

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGION  
IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS  
OF CHILDREN

by

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# I DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGION IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF CHILDREN

**INTRODUCTION:** When one has even an elementary knowledge of the vast amount of literature on the subject of religion; observes the varieties of views held regarding this great constituent factor of life; considers religions both ancient and modern he is constrained to say that a definition of religion that would include all phases of it is quite impossible. We must, however, find some basis on which to discuss the subject before us. We ought to know exactly what we mean by religion when it is found in the consciousness of the child. Our definition then as related to this subject must of course be very elementary. The reason for this is obvious. The structure of the child consciousness is in itself so simple that a definition involving the complex phases of religion would not fit the subject. What then do we mean by religion as used in this sense? WE SIMPLY MEAN A CONSCIOUS RELATION OF THE CHILD TO HIS GOD; HIS THOUGHT ABOUT THIS RELATION; AND HIS ACTION RESULTING FROM THIS CONSCIOUSNESS AND BELIEF.

Since it is possible for a child to love, fear, reverence, enjoy, obey and depend on an earthly parent it appears to us that the same emotional relationship may be carried over into the religious sphere. Why is it not an easy matter to so bring the conception of God into the mind of the child that at a certain definite period in his life he may extend the love, (or any other emotional or thought relationship) that he has with an earthly father to his Heavenly Father? To illustrate: When my boy Ross was less than two years of age he wanted me to make it stop raining and cause the sun to shine so that he might go out to play, but when the idea of God was introduced into his mind he never again made such a request. He had, no doubt, seen me do things which aroused his reverence to such an extent that he was willing to credit me with all power, not knowing of a greater, but when he learned of God he simply made an extension of that reverence. So in the discussion of this thesis it shall be our duty to trace this extension through all its phases until we can say that the child has a fixed consciousness of a definite relation to God. This relationship shall be such that he has a definite set of thoughts, emotions and actions resulting therefrom.

## PART I

### STRUCTURE OF CHILD CONSCIOUSNESS

Before we can proceed with definiteness in tracing out this development we must briefly examine the structure of child consciousness. The child mind is an ever active, enquiring, energetic force even in its earliest stages. It does not remain quiet like plastic clay waiting to be moulded. He is constantly grasping the mental and spiritual material placed at his disposal, in his environment, and weaving them into the texture of his conscious life. Observation usually begins in the first week of the child's life. Our eldest son followed a light with his eyes when about a week old. Observation is the one means by which the child may adjust himself to his environment and learn its ways. As a consequence of this nature has provided for a full use of this power in the normal child. It may not be a strange thing, therefore, if a young child is heard using words which no one can account for him knowing. They have come to him in the course of experience with his elders and the active, observing, little mind grasped them very readily. One frequently hears the exclamation from parents or guardians of children, "I don't see where he ever learned that word", which is a testimony to the fact that children are keen observers.

Again we must take note that the conscious life of children is not an unspotted page as John Locke was wont to say. We have three children in our home and each shows tendencies peculiar to himself or herself. They have come down to the children from the line of heredity from which they spring. But different tendencies from that line have been transmitted in the case of each child. William Byron Forbush says, "By heredity we mean the characteristics which are transmitted at birth from parents to offspring. This includes what comes from distant as well as immediate ancestors." (1)

In developing religion in the consciousness of children it is very important to take note of this fact. It is here we find the need of religion. Original sin finds entrance at this point. From the foregoing two points, we can see the value of religious development in the child's mind. The observing, active energy of the child constantly picking up from his environment shows the necessity of a religious atmosphere to make sure that correct elements are entering his mind. The other point about the natural tendencies to lead away from God shows the necessity of correction in this respect.

We turn now for a moment to notice the native instincts in child consciousness which may be used to serve to the end we desire. First among these is imitation.

#### IMITATION

This we see so common in young children that it would be an incomplete chapter on child life that did not take note of it. There are, no doubt, many theories regarding the imitative faculty, viz., concerning its origin, meaning and development, but it appears to me that Irving King has correctly stated the interpretation of this characteristic faculty when he calls attention to the fact that imitation is not a mere act of copying, but rather the desire on the part of the child to gain new experiences and interpret them to himself. "With the child the emphasis is not on the copying of a certain act, but on the attainment of a certain experience that comes through the copying or imitating. From the first beginning of control, the child is seeking to define his experience, to render it more definite. He is on the alert for stimuli that will enrich and enlarge his experience. Every stimulus is a suggestion to activity, at first, perhaps, merely to grasp some object, later to throw it, later the manipulations of the object by other people furnish stimuli to even more complex acts on the child's part." (2) A complex piece of apparent imitation came before my notice in my own little child. When our son Ross was two years and a half old he was taken to the hospital where his tonsils and adenoids were removed. He saw the nurses standing around him, and the doctors. He took note of the apparatus that was put on his face when he received the anesthetic. For a long time he never referred to the experience without a shudder. When nearly four years old he sought to enlarge his experience and interpret the experience of time past. He got a white cloth from his mother with which he made his little Sister, Ruth, resemble a nurse as nearly as possible. He then got the flour sieve and a bottle with which to administer the anesthetic. He next sought a victim on which to perform the operation. He examined his toy teddy bear and said it was sick and needed an operation on its throat. Arranging all things in order as he remembered his own experience of a year and a half before, he caused his sister to stand by the operating table as the nurse had done. He then covered the face of the bear with the sieve. This is as far as his memory served him, but he frequently talked to the bear for a day or two about his sore throat. Since then he seems to have lost his horror of his own experience, and refers to it as a necessary event in his life. He declares the teddy bear to be much improved by his operation. As a matter of course his toy dog has had the same operation, and only by a violent protest on the part of his sister was her doll saved from the same experience. The above illustration serves to show that the imitative act on the part of the child was but an effort to understand his own experience and, at the same time, to incorporate in his own consciousness the act of the doctor, who evidently had made a lasting impression.

In the religious sphere the imitative instinct is not differently used. When the child observes acts of devotion he imitates them for the double purpose of trying to experience them himself and understand them. To those who would be useful in the incorporation of religion in the child consciousness, it is important that the child's capacity for imitation be carefully observed and made use of.

#### IMAGINATION

The child thinks largely imaginatively, that is, photographically. All that he sees and hears becomes a collection of films.

He develops them by play and they become experience. We may agree that Stanley Hall is right in saying that for a number of years the imagination is the chief means of training, and that the chief additional need of the child is that his mind be provided with rich material to stimulate his imagination, and that he should work this out and express it in free play. Since education claims at all stages to help the child form character, we are glad to utilize the imagination at every stage because it is immensely important for character formation". (3)

Every person who has enjoyed the company of small children knows full well the truth of the above statement. How they delight to picture in their minds the fairy world. The stories told are as vividly pictured before the mind of the child, often more so, than they are before the mind of the story teller. When one speaks to a child of God he tries forthwith to imagine Him before his mind's eye. He can see angels and all other spiritual beings by his imagination. Soon his imagination becomes to him a constructive force. He doesn't hear many stories before his imagination gives him the power to make them for his own amusement and enlightenment. I remember a child very little over three whose imagination led him to invent quite fictitious stories for his own and his younger sister's amusement. Once he told that he saw a man and a woman walking by a railroad track. He saw the man cut the head off the woman and many people running to the rescue. Before they could render assistance, however, a car came and ran over the people. Then God came down and took the good ones all away to heaven and the bad man who killed the girl was pushed into a big fire. The theological ideas in the above illustration are, no doubt, the result of teaching in his home, but the story imagined is the work of the boy's own imaginative mind for the purpose of making clear the justice of God. Thus becomes clear to us the value of imagination as a factor in religious training.

#### CURIOSITY

We find here another valuable ally to assist in the development of religion in the child's mind. At the age of two the child begins to enjoy hearing stories told. He is never satisfied with one partially told. His curiosity insists on his hearing the finish. But not alone in the passion for stories is curiosity manifested. It shows itself in every new idea that comes to the child mind. With endless questionings the curiosity of child consciousness causes him to harass his elders. Especially in the metaphysical realm is this tendency noticeable. "Who made God?", is a question so frequently asked. My little boy of four began questioning about God at the age of three. He is now over four and still he plies his endless interrogations about God. He once asked, "When we die will we go to be with God?" "Yes", said his mother. "How will we go?" "What kind of a body will we have then? We must not go to him with this body which has mosquito bites on it, must we? Does God have new bodies for us with no scratches on them? Where does he keep all these bodies? How does he know the one that will fit me?" Questions such as these were asked by Ross when he was less than four years of age. His curiosity was thus manifested. Nor do I find it less marked in the other sex. Our daughter, two and a half years of age, on hearing of Santa Claus, did not cease her questions until she had exhausted her mother's patience in answering.

This characteristic appears to me to be valuable as an asset to the teaching of young children. When once curiosity is aroused it is not a difficult matter to direct, if tact is used, the disciple to a fuller knowledge of religion.

#### CREDULITY

The elaboration of this quality of child consciousness is set forth by Pratt in his Psychology of Religious Belief. He makes credulity of childhood in a sense a correlative term authority. He says that the child accepts whatever he is told. The possibility of doubt has not entered his head, hence every assertion that he hears comes tinged with the feeling of reality. "It is only after many hard knocks, many clear cases of deception and disappointment that the natural

credulity with which every one of us starts out is modified by a modicum of scepticism; and even in the most incredulous it is never completely overcome." (4) This quality is so apparent in all children that it does not need elaboration. Who is there who has not observed the presence of credulity in children? How they open their eyes in wonder at the story of Santa Claus. Ross was told of Santa Claus. He firmly believed in his existence. When told at four and a half that it was only a myth he flatly contradicted the latter assertion. Moreover he was enthusiastically contending for his first impression. It is usually when some early childhood impression is questioned that doubt arises. We shall further discuss this subject in the next section.

#### PERSONAL POSSESSION

This is the next quality of child consciousness that requires mention. It takes a large place in the development of the religious life within the child. The sense of ownership begins in the second year of life. Among the first words an infant learns to utter are the words "my and mine". We find it necessary in our homes, where two children are so near of an age, to provide their gifts in duplicate. The power of personal possession to stimulate activity and thrift is well known. Ross has developed at four and a half years an ambition for care and accumulation because of this quality. He puts his blocks and cards away with the greatest care because he knows them to be his own in distinction to what his sister possesses. She in turn cares especially for her doll, probably in part by way of imitation of her brother, but more likely because of her sense of ownership. We shall see later how this instinct is used as an asset to religious training. Suffice to say here that in those communities where its value has been discouraged the demoralization of the members has been such that it has been found necessary to partially remove the vow to poverty. "The monk must have his books; the nun must have her garden, and images and pictures in her room." (5)

#### LOVE

Love is the next primitive instinct to require mention. The person who succeeds in securing the love of a child has in that success a guarantee of his power over the child's mind and will. He will be able to get results that another cannot. But love seems to be so natural to the average child that there seems little excuse for one not being loved. Certainly some children are more capable of love than others, but all possess it, or at least a capacity for love. Ruth loves her doll. She is, at two years of age, frequently heard saying, "My dear darling doll." The same expression is used by her in reference to her mother. Ross has an intense love for his teddy bear. He sometimes says, "I love everybody, all the world and God." It seems as though the capacity for love is so fundamental to the child that, though it is not possible to command love to arise, yet by placing the proper stimulus before the child it arises as spontaneously as does the flow of saliva to a hungry person at the sight of food. When the child's love is inspired to fix on God he is on a fair way to being a religious child.

#### PART 2

#### THE INCEPTION OF RELIGION IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Having stated in a general way our definition of religion in its relation to the purpose we have in hand; and having given a brief review of a few of the ~~instinctive~~ constituents of the child's consciousness, we are now ready to note the child gaining his way in religious life. To be religious, of course, the child must have an object of worship. We therefore start with the child's ideas of God and how he gets such ideas.

#### III CONCEPTION OF GOD

The word God to the very young child is certainly a meaningless expression. To some children it is still an empty word at the age of eight or ten or even later. I once saw a girl of twelve years who

opened her eyes with amazement when God's name was mentioned to her. It was a completely foreign expression. But there are many children who have definite notions of God as early as two years. A child living in an atmosphere surcharged with religious ideas will, no doubt, become familiar with, not only the name of God, but will form some idea of what the name stands for. His idea is most likely to be all his own. He will sift out for himself, from the conceptions held and expressed by his elders, certain elements by which he builds up his own conception.

His idea of God, so far as I have observed, is invariably a concrete one. He does not think in terms of spirit. He usually thinks of God as a Father who has special interest in little children. Ruth, at two, said, "I love my father God and want to go to Heaven to sit on His knee." G. said, at three, "I want to see God and tell Him the story my Sunday School teacher told me. He will put His hand on my head and say, 'bless her little heart', like Grandma does." G. Stanley Hall says that his early ideas of God were all concrete. He usually saw Him as a tall slender figure with a pen over His ear taking note of the doings of men on earth. He tells of one of his students relating his early thoughts of God as an old man wearing a purple robe and a purple tam o'shanter. (6) My little boy aged four kept a picture of General Booth which he maintained was a picture of God. When asked why he thought the picture was God's picture he referred to the white hair and the "nice look in his eyes". When a very young child I always thought of God as sitting in a great white chair made of stone with bright jewels inset. He had bright eyes, like the sun, and was constantly watching what we did. He had great ears like mountains with which He listened to all we said. To this day it is not easy for me to get rid of that very concrete notion of God. Illustrations of Children's conceptions of God could easily be multiplied at great length. We note, however, from the above that they are all concrete in form, but vary somewhat as to subject of thought. The reason for variation may be accounted for partially by the temperament of the child, but it is more largely due to the theological expressions to which he has been exposed.

How then does he get such ideas of God? Ross was put to bed each night by his mother or father who prayed a prayer for him. He thus had before him an object upon which his imitative instinct early begins to work. He sees the reverent bowing of the head, hears the reverent tones of his mother's voice, notes the words used and for a long time only observes. He says nothing at first. He notes that God is appealed to as one who loves, is kind, who gives, cleanses from sin, protects, forgives, provides the necessities of life and blesses. It is not long after that the instinct of imitation leads him to pray himself. He then uses words which he has been accustomed to hear used in such exercises. Gradually the thing becomes clear in his mind that he is addressing himself to a being who has the above attributes.

But this is not all. He is taken out into nature. Here his idea of God grows clearer. He hears the wind, sees the sand and leaves moving by an unseen power. His imagination now comes into action. Behind the wind and other phenomena he is taught to think of God. A child of four was sleeping in a room, the window of which had been blown in by a strong gale. His nervousness was too great to allow him to sleep there again without a protest, but when he prayed that night he said, "Please God don't let the wind out to-night." His imagination had led him to imagine God blowing as he blew when he cooled his morning porridge. (7)

The above experience arouses the instinct of curiosity. The following are some of the questions that are asked by my children from time to time. They show strongly the power of curiosity. "Who made the rain fall? Who made the sun hot? Who'll take care of me when I am left alone? How did I come to be your little boy? How is it that you love me more than other little children? I know you do for you don't bring them home to sleep. Who made the flowers grow? Who made me? Where did the baby come from?" There is much in life that perplexes the growing life of a child. He stands before things in wonder, and curiosity will not let him rest without some sort of explanation.



The answers to the above questions brings into action the power of credulity with which children are so highly endowed.

"The young child cannot help believing whatever he is told. For him to hear is to believe. The world of assertions and the world of truth have not yet parted company, and everything he sees or hears bears with it necessarily the tingle of reality. Hence we find that the child accepts as literally as it is possible for him to do so, whatever he is told. As a rule they simply translate into their own language whatever has been taught them." (8)

The above statement shows clearly that when the child hears any plausible explanation of any natural phenomenon he immediately believes it. This is another factor in his gaining a knowledge of God.

Thus we see that by the use of four of his instinctive faculties he gains his ideas of God. When he truly becomes a religious person he then brings into action the instinct of ownership. He will want to express himself as being a possessor of God. The child at a very early age uses the pronouns my and mine in reference to personality. This is my daddy said Ross when not more than two. The idea of speaking of God as my God does not occur to the child as early in life. He only learns to apply such terms to God after he has practised them in the social order, and they have taken a definite meaning in his mind.

Love is another of the primitive instincts of which we have spoken as being useful as an asset in the child's religious life. It is in reality the fundamental principle in religion. Until the ~~and~~ child has learned to love God he will never be able to do one religious exercise with reality. "Love is the necessary foundation for prayer if it is to be real." (9)

## 2 THE FIRST RELIGIOUS EXERCISE - PRAYER

When does a child pray? My memory takes me back to the age of four or a little later. I can remember being taught prayers. Many a time when tired after the day's play through fields of the old farm I was more ready after supper for bed than I was for prayer, but very religiously my mother led me and my brother away to a quiet place in the parlor and had us get on our knees and repeat a prayer after her. My obedience never allowed me to make objections, so far as I can remember, but I still have traces of the feeling of relief when the ordeal was complete. Was it prayer at all to me? As I understand real prayer now I cannot think that in those times I really prayed to God. I had no particular consciousness that I was speaking to Him.

If love is the necessary foundation of prayer we will not expect our children to really pray until they have loved God. How soon may this take place in a child's life? Ross was just a little over four when he had an attack of influenza. He heard prayer offered regularly for him. He frequently requested that family prayer would take place in his room. When he was well again he asked me if it was the doctor or God that made him better. I was careful to explain that God had been the primary cause; that without Him the doctor would not be able to do anything for him. I drew his attention to some bulbs which he had planted in some plots in which he had much interest. He had seen them grow and observed the flowers unfold. I explained that he had planted them and watered them, but that God had made them grow and blossom. "Now that is how God helped the doctor cure you. He had learned from others what medicine to give; God had made things grow out of which medicine was made; then when it was given to him God made it effective so that he grew well instead of sick. That is why I prayed for you, so that God would make the medicine effective." "I see," he said, "Now I love God. He made me well. I guess it is God who sends the snow so I can go out riding." He has now come to associate all his comforts and blessings with God. His little sister was taken ill with the same disease. He saw her recover as he had done. One morning he said to me, "I want to pray all by myself." I listened. He said "O God I thank you for making Ruth well. I thank you for making me well." This is, no doubt, the first real prayer he ever offered. He had been taught forms of prayer which he prayed more or less unintelligibly, but when he became conscious of love being lavished upon him by God he found a stimulus to his love.

Children lacking in imagination may take longer to learn to pray

They need help. A child of six frequently begged her brother to show her fairies. She said she could not see them. But when her imagination deepened she learned to pray.

Sometimes children who have stronger bodies and therefore feel more self-reliant do not feel so dependent on any one. Unless such a child comes to see that there are many things of which he has need, and which he cannot get but by a higher power, he will not be as likely to pray. Very self-reliant, sturdy, little Jack, when asked if he prayed, said, "No, I can get along without praying." "But how could you sleighride if God did not send the snow?" He planted pansy seed and waited for it to grow. I said, "If God doesn't make it rain and the sun to shine warm your flowers will not grow." Though nearly seven he had not thought of dependence in these ways, so when I saw him again he said he prayed now. It seems that dependence is the main motive for prayer, not only in children, but also in adults. Prayer comes as a natural expression of gratitude and love for providing things which are needed, things for which we are dependent on a higher power. Then the imaginative child with emotion enough to respond to the stimulus of blessing received becomes conscious that he is being blessed by an unseen person upon whom he is dependent, he will involuntarily respond in prayers of thanksgiving. He will from the same cause ask favors of this Person, whom he loves, in confidence that he will receive.

### 3 THE BEGINNING OF PERPLEXITY

The child may learn to pray real prayer before he learns much about the difficulties involved in the subject. By reason of primitive credulity he has adopted, without question, what he has gathered from his environment. In other words, it is clear, as Froebel has said, that children feel religion long before they think religiously. It is when they begin to think their way into the subject that perplexity arises. Their extremely concrete conceptions of God present difficulties to even childish logic. They begin at an early age to ask questions about God. "Who made God?" asked my little boy of me one day not long ago. I replied that God didn't require to be made, that he was eternal. "What is eternal?" "It means that He always was in existence." "How can that be? Someone must have made Him or how could He live?" A small boy recently became sceptical about God being able to hear his prayers. "How do you know that He hears what I say?" He was much concerned about not being able to see God. A child may even pray in a real way, viz., out of a heart sincere and serious, without being much disturbed at first, but as experience with external objects increases, he begins to demand the same in reference to all experiences. The questions of early childhood, examples of which I have just quoted, are as real to the young child as any question he will ever have in his life. It is very important therefore at that age to make sure of entering in at the child's point of view. We feel satisfied that many a child is wrecked in his religious development just at this stage by being impatiently hushed up when he comes forward with his early perplexities. The child mind, especially on matters of religion, is like a tender plant. To treat it roughly is to stunt its growth or, perchance, to arrest it altogether. The only way, as I have found, to maintain a continued interest on the part of children in things spiritual is to be as sympathetic as possible with them in this hour of confusion. We need to impress them with a sense of the majesty of God. He is to be presented as a spiritual being. This can only be made clear to the mind of the child by means of analogy. God is love, I explained to my little boy recently. "You know what that is, don't you? You love your mamma. Can you see your love for her?" "I show my love when I hug her and kiss her." "Any other way?" "Yes, when I do what I know she wants me to do." "Well, when you kiss her you are only showing your love, it isn't love itself." "Yes, I see", he said. Now God is as invisible as the love in you for your mamma. He shows Himself by making visible objects and doing acts of kindness in His laws and providential dealings. Now love didn't need to be made, it always was." In the same manner I have impressed upon him the idea of God as Omnipotence and Omnipresence. He, slowly but certainly began to grasp the notion of God as a personality. Recently a series of questions served to make



plain the idea of the unseen to a small boy of four years and ten months. He was puzzled to know how he could be expected to commune with an unseen Being. He had scratches on his hands and arms from playing with the cat. The question was asked whether he would like to have hands that were not scratched. "Yes", he said, "I would." "Would you like to have a body that would never be sick?" He said, "I would, can I get such a body?" "Yes", was the answer, "when you get to Heaven. But when you get to Heaven will that body be you?" "NO", he said, "It is only what I live in." By this method he finally came to see that he was an unseen personality manifested through his material body. The question was finally made clear that God is also an unseen personality manifested by visible things. He lives in the visible and can hear as we hear, though, as spirit, he cannot be seen.

There are those who make great use of fairy stories in order to make plain the thought of the invisible God. Many children are able to grasp the thought of the unseen best by a fanciful tale put in a concrete way. We have recently heard of a small child whose imagination was very strong. She was often found alone in the garden among the berry bushes talking alone to her fairy friends. Whoever had introduced the idea was evidently successful in impressing her with the possibility of being able to commune with the unseen world. That is the important goal to reach at such a stage in religious education. If it is true, as one of old has said, that wonder is the beginning of philosophy, it is equally true that wonder is the power by which a child may be led more deeply into the knowledge of God. It is out of the child's own experience with things that he truly learns. Our boy of four and a half has a wonderful ambition for growing flowers. He had a few tulips bulbs in some dry earth in the cellar through the winter. He was greatly worried about them not growing, but one day, as spring drew near, he saw some little green shoots coming through the earth. One day I saw him down on his knees in a perfect rapture exclaiming how good God was to make his tulips grow. From that day on his wonder increased as the tulips developed. He had often seen tulips growing before, but had paid little attention to them. But this time he had something to do with them. His own experience was the means of awakening his sense of wonder and curiosity in the presence of this miracle of nature. As Froebel has somewhere remarked: "For the development of religion the teaching of visible phenomena must come before the teaching of words: the Creator must first reveal Himself in His visible works before He can be apprehended as the invisible God of our spirits." Conscious reverence naturally lays hold upon the heart of human beings, whether men or boys, when they know themselves to be co-workers with God. A great physician once said, "Man dresses the wound, but God must heal it." As we stated at the outset (of this thesis), the child's knowledge and attitude depends largely on what he sees and hears and feels in his environment.

#### 4 ALTRUISM IN CHILD RELIGION

This is seen in children at the age of two or two and a half, though, it is not always shown from a religious motive. The little child wants a piece of dough to help her mother bake. The boy wants a hammer or a hoe to help his father. The idea of another is very early recognized, but it takes a little time to get the idea of co-operation with another or of sacrificing for another. It is probably not much before three or four years of age that a child begins to sacrifice his own wishes, etc., in the interest of others from a religious motive. When the inner vision of life with God strengthens the power of altruism is gained from a religious motive. Moral response is innate in children and we can strengthen or weaken it at will. The child learns the difference between right and wrong from his social relations. This he at first automatically acts upon. Later as his religious life deepens he learns the difference between right and wrong by reason of an inner sanction. Sooner or later he comes to see that his act is the expression of his will. As the desire to do the right grows upon him he becomes conscious of failure; he knows that if he had willed differently the result would have been different. He becomes conscious of a

higher power urging him to right doing. It is when a love for right can be inspired that a hatred for wrong will grow. Children cannot be forced to act altruistically. This must be inspired in them. "The secret of help is encouragement." As Paul said, "The love of Christ constraineth me." So it is by a constraining love, on the part of elders, for the right: a careful influence of example after love for the right is awakened: earnest prayer to God that right desire is strengthened: the voice of conscience - the divine impulse - is awakened in the child and he will do what he now wishes.

There is no doubt that love is the greatest socializing factor. Through it the power to be a good citizen of the social order is acquired. As a child goes on in life he is loved and through this learns love bit by bit. The child who will act properly towards his fellows only learns to do this by degrees. He must learn first the power of self mastery. "It is dreadfully wrong to be selfish", said a little lad of five years. "How can I keep from it?" He was told to pray and to try hard, but still he found himself seeking his own interests above other things. One day when the soldiers were marching past the house he conceived the idea of being a soldier. He knew he could not go away to war, so he thought of the possibility of an equivalent. His mother saw the point quickly and made use of it. She told him of the self denial of the soldiers, of how they suffered privation, of how they went out to fight the enemy for his liberty, of how many would never come back again and that many who did come back would be maimed for life. "They do all this and more", she said, "because of their love for country and liberty and right." "If I give up my waggon to Tommie, will that be equal to a soldier giving up his home to go and fight?", he asked. He received an encouraging reply. "If I go out and help Mr. Turner get in his garden stuff, will that not be equal to a soldier doing his bit for King and Country?" In short, he had learned the altruistic spirit from an external example. He set to this his inner sanction, and through this learned bravery, unselfishness and the positive exercise of his powers for the good of his fellows. (10)

A boy of six, saying his prayers one night, said: "I thank you dear God for all the good things I have had to-day. There is only one way we can really thank you, and that is by being good and kind to others."

Thus altruism is inspired by example and encouraged by love. There is a wonderful power of response, in children, to love. They quickly and gladly yield to requests of those who have gained their confidence. "My, I love to do my lesson for my teacher", said a boy who had become conscious of his teacher's love. This principle, when lifted to its highest application, finds the child doing right and serving his fellows for religious reasons. "Jesus loves us all very much", said a little lad of seven, who came to me to ask to join the church. "Yes", I said, "What difference do you find in your self because you know that?" "Oh", he said, "He wants me to be good and help others. He wants me to be obedient and kind." "Do you do these things," I asked. "Yes," he said, "I do because I like to do things for those who love me."

#### THE CHILD'S EXERCISE OF FAITH

Many children find it so easy to trust. They go along for years in a home where deception is not known. Living in an atmosphere of sincerity and simple faith, they easily exceed their elders by a faith that knows of no doubt. This may, and often does, cling to people throughout life, but, unfortunately, this is not the experience of all. With many it does not continue without severe shocks. When the child passes out into life, in almost any given community, he sees much that seems to contradict his early teachings. He sees cruelty and crime. He sees people degrading themselves in many ways. He meets with many that are insincere and untruthful. He meets with irreverence and disrespect for the name of God and religion. He is awakened to a new set of considerations. He wonders after all if God has the power and purity that he was told He had. If He has such

power and such regard for right, how is it that He does not exercise His power and stop the wrong? Moreover, as he moves out into the world of nature, he finds more to set him questioning. He sees the storm sweep away the little bird's nest, and destroy the helpless young. He notes the premature destruction of precious fruits by an untimely frost. For him he hears the cry that -

"Nature, red in tooth and claw,  
Shrieks against the law - that God is love."

What must be done in the face of all these facts that come so stubbornly before his eyes? Shall he renounce his faith, or shall he seek an explanation? He finds that, at least, if he is to maintain his hold on God, he will be obliged to listen to the call of faith. Life presents to all of us a riddle. Can we solve it? Do we know the ultimate purpose of God in it all? Then, until we can understand His purpose, we may find excuse in clinging to Him. We should not renounce faith until we have learned the whole story. All thinking children have such suggestions coming to them from time to time. Out of their own experience they can get the answer. In the last section we saw the altruistic spirit developing. Every child has his altruistic experiences.

If he will follow this he will find that, in any section of life, success depends upon the loyalty and unselfishness of all the members of the society concerned. In the larger life this holds good as well. When once the heart of mankind is changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ there will, no doubt, be satisfaction and success.

This brings us to the consideration of the last section of this thesis, namely - regeneration or child conversion.

### PART 3

#### CONVERSION

Conversion - We have now traced the child's religious development from its vague beginnings in his earliest conceptions of God to his altruistic activities from a religious motive, but up to the present we have said nothing about conversion. What do we mean by conversion? Is this a necessary religious experience to a truly religious person? At what age does this experience usually take place? What agencies are used to produce this experience? What results follow after? These are the questions which shall occupy our attention in this section.

What then is meant by the experience called conversion? If we consult Professor James, he will tell us that: "To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self, hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold on religious realities." (11) This definition is one which seems to cover the idea of conversion so thoroughly that it splendidly meets the needs of my present purpose. The consciousness of being wrong is inevitably followed by the feelings that of inferiority and unhappiness. These are feelings necessary for a condition to conversion. Doctor Rufus Weaver gives his definition of conversion as follows: "The voluntary transfer of the control of one's life to Jesus Christ." (12) By this he means that the converted person yields his will to Christ, and becomes obedient unto Him. If we consult Doctor E.D. Starbuck, he will give us a more extensive and analyzed definition. He points out that, according to the data he had before him, there are seven states and processes involved in the conversion of various persons. First - there are those who are to yield to another, break their pride and make a complete self-surrender. A typical example of this is given by a young lady of seventeen years who said: "I had said I would not give up; when my will was broken it was all over." A second class represents the state of determination. A man of nineteen says: "I determined to yield my heart and life to God's service." The third class represents the state of forgiveness. A girl of thirteen said: "I felt the wrath of God upon me. I called on Him for aid and felt my sins forgiven." The fourth class represents

the state of insufficiency in one's self. A man of nineteen says:

"By God's special grace and help I sought peace publicly and found it." A fifth class represents the state of requiring the social sanction known as public confession. "I rose for prayer and felt relieved," says one. The sixth class represents spontaneous awakening. Here there appears no antecedent<sup>thought</sup> and action. There probably was such which, for the moment, had been lost sight of. The seventh class represents the state of oneness with God and His people. One illustrates it thus: "The witness of the Spirit that I was a child of God was very clear." (13) Doctor Starbuck closes his discussion regarding the meaning of conversion with the following statements: "There are two essential aspects of conversion, that in which there is self surrender and forgiveness, accompanied by a sense of harmony with God; and that in which the new life bursts forth spontaneously as the natural recoil from the sense of sin, or, as a result of a previous act of the will in striving toward righteousness." (14)

It will be seen from the foregoing definitions that in conversion a new centre of interest is established in the conscious life. This centre is a more adequate organizing centre. It is a new plane, a clearer insight, a clearer outlook upon the world. Through this experience the self becomes unified, as Professor James says, and is able to adjust itself with more or less satisfaction to the various causes of disturbance and distress of mental and spiritual life. To give Christ the preeminence and control of one's life means that the wrong one has done is atoned for by Him, and is followed by a consciousness of right, and a feeling of happiness. This involves, as Professor Starbuck has pointed out, self-surrender, determination to do the right, forgiveness, human insufficiency and dependence on divine power, public confession, an awakening, and a oneness with God.

II We must now pass on to examine the question as to whether conversion is necessary to a full religious life. Practically all Evangelical churches maintain that it is. There are other churches, such as the Roman and Greek Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran, that substitute confirmation for conversion. Some teach "baptismal regeneration", which recognizes the necessity of conversion, but the plan used to bring it about is the point of difference.

At the conclusion of our last section we found the child who had been reared in a religious atmosphere with strong religious tendencies, but somewhat perplexed as his reason develops. He sees the cross currents in the world of experience. He meets with sin and finds it hard to reconcile what he sees with what he has been taught about God. Moreover he finds the evidence of the thing in himself. He has had high ideals lifted up before him. He has striven to be the type of character that his father and mother have told him he should be. In all his efforts at self improvement he has felt that something was lacking. He becomes conscious of failure. He knows that failure in this direction is sin - missing the mark. It is through this consciousness of failure to attain to the highest form of one's ideal that the state of which Professor James speaks, namely - "consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy", lays hold upon the young person launching out upon life. The higher the ideal, the more honest the individual, the more certain this consciousness of wrong and sin is likely to be. There seems to me to be a direct ratio between the honesty of the individual with his ideal, and his consciousness of sin with his sense of need of salvation. It is certainly a fact of salvation that conversion cannot take the place where there is no consciousness of sin.

Professor James, in his varieties of religious experience" (pages 78 - 127) refers to a class of people whom he calls the healthy minded. This class never sees the need of conversion for three reasons. (1) Because they deny the existence of sin. (2) Because they call conversion an abnormal experience. (3) Because they hold to salvation by education. To answer these objections in full would take too much space. Suffice to say that sin is such an established fact that for time immemorial men have been devising schemes of salvation. That conversion is abnormal as an experience does not argue that no benefit can arise from it. It is maintained on the other hand by Professor

Starbuck that conversion is not an abnormal experience. That salvation by education is possible is flatly contradicted by human experience. The world war, which started in a land whose ethical education was world wide in reputation, came from a people who were sinfully ambitious for material gain, notwithstanding all their education. Prof. Edward E. Hale Jr., son of a Unitarian minister, taught from infancy that conversion was not necessary, was, nevertheless, converted. He says: "I saw I was a sinner, and I resolved to surrender and take up the spiritual ministry of Christ." (15) C. Stanley Hall says, somewhere in his book on adolescence: "Conversion is a necessary experience, and if the time ever comes when the Evangelical churches fail to preach it, psychologists will take it up." Dr. Rufus Weaver says, regarding those who see no need of conversion, that they realize imperfectly, if they realize at all, the holiness of God, and they take such a superficial view of man that they fail entirely to discover that dynamic of degeneration which the theologians call original sin. (16)

### III THE TIME WHEN CONVERSION USUALLY TAKES PLACE.

All students of this subject are agreed that adolescence is the period when most people are converted. Professor Starbuck says: "Conversion does not occur with the same frequency at all periods of life. It belongs almost exclusively to the years between ten and twenty-five." (17) He further adds that somewhere between the innocence of childhood and the fixed habits of maturity, while the person is yet impresionable, and has already capacity for spiritual insight, is the normal period when conversions most frequently occur.

Stating, as concisely as possible, my own view as to when conversion will occur, I would say: It is when the child has a consciousness of his abject failure to attain what he thinks he ought to as a moral and social being that he seeks salvation from this painful condition of mind and heart. This might occur as early as five years of age. The intelligence of the child may have much to do with it. It is found by experience that adolescence is the usual time. It is more correct to say that this is the time when the moral sense awakens so as to have capacity for a bitterness of feeling because of moral failure. Speaking from my own experience, it was when about seventeen I came under the conviction of sin. I knew I was not able to do all I would. I knew much about God, about prayer, about kindness towards others, but still I knew myself far short of what was called for. I sought for peace of heart, I longed for rest from weary tossings in the night from a troubled conscience and a sense of being unforgiven. By the ministry of my friend Rev. J.J. Ross, I learned of Christ the sinner's friend. He led me to think of Him as one whose death atoned for sin, who became an advocate for those who trust him. I believed what I was taught and found grace.

From a Psychological standpoint it appears as though this might take place long before adolescence. We seek to raise our children in a religious atmosphere, and our eldest son shows much religious advantage from this, as shown in section two (of this thesis), but even before the age of five, he has failed so often, and suffered in consequence, that probably were it not physiological reasons he would waken to a point where he would voluntarily transfer the control of his life to Christ at once.

This leads to a word or two about the physical development of the child in relation to the time of conversion. "It has long been recognized that the beginning of adolescence is a period of rapid physiological transformations. The voice changes, the beard sprouts, the proportions of the head are altered, the volume of the heart increases, that of the arteries diminishes, the blood pressure is heightened, and central among the changes are these in the productive system which make the child into man or woman. (18) These changes occur at the very period when conversion, usually, takes place. We must try to find an explanation of the relation between them. It is possible that there is no relation at all, but, so far as I can see, the growth of all the organs, the development of manhood and womanhood, awakens



feelings and interests in the boy or girl. The mind is now sufficiently strong to respond to abstract thought. The heart, which is in a state of love making, is capable of responding to spiritual influence, and to make the transfer of all earthly love to God, whose goodness in giving us life and a religious knowledge of Him has awakened gratitude.

#### IV THE FORCES LEADING TO CONVERSION

When the consciousness is rent asunder then conversion becomes possible. The character of the conversion depends upon this shattering. One outstanding force here is the demand that is made on the will. There is required the rearing of a new controlling centre within the consciousness. As I have had the occasion to mention above, in Christian conversion a vision of the self as a moral failure is a potent factor. God is seen in Christ offering forgiveness and claiming faith and obedience. When Christ is seen as a perfect Saviour always in favor with God, and divine as well as human, He can then be accepted as the spiritual master of one's life. This being done the person may be said to have fulfilled the conditions for conversion.

There are various motives that lead to the effort to seek salvation. Sometimes it is fear. Children are often much frightened of the consequence of moral failure. This leads to a desire for conversion. Then others desire to have the approval of their (social) companions, and for that reason they want conversion. At other times there are people actuated by the desire to be of greater service to their fellows. That makes them abhor their moral failure and long for salvation from it. On the other hand it may be the example of friends, or the longing to rise to their ideal, or remorse in failure that leads to a desire for conversion. Children often are found with anxiety, restlessness, strangeness and the like which indicate a consciousness of wrong, unhappiness and inferiority.

The revival meeting often has much to do with the conversion of children and adults, but we feel that those conversions that take place apart from the influence of undue excitement, under quiet, normal conditions, are the most likely to be real and produce real results. Very frequently the most potent force in conversion is the influence of a Godly person whose teaching and life are consistent, one with the other.

#### V WHAT RESULTS MAY WE EXPECT TO FOLLOW CONVERSION?

Rudolph Eucken says that he who experiences religion in the depth of his soul is never free again from it. There are the following results:- Peace in the heart, a joy always swelling up within, a consciousness of right, superiority and happiness, a great sympathy for one's fellows, a love for God and man, an ambition to spend and be spent in the interest of the Kingdom of God.

"Through regeneration there is produced a complete re-adjustment of the subconscious life, and this transformation is manifested in the field of consciousness, through intellect, affection and will: the intellect recognizes God in Christ as the divine Teacher; the heart recognizes Him as the object of supreme affection, and the will, captured by God, finds its expression in joyful obedience, the permanent, persistent effort to reproduce Christlike conduct. Thus the child comes into right relation to God. He is now in the Kingdom; he is ready for church membership, along with other believers in Christ. The goal of the whole movement of his psychic development is now reached, and, from this time forth, life means for him an extension and an enrichment of a living personal fellowship with God. (19)

We have now come to the conclusion of our survey of the development of religion in child consciousness. We have seen how he passes from one point to another until he bears a humble, obedient and trustful relation to God. His thoughts about Him are never complete. He studies with all diligence any relations there are to be found of Him in the Bible, in history, in nature or society. His conduct is always law abiding. In fact for the truly religious person, who knows the highest religion in his soul's experience, there



is no need of law. He follows the inner monitor who always guides him into the way everlasting.

The end.

Submitted by

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15. Frast; Experience and Grace, P 66-67
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