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Oct. 2, 1954

Dear Dr Fromm:

Some time ago when I was reading your Psychoanalysis and Religion I thought I would write you a letter. Now that I am in the middle of Man for Himself and am hoping to get Escape from Freedom, I think I shall put a few of my thoughts on paper and send them to you.

The chief reason for my writing is that since discovering Karen Horney I have been reevaluating my originally rather premature judgement of psychoanalysis. Now that I am in contact with what is best in the field at the moment, I would like to say that I notice a profound agreement between the psychoanalyst and the Catholic priest on some very fundamental points. I believe that this agreement ought to be noticed and emphasized, because I feel that our two vocations in a sense complete and assist one another. I also feel that there is much in Christian tradition that fits in very well with the general tendency of writers like Horney and yourself.

The reason for this is that Christianity is fundamentally humanistic in the sense that its chief task is to enable man to achieve his destiny, to find himself, to be himself: to be the person he is made to become. Man is supposed to be God's helper in the work of creating himself. Dei adiutores sumus. Salvation is no passive thing. Nor is it an absorption of man into a kind of nonentity before the face of God. It is the elevation and divinization of man's freedom. And the Christian life demands that man be fully conscious of his freedom and of the responsibility it implies. I am in full agreement with your basic thesis on the humanistic conscience. I also observe with satisfaction that you emphasize the mystical element in religion. In fact, Christian humanism and Christian mysticism coincide. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty".

At a time like the present, when over vast areas of the earth systems of thought and government are tending to the complete debasement of man's fundamental dignity as the image of God, it seems to me important that all who take to heart the value and the nobility of the human spirit should realize their solidarity with one another, and should be able to communicate with one another in every way, in spite of perhaps grave doctrinal divergences. I know indeed that in France Catholicism and psychoanalysis are not now considered to be in any way mutually exclusive. In fact there are priests who are practicing psychoanalysts-- though this should not be regarded as normal. There are congresses in which the priest and the analyst join in giving papers and conducting discussions that further the spiritual life of Christians. I believe that there is an association of priests in this country interested in psychiatry, but I do not know any of them.

As spiritual director of some thirty young monks in this Trappist monastery-- monks in the crucial period of their formation, who have been in the monastery between two and six years,-- I fully realize the wisdom of what you have to say about types of conscience and modes of conscience formation and malformation. You can well realize that I run into all kinds of difficulties and problems precisely where an "authoritarian" conscience is allowed to have its way. It is pitiful to see the harm that can be done in potentially fine monks by the pettiness and

formalism they can get into as a result of making their whole life depend entirely on the approval of another.

If you have read the Rule of St Benedict, you can realize that I seem to be faced with an insoluble problem. But I don't think the position is as bad as that. It is true that the Rule of St Benedict presupposes a long period of formation in which the wholespiritual life is summed up in the two words "obedience" and "humility". I know that it is also true that men who are in your terminology "authoritarians" can wreak havoc on themselves and others by a narrow and absolute view of what St Benedict means. Obedience for its own sake, humility for its own sake. However, familiar as I am with ancient monastic tradition, I am convinced that it is possible to take the true Benedictine idea just as it stands and make it the foundation of a life of spiritual freedom and "humanism" and "mysticism" in the best sense. I am sure that is what St Benedict intended. The function of obedience, in his context, is not merely to bring the monk into submission to authority as if the authority were everything. It simply presupposes that in the beginning he does not know how to go about living the monastic life and needs to be told, and that the more he is willing to be open to suggestion and formation, the better off he will be. But if we consider the rule closely we find that the mature monk is a very capable and many-sided person, completely integrated, leading a life of freedom and joy under the guidance of the Holy Spirit rather than out of servile fear. In fact, servility is the exact opposite of the Christian and monastic spirit.

I think that in your treatment of obedience and authority you are perhaps too absolute-- but this is quite natural, since you have in mind Nazi authoritarianism, than which I can think of nothing more abominable. But in the monastic life I think we are quite entitled to ~~XXXXXX~~ "escape" from certain responsibilities -- those of worrying about how to plan meals, what to wear, when to get up, when to go to bed, how to plan our social life etc-- in order to be free for something better.

Finally, on one point I think you are definitely wrong. I do not see how you can consider that mystical religion is indifferent on the question of the objective existence of God. Jnana yoga and perhaps Buddhism are more or less ~~xxx~~ atheistic, but the majority of true mystics stand or fall with the existence or non-existence of God. Besides there is, it seems to me, the absolute ontological impossibility of anything existing if God does not exist. However, I have argued on that point long and uselessly enough not to start it again. I think what you are really saying is that true mysticism does not know God after the manner of an object, and that is perfectly true. God is not experienced as an object outside ourselves, as "another being" capable of being enclosed in some human concept. Yet though He be known as the source of our own being, He is still das ganz Andere. Surely you know Rudolf Otto's work. And do you think God was not real to the Prophets?

However, I did not write to emphasize our differences. I simply want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation of your work, and to thank you for the thoughts you have suggested, which have been of great value in my own work. I hope I can someday do the same for you. Meanwhile

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