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Wayne G. Rollins & D. Andrew Kille, *Psychological Insight into the Bible*. Eerdmans, 2007

Rollins and Kille have given us what resembles a restaurant “sampling menu” with the chef’s commentary tossed in to point out salient features of the various dishes and courses. A desire to include a “taste of the town” for all forms of cuisine that have come under the generic heading “psychology” and Bible in the past century makes this a difficult book to review. Even with the clarifications, summaries and fill in bits provided by the editors, it is often difficult to follow a particular line of interpretation.

A second problem derives from the business side, presumably: the “tid-bit” size of the samples provided. It may well be impossible to compile a reader at a reasonable cost without such chop and dice editing. Certainly selections in the second edition of Wayne Meeks and John T. Fitzgerald, *The Writings of Paul* (Norton, 2007) suffers similar problems with a number of its articles. The only solution for the classroom teacher is to insist that students go to the original articles. *Psychological Insight* demands such expansion for the method and conclusions of almost every entry to be intelligible. A teacher as well-grounded in the field as the editors might be able to fill in the gaps, but those of us who are interested observers would have difficulty using this book as a classroom text.

Clarifying the questions in Biblical interpretation addressed by psychology:

- NATURE OF LANGUAGE being employed in Biblical texts: against literalism, words are not what naive reader might presume though there is profound disagreement between Freudian and Jungian approaches over appropriate description for what is the context which illuminates their significance.
- NATURE OF LANGUAGE in its effectiveness in transforming or giving expression to individual and/or intra-personal realities in its relationship to unconscious, universal archetypes or constellations of desire.
- ANTHROPOLOGY, INDIVIDUAL psyche and its operations; relationship between thought, concepts, principles and desires; modes such as dreams, visions etc. by which the “unconscious” emerges into consciousness.
- ANTHROPOLOGY, SOCIAL factors in the formation of person and group identity; dynamics of group membership over against the “Other”; function of ritualized group behavior such as sacrifice, baptism (water, cleansing or purification),

- communal meals (ingestion of symbolically represented “victim” with whom community identifies)
- ANTHROPOLOGY, SOCIAL negotiation of relationships of power, domination, subordination as “mapped” in divine or natural world; existence of “marginal”, transitory settings in which fixed order is inverted or subverted.
 - HERMENEUTICS, SUSPICION to unmask or remedy the toxicity of religion (Biblical tropes and archetypes) as promoting “righteous violence” either experienced by the ego (in Freudian super-ego, ego, id scenario) or in communal violence against the “Other” to whom “evil, shadow side of a group” has been transferred (anti-Semitism)
 - HERMENEUTICS, CONSTRUCTIVE to provide an intelligible language for understanding the transformation of persons, social groups that has been traditionally expressed in theological terms, since the latter do not communicate transformation to the 21st century believer whereas psychological language is widely accessible. Developmental psychology contributes new dimensions to Biblical stories by attending to particular stages, how they apprehend the self and world as well as key transitions between stages.
 - HERMENEUTICS, HISTORICAL hypotheses drawn from the social psychology of groups are employed in understanding what was happening in situations referred to in the Bible for which scholars have little or no supporting information. One must recognize problematic in cross-cultural psychology as well as older, discredited constructs of “primitive psychology”.
 - HERMENEUTICS, LITERARY psychoanalytic literary theory; replacement of the “demythologizing” program with a more adequate understanding of myth and symbol, which also recognizes the symbolic, archetypal as real (but not literal, external facts); reader-response criticism, deepened by psychological insights into the diverse ways in which persons appropriate texts; “characters” in Biblical narrative “fleshed out” with psychological profile.

Points of tension between Biblical theology and psychology that remain

- God as “objective” point of reference, living, “uncreated”, source and goal of all that exists is not to be reduced to the assorted expressions of a “god archetype” in subjective human experiences. (“Biblical psychology” in early 20th century presumed that it could read an anthropology out of the Biblical texts).
- “Psychology” is too broad a term, since the approaches catalogued in this volume are in conflict with each other; most of these “meaning-oriented” psychological theories are not representative of the academic or scientific treatment of psychology today. “Pastoral counseling” (the modern analogue to ancient philosophical “psychagogy”) or some other religiously mediated approach to the “Self” is the discipline which employs such theories. (See discussion of scientific psychology, “naturalistic positivism” vs. the self of Biblical psychology; and

recovery of such Biblical concepts as sin/forgiveness in therapeutic contexts, p. 253)

- Neurobiology, neurotechnology (and their philosophical allies) have a full assault going against the “recovery of the soul” (celebrated on pp. 25-32) which suggests at the minimum that Biblical theology might not hitch its future to psychology. A reticence acknowledged in Anderson’s article (p. 37) noting a shift to speaking of “spirit” among theologians. Excerpt is too fragmented to represent his argument defending theological retention of “soul” language – despite the importance of the question.

Psychology and the Biblical interpreter, watching ourselves as readers (ch. 5)

- Unconscious dynamics, anxiety reduction through distortions or selective attention, replaying early childhood can play out in readings of the text
- Personality types and distinctive styles of interpretation (Everding et al experiments to establish something of a “grid” for diverse reading strategies, pp. 86-94)
- Employing one’s own cultural patterns, perception of normal/deviant human behavior, evaluations in “reading” persons, texts from another culture; much emphasized in “social sciences” criticism of the NT, though the “grid” by which it characterizes the “other” (honor/shame, collective, e.g. p. 117) may be too broad
- Reading out “erasure” of elements of religious experience that are central to reality in the Bible because they “don’t fit” any modern categories (except psychotic, cf. Sanford on dreams and visions, p. 195).

In conclusion, the elaborate “tasting menu” laid before us could be said to highlight a deeper problematic: lack of a coherent psychology of religion. Charles Taylor’s study of William James, a century on, associates James’ focus on “personal religion”, the inwardness of individual feeling – opposed to all the communal structures of churches – has marched hand in hand with Western secularism.¹ If the “heart of religion” for James lies in the experiences of the “twice born”(Taylor: 33-39) – so it does in many ways for those Biblical figures of interest in this collection – Moses, Ezekiel, Paul and perhaps even Jesus in the Freudian read given the miracle at Cana by Françoise Dolto (pp. 177-80).

¹Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today. William James Revisited* (Harvard, 2002)