them”. In one case of intellectual professional musician middle-aged woman this object was identified by her as real man who periodically appear before her eyes only on few seconds (usually in window of nearby home). The appearances and shortly disappearances of this person had for her special significance as the signs of the necessity to dedicate all her life to the process of trying to meet with this man.

The process of pathological development of the search for transformational object leads to an activation of “recessive ego” (term coined by Guntrip [15]) with the gradual process of disintegration of the psyche and an activation of the complex auto-annihilation tendencies with feelings of existential hopelessness and feeling of loss the sense of life.

The myth denies the essential immateriality of human psyche by portraying mental life exclusively in substantialized terms. It represents modern man’s alienation from subjectivity itself. In result, the psyche takes its place as a thing among things, and it is conceived in categories applying to tangible objects in the physical world [16,17].

Conclusion

The problem of religion and spirituality play significant role in the theory of the contemporary psychoanalysis and especially in the psychodynamic long therapy of the persons with mental disorders. It is connected particularly with the presence in every person the

need of the ideal transference that is unconsciously present in every human, even in the case when consciously this person manifests her or his atheistic ideology. In nowadays many people identify spirituality with religion focusing themselves mentally at orders, rules, and rituals in the frame of various confessions. This approach in some cases can lead to the appearance of the united negative approach to the religion and spirituality. Spirituality has been described as the transcendental relationship between the person and a Higher Power, a quality that goes beyond a specific religious confession. Spirituality is in its essence an individualistic experience of sacred, when the religion includes a strong association with a set of doctrines and institutions. In contemporary culture, some people became disillusioned with the functioning of religious institutions seeing them as rather preventing than activating a personal transcendent experience. This general trend to the secularization has created some forms of "unchurched culture" (Stark R, Bainbridge W. 1985 *The Future of Religion*. Berkeley, CA. University of California Press).

Authors emphasize the fact of inseparability of religious feeling and spirituality from psychological well-being and the meaning of mental disorders. These factors must be involved in the content of the psychodynamic treatment as the answer at often very deeply hidden existential question.

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