PSYCHOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE KINGDOM

By GEORGE CROFT

ANY CONSIDERATION of the ignatian meditation upon the Kingdom of Christ, in which our Lord is at first presented disarmingly enough, it is true,[1] has in the end to handle the fact that, for better or for worse, Ignatius used a military analogy (or, as has been suggested above, catalogy) of the calling of the christian. The most frequent and obvious interpretation of this has been to ascribe it to the personal and historical antecedent experience of Ignatius himself. While not attempting to question the advisability of such an interpretation, the hypothesis is nonetheless proposed for exploration here, that mere sixteenth century history, and Ignatius' own history, may not between them exhaust the intelligibility of the appropriateness of this analogy. Might it not be the case, it is suggested, that the meditation, and the way it is presented, also refers to something more perennially present in human make-up than its nowadays not very considerable outward likeness to conquistadors, knights-errant, or other sorts of medieval fighting men?

Psychological concepts of human aggression

Whether or not it was due to his reflections prompted by Europe's experience during the first world war, it was not till after this four years of wholesale carnage that Freud, now already twenty-five years or so into his psychoanalytical theorizing, first began to speculate about there being a death-instinct in the human make-up. Up to that time, his speculations had referred to pleasure- and reality-principles as guiding and shaping human development, and of aggression as resulting from the thwarting of sensual impulses. After that time, he began to speculate that there might be in man an impulse which had death as its aim: an instinct that was directed to the elimination of the tension of life itself.[2]

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[1] Exx 91.

[2] Berkowitz, L.: *Aggression* (New York, 1962).

Though this is an idea which has not found general acceptance either among psychoanalysts since Freud, or in the wider world of psychological theory and research, yet it has contributed to a growing debate about the way in which aggression, variously defined, can be understood.

By the term aggression, psychologists mean behaviour, the goal of which is the injury of some object or person.[3] Others in the psychoanalytical tradition have adopted a definition more nearly based on english usage as represented in dictionaries, and on more dubious etymological considerations. Thus the meaning can be given to the word aggression of unprovoked attack, or the first attack in a quarrel; and similarly the word can be used to indicate movement more or less tenacious towards something *(ad-gredior)*. These are the meanings suggested by the contemporary psychoanalyst Storr.[4] The emotion of anger is understood as the state of feeling which instigates aggressive responses.

Is there, if not a death-instinct, at any rate an aggressive one in human make-up? That is to say, is aggressive behaviour, defined in one of the ways mentioned above, more than something which is merely learned from others? Among psychologists and psychoanalysts who discuss this question somewhat voluminously these days, opinions are fairly evenly divided between yeas and nays. Among the yeas are to be counted those, like Storr, who would reckon themselves contemporary psychoanalysts with a debt to Freud. While not going to the extent of declaring that man has an inborn tendency directed towards release from life, they would at the same time maintain that there is an inborn tendency to fighting and to aggressiveness. Evidence for this would be brought to bear from the understanding of various sorts of human pathological condition (for example, in paranoia, features of which, it is claimed, are far from uncommon within the range of ordinary human behaviour), where there is an inherent tendency to project hostile feelings onto an environment and onto other people. Other, earlier, defenders of a similar viewpoint would be the post-war psychoanalysts Hertmann and Kris.[5] Defenders of this view of human make-up have recently taken new heart from the evidence of animal ethologists, for example Lorenz,[6] who have written

[3] Thus Berkowitz, *op. cit.*, p 24, and similarly Dollard, there quoted.
[4] Storr, A.: *Human destructiveness* (London, 1972), pp 15–17.
[5] Berkowitz, *op. cit.*, p 11.
[6] Lorenz, K.: *On aggression* (London, 1963).

popularly of the animal studies of fighting between species, which, they claim, seems to show evidence of an inborn tendency, often connected with the defence of home territory.

Among the opposed nays can be numbered other animal ethologists and psychoanalysts who reckon that the ethological evidence is at least equivocal,[7] and that to speak of an aggressive instinct in man is covertly to reintroduce some sort of concept into psychology that is akin to that of original sin in theology. Others again, who would oppose the idea of an inborn aggressive tendency in man, at the same time defend the view, and defend it with meticulous thoroughness, that aggressive behaviour, which is indeed admitted to exist, is better regarded as the result of frustration, by which word is meant the interference with the occurrence of a series of responses directed towards a desired goal.[8]

The debate continues. But there is in the midst of the debate a measure of agreement that the aggressive is pervasive in human behaviour. It calls for explanation as it calls for handling. On the latter point, there is as yet remarkably little that is forthcoming from psychological sources, although it remains true that any step towards understanding is also implicitly one towards handling.

It can also be commented in passing that just as Freud's views on the instincts of man tended to find gloomier expression after the war than they did before it, so also after the second world war, psychological research moved off, in America, in search of the personality-pattern that can end up in support of totalitarianism. As is well known, this research came up with the description of the authoritarian personality,[9] one of the features of which personality is the tendency to displace, and to project onto scapegoats, aggressive energy roused by frustrating experience.[10] More recently still, a large project has been undertaken in this country in search of the psychological roots of persecution and extermination: one of the first fruits of it is the work of Storr, appearing last year, and referred to above. The understanding and handling of aggression, then, whether inborn or learned, or expressed in whatever way, is one of the major preoccupations of psychologists of this day and age.

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[7] Montagu, M.: *Man and aggression* (London, 1968).
[8] Berkowitz, *op. cit.*, p 27.
[9] Adorno, T. W. & al.: *The authoritarian personality* (New York, 1950).
[10] Berkowitz, *op. cit.*, p 153.

Aggression and personal maturation

In another place[11] it has been suggested that the first week of the Spiritual Exercises may have to do with the maturation of human conscience, and that this maturation can, in part at least, also be spoken of in psychoanalytical terms. It was suggested that the coming to consciousness of premature forms of individual self-control, expressible descriptively with the use of the term super-ego, is one of the forms of growth that the meditations of the first week might, if undertaken with moderation, serve to foster.

Our present reflection can, perhaps, take up at that point. Premature forms of self-control, of the kind that the term super-ego was meant to embrace,[12] can be thought of as the control of feeling by feeling. Certain sorts of behaviour can come to be avoided (by the growing child or even adult) because of the anxiety which the impulsive seeking of them arouses. The source of this anxiety is, as it is sometimes hypothesized, the introjection of commands, if not other characteristics, of some authority figure in early experience. Control of feeling by feeling: the feeling that is being controlled certainly includes aggressive feeling, and the controlling force is also aggressive in quality too. In the operation of the super-ego, a premature form of self-control is to hand in which aggression is turned inwards in the person's make-up, against impulse of various kinds. Whatever the justice of these psychoanalytical constructions, it is certainly common experience that the dissolving of some super-ego element of behaviour is accompanied by an access of new, often aggressive, energy. Liberation from some element of super-ego structure is often followed by energetically renewed behaviour and expression. This can take the form of protest. The accompanying affect moves from one which included depressive elements, often enough, to one which is at least temporarily exhilarated.

Quality of adolescent intelligence

It has often been noted that adolescent intelligence is, in certain ways, more able to grasp things than intelligence of any other time of life.[13] It has at the same time often been noted that the gentler, if not wiser, sides of the exercise of intelligence are not most manifest at that time of life. It is true of course that intelligence of its

[11] Croft, G.; *Supplement to the Way* 1 (1965), pp 39–52.

[12] Plé, A.: 'Moral acts and the pseudo-morality of the unconscious', in Birmingham, W. and Cunneen, J., *Cross-currents of psychiatry and Catholic morality* (London, 1956).

[13] Cf, for example, Butcher, H. J.: *Human intelligence* (London, 1968), pp 175–6.

nature entails the response to relationships of things; it has also been said that, in fact, this entails the ability to make distinctions, to differentiate. But the exercise of these latter aspects of intelligent activity are not always in fact distinct, in the early exercise by adolescents, from aggressively energized actions. New intelligence often seems to have an aggressive leading-edge to it; this is true both of individual development, and of the course of the history of ideas. New insight and new crusade are seldom in fact far apart.

In the now well known developmental sequence of Erik Erikson,[14] the particular stage which challenges the adolescent is that of identity (as opposed to role diffusion), and the particular virtue (Erikson's word) which this calls forth in the teenager is *fidelity*.

Erikson would claim that we have almost an instinct for fidelity: meaning that when a person realizes a certain age, he or she *must* learn to be faithful to some ideological view.

In Erikson's schema, each stage of development is incorporated in, but transcended by, the next stage, and it is interesting that the individual's next challenge is that of intimacy, by which he means the ability to fuse new-found identity with somebody else's, without fear of losing oneself. For intimacy, a firm identity has to be at least in the making. This particular psycho-social developmental sequence differs from Freud's in that it continues throughout life, and it is useful to note before leaving it that the stage following intimacy is called generativity – the ability to insert oneself into the world and out of oneself to create a newness of life, whether it be that of a new-born baby or that of a work of art, invention, or whatever.

Aggression and consciousness

Adolescence can be a time of fierce consciousness of self and others. Aspects of self newly come to consciounsess can, for a time at least, take more than their due share of attention.

Concerning the maturation of human consciousness, Jung has pointed out[15] that the centring of the human person exclusively in the conscious realm can be a feature of immaturity. For the person who is more nearly full grown, the centring of awareness is, as it

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[14] Evans, R.: *Dialogue with Erik Erikson* (New York, 1967). The above observations concerning Erikson's work and those under 4 – in the penultimate paragraphs of this article where the relevance of Erikson's points to the present reflection are elaborated – have been kindly contributed by Michael Reddy, S.J.

[15] Jacobi, J.: *The psychology of Jung* (1949), p 119.

were, between consciousness and the unconscious sources of much that is human in current behaviour and experience. The centring of mature awareness is to be, as it were, a bridge that unites, and is not exclusively based upon just the one, or the other, side of human make-up.

Whatever the justice of Jung's suggestion, it leads at any rate to the considerable possibility that one of the aspects of maturation to be gone through psychologically and spiritually may well consist in the recentring of consciousness away from any kind of fanatical clarity of new-found idea or newly-exercised personal power. This, quite possibly, is one of the qualities of growth in personally wise use of intelligent power, as opposed to any exercise of it which has an admixture of pre-rational aggressiveness about it.

Another way of approaching the same sort of phenomenon is to recall what has been noted psychologically concerning adolescent attitudes in religious, as in other, matters. These, it has been noted, often tend to have an all-or-nothing quality, either exclusively for or totally against; where such is the case, the question arises as to whether or not such attitudes are still emotionally over-determined, and whether or not sufficient power is yet to hand to make gently moderate distinctions, which weigh pros and cons. The differentiation of attitudes in religious as in other matters is also a feature of the growth of mature intelligence.[16]

The foregoing in relation to the Kingdom

Without being too confidently affirmative about either the precision or the generality of the points of description ventured above, which occur within the range of ordinary human experience in development, and which are the subject of contemporary psychological exploration, it is legitimate to speculate whether or not they might possibly come within the purview of what is being appealed to in the ignatian meditation of the Kingdom. In brief, it has been suggested above that contemporary psychological discussion, as well as much other evidence, attests to the perennial presence in human experience and development of an aggressive dimension, of whatever origin. It has been suggested that this dimension can be seen to be involved in the processes of human conscience develop-

[16] Cf Allport, G.: *The individual and his religion* (London, 1950), p 103; Allport, G. & Ross, M.: 'Personal religious orientation and prejudice', in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, (1967) 5, pp 432–443.

ment, and perhaps in the maturation of the use of intelligence, if not of consciousness itself.

In suggesting a possible affirmative answer, perhaps the following facts can be noted.

1. It is significant that the way in which the parable of the Kingdom is presented, with its two parts, the one inviting the consideration, 'wouldn't it be wonderful if (there were such a leader)' and the second affirming 'but there is (such a leader)', is directed of course not only to intelligence but to the person's affect as well. It invites a response which is rendered more likely because of the affective approach to it. It invites a response to Christ, which is to perfect the capacity which each person has for less than totally personal identifications, and which is to replace merely super-ego-like formations. Christ is not a finite person. The response elicited from the exercitant is such as to redirect energies made available from prior personal adjustments. The protest to which it leads is to be the committed affirmation of the following of Christ.

2. There is then of course the military aspect of the analogy made use of in the meditation. This fact suggests that the capacity that a person disposes for loyalty and the religious (strict latin sense = military oath) dedication of his powers is to be given in personal and dedicated service of his leader. This plainly has to do with a person's aggressiveness and the way it is to develop into his christian self.

3. Again, one may point to the fact that in the meditation, no description is given of the conquests to be undertaken and to which the exercitant is invited. What is proposed is an offering of greater worth in which the only conquest envisaged is, in the same loyal love of Christ, a conquest of the demands of sensuality, and a readiness for poverty. Aggression is to be given no body. The implications of this offering extend, by implication, to the handling in psychological terms of frustration, without aggression being allowed to issue in its wake. In general this movement is also reminiscent of the development which is spoken of in psychoanalytical parlance as 'the neutralization of aggression', entailing, as we may speculatively add, a tendency to refrain from making distinction into divisions, or from excesses of fanatical conscious awareness.

4. In terms of Erikson's developmental stages, we can see that the call of the Kingdom practically fuses to two stages of identity and intimacy. It is the challenge of identifying oneself with *what* Christ

stands for and an invitation to yield oneself into a real intimacy with him as a person. Such growing intimacy is of course the principal purpose of the second and third weeks of the Exercises, and Erikson's schema suggests that such intimacy will be available to the exercitant to the extent that he has found his identity in the call of the Kingdom. It suggests too that such 'generativity' or creativity as the exercitant's life is to show forth will in turn depend on the degree of intimacy he acquires in such meditations.

One must be careful, of course, not to make a theoretical framework developed in one discipline act as the procrustean bed of another, but Erikson's constructs do seem to shed light on some of the psychological dynamism which the Exercises evoke. A fuller examination of his theory would include what promises to be an interesting comparison between the Exercises of the first week and Erikson's early stages of shame and guilt. But that would take us too far afield from the Kingdom for the present.

The above reflections may serve in some measure to support the suggestion that the personal qualities to which the Kingdom meditation was intended to appeal are both perennially human and, in other languages, the subject of considerable contemporary concern.