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Response to Psychology and the Bible, Volume II

The editors of the important four-volume project titled *Psychology and the Bible* once invited me to make a contribution. At the time, I was deeply involved in other projects and I had to decline the kind invitation. I wish I could have been a part of the project. As I understand it, I am very sympathetic with it. I also have a developing sense of how challenging it is.

Here is my understanding of the project. Editors Ellens and Rollins, as I see it, 1) want to bring psychology onto the team of interdisciplinary players studying, interpreting, and critiquing the Bible. 2) By psychology, they primarily mean a range of modern psychologies developed in the 20th century mainly within clinical settings. 3) They want to fine-tune what psychology can contribute not only to interpreting the Bible, but critiquing it, i.e., uncovering both its healthy and pathological dimensions.

In view of these goals, it can be said that the editors are not envisioning a psychological reductionism. They are not advocating that various brands of psychology should take over the entire field of biblical studies. Nor are they dismissing the need to place biblical texts under the lens of theological, historical, literary, linguistic, sociological, or economic studies. They are simply trying to find a place, within the context of these other disciplines, for psychology. Furthermore, they are trying to find a place for the modern psychologies in addition to the folk psychologies from ancient Israel, Egypt, and Mesopotamia that are embedded in the Hebrew scriptures and the Aristotelian and Stoic psychologies that mingled with the local psychologies of the early Christian scriptures. The editors are aware that these ancient psychologies exist, but their proposals are to supplement, if not reinterpret, ancient psychologies in light of the modern, primarily depth clinical psychologies (although some attention is given to cognitive and social psychology). By privileging these recent psychologies, the project ignores other efforts that used the psychologies of early American pragmatism to interpret the Bible or Heidegger's existential psychology, as did Bultmann, to interpret concepts such as *psyche* and *soma* in the New Testament. Regardless of this choice of psychologies, which the editors could do more to justify, the overall project is well conceived, balanced, and properly limited.

I read chapters in the second volume, and selected chapters throughout, from the perspective of my appreciation for the hermeneutic theories of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. In Ricoeur's early work, especially his *Freud and Philosophy* (1970), he

made a distinction between the archeology and the teleology of the meaning-making human subject. Psychology, especially Freudian psychoanalytic psychology in the counseling situation, could illuminate the archeology of motivations and unconscious processes that shape meaning from the bottom up, so to speak. But Ricoeur also spoke about the teleology of meaning. This referred to how cultural symbols become objects of desire and thereby shape meaning dialectically from outside and downward into the psyche. In *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur clearly believed that it helped to interpret the teleology of meaning with its archeology in mind but that meaning rested mainly with its teleology.

This distinction set the stage for Ricoeur's mature theories which influence various authors throughout the four volumes, most specifically Andrew Kille's threefold distinction in volume one between the world of meaning behind, in, and in front of the text. Ricoeur began to teach that the meaning of the text was mainly in the referent of the text, (the world in front of the text) rather than its grammatical structure (its "sense" or world in the text) or its motivational and social origins (the world behind the text). Writing a text distanced its meaning, at least to some degree, from the motivations of the author as well as the social and economic conditions that surrounded its origin. Does this mean that Ricoeur's mature theory of interpretation eliminated the place of the modern psychologies in interpreting the meaning behind written texts?

I believe the answer is no, not quite. I believe he always held that it helped to understand the archeology implicit within the teleological transformation of a text. But he did seem to demote the place of the modern psychologies in the interpretive task. Even in the counseling situation, it is difficult enough to discern the archeology of the subject in his or her spoken text. It is all the more difficult to discern this archeology in texts written hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago. In addition, it is not clear why the modern psychologies should be thought to reveal this archeology in contrast to the folk psychologies embedded in the text. Finally, since the meaning is primarily with the referent, what more does digging up the archeology add to our understanding of it, especially when the referent in some way transforms the archeology and since our understanding of it is a fusion between the world it opens and our own situation?

There are answers to all of these questions, but they are not easy. To check how some of the authors might deal with these concerns, I look for the authors in volume two who were explicitly informed by Ricoeur. There are two: Andre LaCocque on Jonah and Andrew Kille on chapter 5: 18-20 in the book of Amos. Kille once again explicitly invokes Ricoeur's distinction between the sense and referent of a text. He is interested in the meaning of the phrase "The Day of the Lord" in the lines "Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord?" (5:18) Kille finds the referent of the passage unclear, especially the meaning of "desire" or "craving" in the sentence "Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord." Amos is telling his readers that the Day of the Lord is not light and deliverance but darkness, gloom, and judgment because of their many inequities. Ricoeur would applaud Kille's careful linguistic and contextual work that helps him open the referent of these verses, especially the meaning of desire in the phrase "you who desire the day of the Lord." Kille suggests desire really has to do with "craving," in fact a craving that entails delay in recognizing reality, in this case the reality of injustice perpetrated by his audience. The oracle is not just

condemning the injustices committed by his audience; it is condemning the more fundamental attitudinal self-deception and wishful thinking for deliverance that sustains the injustice. Up to this point, I applaud Kille's careful opening of the meaning in front of the text.

But then he invokes Jung's concepts of repression and projection to explain this craving. Furthermore, he speculates that Amos's audience has a group "ego ideal" and Shadow that it is projecting onto its enemies, assigning all the evil to them and waiting for the Lord to deliver them and judge their antagonists. Invoking Jung seems not so much to help with the meaning of the text as to illuminate possible unconscious mechanisms sustaining the craving and delay. Kille writes, "Psychologists recognize several human mechanisms for denying or putting off present reality, including *repression and projection*." (p. 273)

Since my time is limited, I must conclude these remarks with the following questions. Did Jung's archeology help us understand the meaning of the text or did it help us speculate about psychological mechanisms that sustain wishful thinking and defensive delay? Does the text itself have explanations for this craving and delay? If psychology primarily helps us speculate about various mechanisms of defense and projection, does it really help us retrieve the meaning of the text? Or is tracing the connection between archeology and teleology in ancient texts condemned to be so speculative and tentative that this contribution will be both limited and uncertain? The various excellent articles in this volume and the other three as well struggle with these issues with varying degrees of success. From my angle, this is where the questions still remain.