

# PSYCHOLOGY'S RELIGION PROBLEM

Pauline Magee-Egan

***Psychology's War on Religion*, edited by Nicholas Cummings, et al. (Phoenix, Arizona: Zeig, Tucker & Theisen, 2009) Order online at [www.zeigtucker.com](http://www.zeigtucker.com) or call 1-800-666-2211**

The editors of this important volume have assembled the writings of various experts to comment on several religions and the impact of psychology's stand on religious beliefs. The collection maintains that psychology has systematically attacked all religions, without exception.

In the introductory chapter, the editors offer an accurate account of the movement within the profession, as exhibited by the American Psychological Association (APA), and the way religious values and beliefs have been attacked. The statements made by the APA have been influential in the resignation of psychologists who practice their religion. The APA does not speak for all psychologists, and in recent years it has introduced outrageous positions when it comes to abortion and homosexuality. A supposedly professional organization has been enlisted in the anti-religious movement evident in our culture. Indeed, years ago I resigned from this once professional organization since their professed beliefs were directly antithetical to mine, and to my training as a Catholic psychologist.

This professional organization, controlled by leftists, lacks sensitivity towards its membership and the patients who are subjected to their anti-religious viewpoints. The chapter titled, "The Culture Wars and Psychology's Alliance," written by William T. O'Donohue, offers a great summary of the ways the profession has been politicized. Psychology, because it is a social science, requires sensitivity and objectivity, but too often it not only lacks understanding, it demonstrates a

belligerence that typifies our culture.

In setting the stage for the very title of the book, the editors have emphasized that our culture today is in turmoil, especially with regards to ethics. Psychology has literally declared war on religion. They wisely point to the specific issues which are continually being fought: abortion; homosexuality; gay rights; the status of women; ethical absolutism versus ethical relativity; the definition of normative sexual behavior; the definition of mental health; bioethics/stem cell research; the death penalty; creationism, intelligent design and evolution. These issues are cause for concern because they affect everything from law to education.

Why the attack on religion? Logically, they maintain, if standards of morality are attacked, then we can live in a world which knows no barrier or parameters. We can throw out the golden rule, values, commandments and any laws which we don't like. No wonder ethics is viewed with askance. Indeed, ethical relativism has crept into business and politics, contaminating our thinking. Such "erudite" thinking is exactly what is happening in our professions and particularly the psychology profession.

In the chapter on paradoxical relationships, Nicholas and Janet Cummings (father and daughter) illustrate the historical beginnings of the founders of psychology. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, we had G. Stanley Hall and William James, both of whom had deep spiritual roots. Together with Hugo Munsterberg, a physician who taught philosophy, they viewed religion as part of psychology. Those familiar with the history of psychology in the United States know that many graduate programs grew out of philosophy departments. Little was anticipated regarding the tremendous upheaval that was about to take place in the APA.

In the 1950s many Catholic psychologists felt that the divide between the professional organization, and what they ascribed

to, was widening. Various schools of thought regarding psychoanalysis injected thoughts of abandoning religion and its tenets, finding them "infantile and neurotic." It was around this time that the Reverend Father Bier, S.J. formed the American Catholic Psychological Association. Meetings were held at its national conference on issues regarding values, ethics and religion. It was a safe haven for those of us who did not agree with many of the positions the APA was taking.

It wasn't until the 1970s that the APA moved to attack "faith-based" programs in clinical psychology. A subtle but effective movement was launched. Since then psychology as a social science has struggled to identify itself. Abandoning its philosophical and spiritual roots, and trying to represent itself as the scientific study of human beings, psychology has become a conflicted field of study. In fact, psychology has had an identity crisis and it is still persisting in its endeavors to emulate science. The key element here is that science deals with objective truth, whereas psychology deals with aspects of it.

There are several chapters on the conflict between religion and psychology. For example, homosexuality was eliminated as an official "psychiatric disorder" by the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. An informative chapter on the problem of religious gays written by Michael Lavin clearly wrestles with the problem of the dictates of the APA on homosexuality and the subsequent counseling and treatment of people who are inclined towards this behavior. The difference lies in the belief that homosexuality is a "behavioral" issue.

Transformational counseling has entered the field in the past few years. Not content with stating that homosexuality is not a disorder, the leftists have damned the idea of anyone who serves as a counselor who might support the transformation of a homosexual to switch to a heterosexual life. Lavin stresses that good counseling is predicated on sensitivity and respect for the religious beliefs of patients; the therapist should

not impose his beliefs but rather respect the patient's beliefs and help him in dealing with whatever conflicts that he may have. The Catholic Church recognizes that homosexuality exists but emphasizes the need for chastity in regulating one's life: All human beings possess the free will to change their behavior. Other religions have different judgment calls but the essential thought is to recognize what part religion plays in one's life and support a change in behavior if it is disrupting to the person.

The chapter reviewing the battle regarding sexuality by Mark Yarhouse is a marvelous treatise on the impact of policy throughout the psychological profession. The line has been drawn on anyone talking about abstinence; the counseling of post-abortion women; the discussion of alternatives to leading a "gay" lifestyle, etc. Even the discussion of child abuse is now called "adult-sex" relations. The policies made by working groups, or "task forces," within the APA and the American Psychiatric Association, evince an almost total neglect of religion and its impact on behavior. Furthermore, graduate and undergraduate students today are exposed to derogatory commentaries about religious beliefs. Some might even be denied entrance into a graduate program if an investigation suggests they are "too religious." The pomposity and general bias of the left has invaded the ivy halls so much so that the normal candidate who belongs to an authentic religion feels alien to what is being taught.

A scholarly and serious treatment on the subject of "Judaism and Psychotherapy" by Dr. Isaschar Eshet introduces the reader to a contrast to what he refers to as two "world views," i.e. the Jewish worldview and the worldview of psychotherapy. In Israel, he says, most of the psychotherapists belong to the secular leftist intellectual group. He then launches into a discussion of the basic beliefs of Judaism. To his credit, he emphasizes the need for mutual respect of the two worldviews. Dr. Eshet hopes that the "evolving psychotherapy can also

provide one with tools to unravel hints from the divine worldview."

In the chapter on the "War on Catholicism," William Donohue of the Catholic League gives a very well researched synopsis of the history of psychology and the evolution of the distrust that it shows for Catholicism. Occasionally injecting his usual humor and insights, he points to the very people responsible for such chaos in the 1950s and 60s (which I well remember). He spares no one in his ridicule regarding the research that was done, misinterpreted and taken as solid truth, taking particular aim at the work of Maslow and Rogers. Unsuspecting priests and nuns welcomed the views of these two psychologists with open arms, much to the detriment of their religious orders (some no longer exist).

Fear not, however, because Donohue always sees the bright side and illustrates all the positives that are present in what the Catholic Church has effected in our present culture. The aid that is given to the sick, troubled and least among us is endless and reflective of the generosity of those who believe in our faith. This is well stated and worthy of note despite the trashing the Church receives on a daily basis; the author is well situated to see this happen every day.

The chapter on Protestantism, by Cummings and Cummings, shows that "one size fits none." What they mean is that there is a "buffet" of different beliefs, tenets, and values among the various denominations. Disarray is evident, and liberal thought has been injected into all the different churches.

Subsequent chapters dealing with Mormonism which has been attacked by the APA as a religion, exposes the outright trashing of the beliefs which some 13 million people follow. The bigotry of the APA which is fully documented in this chapter is as provocative as the injustice is blatant. Dr. A. Dean Byrd does an admirable job with his research and fact finding here.

Subsequent chapters dealing with a thorough synopsis of Islam and Buddhism illustrates some interesting concepts. Psychology has been kind to Islam perhaps out of political correctness. Islamic beliefs differ in terms of two perspectives, namely the fundamentalist and the extremist. Both viewed, psychology students may very well open up an interesting area for scholarly study in the future.

For the general reader who relishes information on all religions and their basic beliefs this book is invaluable. It is well organized and the contributors are obviously scholars in their respective fields. This is a "must read"!

*Pauline Magee-Egan, Ph.D, is a professor at the Department of Management, Tobin College of Business, St. John's University. She is also a New York State certified psychologist.*