
PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

a Model of Faith and Hope

by

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Introduction

I would like to share with you how psychosynthesis as a model has influenced my life: not only my personal life but also my professional life as priest, teacher and therapist. I do so with the benefit of hindsight which allows me the possibility of making explicit what at the time was implicit. I can now speak with a conceptual clarity of processes and events experienced at the time as unclear, embryonic, fuzzy and not yet formed.

I met psychosynthesis at a time in my life when I was confused and lost. I was desperately seeking to put my life together in a way that made sense to me as man, priest, teacher and psychologist. I needed a framework within which I could relate realistically to the polarisations I experienced within myself, between my personal needs and my professional obligations, between my desires as a man and my aspirations as a spiritual being, between the demands of my unconscious instincts and the deepest call of my spirit, between my destructive forces and my creativity, and, above all, between my faith as perception of the Divine and my inherited belief systems. Of

course, not to construe these opposites as polarisations but rather as polarities was one of my first lessons in psychosynthesis. So long as I construed them as polarisations I oscillated between the passive pole of despair and inertia and the more active pole of envy - the restless striving for the never to be obtained but always attractive and elusive object, be it woman, academic respectability, life-style or spiritual perfection. At best I achieved a strained accommodation of both poles resulting in oscillation between the spiritual hypertension of an Apollo and the formlessness or abandonment of a Dionysius. At the time it was the healthiest way for me to live and both poles of the accommodation were necessary. My organism knew in some obscure and non-rational way that it was healthier to oscillate between both poles than try to deny the existence of either one or other of them.

It occurs to me that my personal experience of oscillation between the passivity of despair and the restless strivings of envy mirrors at a personal and microcosmic level what occurs at a more universal and macrocosmic level. I say this because when I consider the world I live in, I am confronted by one

inescapable fact: for the first time in the history of our species, from Neanderthal man through the Renaissance to our own space age, we have the power to destroy all life, what that means is beyond our understanding since we have no experience of it and have no images for it. We have no way of imagining the planet barren of all life. To try and do so is like trying to be inside and outside at the same time. The response of the species to this unique and never before experienced situation is for the most part either the despair of political and social inertia so eloquently described by Simone Weil, or the relentless and restless strivings of the aggressive and acquisitive instincts - eloquently portrayed in our newspapers and television. The illusion seems to be that more of the same, whether it be territory, money, arms or ideas, will solve our problems. In the case of arms this is presented as the doctrine of nuclear deterrent resulting at best in a shaky tension of détente. So much of the ever prevailing disrespect for life, whether it be through economic and social oppression or denial of human rights, is based on greed - the acquisitive instinct; it would seem that survival and self preservation, even utopia and heaven itself, are based on the illusion that 'more of the same' will acquire and bring them about.

The question for me as an individual and for all of us as a species is: what is the alternative to the inertia and passivity of despair on the one hand, and the restless, aggressive and acquisitive strivings of envy on the other? Where or how can I stand in my present experience so as to project realistically and creatively

into the future? How do I construe reality so as to experience it creatively rather than despairingly or enviously?

Is the future so determined by the past and the present that it cannot be different? Is failure and destruction inevitable? Is fragmentation and homelessness the only and inevitable human stance? Or is there a response to reality - personal and cosmic - that is life enhancing and creative? In this paper my suggestion is that, while psychosynthesis as a model does not provide answers to these questions, nevertheless it allows me to construe and organise experience in a way that points to an answer; it offers a model for the basic human response of hope to perceived reality.

By hope I mean a basic creative thrust towards the future, based on a perception into the present. It is this stance of hope that allows me to engage the future; it is an experience in the present of the not yet realised. The experience in the present is the experience of **faith**, while the experience of and thrust to the not yet realised is the experience of **hope**.

I will be suggesting that the art of disidentification which leads me to an experience that I am always more than any experience, (which may be the deepest insight of modern psychotherapy and traditional religious practice), allows me a stance of faith, i.e. a stance of inner perception into the essence of things. It also allows me a stance of hope, i.e. that present experience does not exhaust all of experience. This inner knowing allows me to

engage creatively in future experience. I might say that faith is to the mind and consciousness what hope is to the will and creative energy. Mind and Will are faculties of the person, while faith and hope are the highest exercise of these faculties.

Psychosynthesis as a model with its elements of consciousness and will and its levels of transformation of energies allows me to organise experience in a way that avoids the Passivity of despair on the one hand and the restlessness of envy on the other. It shows me a way of engaging creatively in my future while remaining rooted in the past and standing firm or faithfully in the present. I would also suggest it offers similar possibilities for mankind to construe reality in a creative way.

I would like to emphasise that psychosynthesis is a model of reality and not reality itself. It is a way of construing and organising experience rather than being itself an experience, it is more process than event. 'And finally it is a model and not the model.

With this in mind, I would like to amplify the idea and metaphor of psychosynthesis as a model of hope for mankind at the present time. In many ways this paper is my personal commentary on the admonition of St. Peter:

Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15-16)

I am not suggesting that psychosynthesis is the hope that is in me but rather that it helps me to articulate, explain and in many instances share that hope. It allows me to articulate a psychology of hope and it allows me to do so with "gentleness and respect".

In amplifying the theme "Psychosynthesis and Hope" I shall consider the following questions:

- I What do I mean by saying that psychosynthesis is a model?
- II What do I mean by hope experience and what is its relationship to faith experience?
- III How does psychosynthesis help me to articulate a psychology of hoping?
- IV What are the limits and boundaries of this model?

Part I: Psychosynthesis as a Model for Organising my Experience of Reality

If I lived in the medieval world or if I were to live today according to the medieval world view, my overarching category for understanding my world would be 'Being'. I would construe the universe according to its different levels of being - all interconnected through participation in the Supreme Being: this participation would give rise to a sense of order and harmony in the universe, social and political. It would also give rise to different modes or ways of perceiving or relating to the different levels of being.

With the Renaissance and the scientific technological revolution this medieval world view was shattered. The universe was fragmented and knowledge was fragmented and piecemeal. Perhaps it would be true to say the overarching category in understanding the universe at this time was "looking" in the sense of staring and analysing. And it led to ever further fragmentation and separateness.

In more recent times however I suggest the overarching category for understanding the universe is "meaning". The fundamental questions being asked are all about meaning. What is the meaning of what I see? What is the meaning of the law of relativity - the uncertainty principle - the religious impulse - god? What is the meaning of the more creative and destructive impulses in my life? And always implied in the question of meaning is the question of purpose. To ask a question about the meaning and purpose of any event or process is to ask not only about its structure and function but also about its relationship to the whole universe, this mode or way of knowing - the meaning - is both analytical and synthesising - focused and open.

Now in trying to understand my world - inner and outer - I inherit or create a model. The function of this model is to organise the various elements of my experience and help me make some predictions about my future. It is in this context that I see Psychosynthesis: it is a model which helps me understand my life, to relate to it through the category of **meaning**. It organises the different elements of my experience inner and

outer - shows me their interconnectedness and suggests a principle of organisation or unity for these various elements or parts.

What are these basic elements of my life experience? Perhaps the most basic one echoes the age/old Problem of the One and the Many. I experience myself with different faces and different ages in different situations. And yet I experience myself as one-faced and ageless. Who am I who has lived through my childhood, adolescence and adulthood? Who am I who lives through my death? Who am I who is angry and sensual, calm and joyful? How is it that with some people I feel at one - in flow, and with others I feel separated and in conflict? How and why is it that sometimes I am in flow and in tune with the universe in time and space and at other times I am alienated and scared? How do I understand moments of wonder and awe together with moments of terror and fear of annihilation?

As a model, psychosynthesis relates to this question of the One and the Many - to the whole and the parts - to the higher and the lower, the inner and the outer - the conscious and the unconscious.

The dynamics of the unconscious and its revelations through dreams, slips of the tongue, forgetting and word association were carefully articulated by Freud. Like most of the modern psychotherapies - especially those which acknowledge the unconscious - psychosynthesis derives from Freud. Like Freud, Assagioli postulates the existence of unconscious energies and impulses. He also postulates the effects in

later life of early learning experiences. These energies and impulses are organised and controlled to act on and have maximum effect in my environment. I might say that much work in Psychotherapy has to do with reorganising and restructuring these energies and their various differentiated forms. The organising centre and principle in this work Freud calls the Ego and Assagioli calls the I.

However, for Assagioli there are other experiences in life which are not catered for by postulating the processes of the unconscious and the dynamics of the Ego. How do I understand the creative process - the thrust to love, the urge for peace and justice? What is the source or origin of these energies in the person? Assagioli postulates another dimension of the unconscious which he calls the **Superconscious**.

Superconscious. The energies of the **superconscious** are as integral to the person as are the aggressive and sexual energies even if for many of us they seem more embryonic.

In so far as the model is visually and two-dimensionally presented it gives the impression of unrelated levels of energy and unrelated levels of consciousness. However, for Assagioli these levels are not reducible to each other. But this does not mean they are unrelated. In fact the higher energies are shaped and expressed through the energies of aggression and sexuality and our early learning experiences. And so if my sexual energies are not

available to me through early learning experience, I am not able to express the quality of love adequately. I may express it as narcissistic, masochistic or sadistic. These superconscious energies are not higher or above the energies of the lower unconscious but rather can be understood as dimensions, perspectives or hidden potential in my behaviour. They are as constitutive of my behaviour as my instinct for self preservation.

The question arises, who am I who experiences my behaviour with its higher and lower dimensions? Who am I who experiences my drive for self-preservation at any cost? Who am I who experiences a thrust to be creative and altruistic? For Assagioli, as for Jung and others, the organising centre of who I am is not the centre of awareness I act from in my environment. My self awareness as I write this sentence (and your self awareness as you read it) is not ultimately who I am. I am more than my experience in self awareness. Rather I am a deeper or higher self that always eludes my awareness as an object. I know and feel its presence through moods, feelings, dreams, symbols and rituals. In Hebrew psychology it is what corresponds to my first name, it gives integrity and unity to all of who I am at whatever level of my being, whether body or mind, conscious or unconscious. It is the subject of all processes within. It does not exist and is not experienced outside of these processes. In that sense I am not an "I" in search of myself. Rather, my self is a yet deeper subjective element to make sense of the mysteriousness of who I am - neither totally fixed nor totally

without boundaries and yet with some fixedness and some boundaries. As such its characteristic or quality is not only one of self awareness - self consciousness. It is also one of self expression and originality.

It seems to me that in his psychology of will as an integrative function of the person and of experience Assagioli complements Jung.

In many ways Assagioli's psychology of willing, mediated through the transforming power of imagination, is one of his great contributions to modern psychology and one which is not yet fully articulated. When this is only partially understood or misunderstood it comes across as another psychology of the "power of positive thinking", whereas in truth he is trying to articulate a profoundly human experience in the mystery of depth, of "more than" and at the same time of uniqueness, individuality and of focus. He is trying to bridge the gap at its deepest human level between knowing and doing. And he does so through a psychology of expression.

Assagioli was very aware of the traps and possible delusions of experiences of the self and its expressive power. How do I know my experiences of self is not just a delusion and avoidance of life - an inflated Ego? What is the difference between the mystic who says "I am God" and the man in hospital who says the same thing? One of the contributions of the psychosynthesis model is in helping to identify pathologies of the sublime from authentic experiences of the Self's Superconscious.

There is yet a further question of meaning to be asked, one which the philosopher and priest in me formulates: "is the Self ultimate in me or is there yet a more deep and intimate root aspiring in me?" I would suggest that beyond the self or soul that principle of organisation and life in me is my spirit. This is my capacity for the infinite and opens me to experiences of universality and divine in the concrete and in creation. In the Judaeo/Christian tradition it is also referred to as the Image of God - the spark of the divine, the desire for God, the spirit within.

And while soul-knowing is through dream, symbol and myth, spirit-knowing is beyond all concepts and images. It is a "not knowing" - a negative knowing that points beyond itself like the predawn darkness, the reality to which this negative knowing points is the ultimate horizon which all authentic religious insight seems to express. There is question here of the "I" standing in relation to its own ultimate ground as Infinite - while yet remaining finite. The "I" transcends all its "knowing here and opens to the dynamic of total receptivity at the source of its reality.

In the Judaeo Christian tradition it is important to distinguish two levels here. One is this desire for the infinite as the ground and ultimate context of all human desiring. The experience of this is accessible to the person as a natural endowment. The other refers to the totally gratuitous outpouring of the Divine, fulfilling this desire for the Infinite. The central mystery of Christianity is this outpouring of

divinity manifested in Jesus Christ. Here there is question of an 'exchange' between God, man and woman, an 'elevation of the natural to the supernatural'. And here **all is gift and grace**. Of ourselves we can be open only to receive; we can know only the desire for the infinite as the ultimate horizon of our finitude.

As a model of the person it does not pertain to psychosynthesis to speak of spirit-knowing. Yet it is open to including this dimension of the human person even if it is not within its own parameters to speak of it.

As a model, psychosynthesis helps me organise not only my inner experiences of creativity, destructiveness and spiritual aspiration but also my experiences of others in terms of right relations. In short this model helps to contextualise me in the universe as a whole and allows me to engage in the tension of opposites - the light and darkness, presence and absence, finite and infinite, human and divine. It allows me to relate to these dimensions of my being and experience as polar opposites rather than as exclusion polarisations.

Part II: The Ultimate Human Experience Construed as Faith and Hope

When I reflect on my life I discover I live in different contexts. I dwell in the context of my family, my work, my friends, etc. Each relationship forms its own environment or context between me as a subject and my world. Likewise I dwell in different inner contexts i.e. my creative world and my destructive world etc. My higher self

contextualises all these different contexts without disintegration or fragmentation. The more I live out of myself or relate from that deep centre of my being the more unified and inclusive is my experience of life. The further away I live from the centre the more fragmented and disorientated is my life.

The question then arises - in what context or environment does my Self dwell? Where as a person do I ultimately dwell? What is the ultimate context that underlies and supports every context?

This ultimate environment - ground of every environment I call the **Divine**, the **transcendent** or **God**. It is ultimate and transcendent because it is the source or origin from which other contexts proceed. There are no contexts outside of it and at the same time it is experienced only within these same contexts.

This means that when I live in a context of love or hate, disappointment, envy or joy I also dwell in the ultimate context.

The act of my person or the mode of knowing that perceives this ultimate context or the divine I call faith. Faith is a perception of the divine in all things human and non human. Now the word faith can be used in different ways. For some people it refers to correct formulation of religious truths. For others it refers to religious feeling or to correct moral behaviour, sometimes it is used interchangeably with belief. In this instance my faith is what I believe in. The focus is more on the content or object of what I believe rather than the process itself.

In this paper I understand Faith to be more than the correct formulation of doctrine - more than correct moral behaviour - rather it is my perception, my inner awareness and response to the divine or transcendent dimension in life. It is my knowing of the ultimate context wherein dwells all contexts. It is the ground out of which all else emerges. It is the ultimate source and place of rest. Understood in this way faith is a profoundly human category and is the ultimate human experience.

When I sit before life - whether poem, music, man or woman, I perceive not only their outer forms of expression, however beautiful or ugly they may be, I also perceive the ultimate context or environment that transcends us both and yet contains us. This mode of knowing is open and evocative rather than focused and grasping.

However, this profoundly human engagement is more than a perception - more than an inner knowing complete in itself. It is also a response. It looks to the future. This inner response in Faith I call Hope.

Hope is the response that seeks to make every context more transparent for the ultimate one.

Hope is the response that encourages me to work on my body, feelings and mind to make my personality transparent for the deep inner life within.

Hope is the response that urges me to evoke the highest and best potential in those I meet and work with.

Hope is the response that urges me to take care of the universe so that its deep inner life and source might be more visible.

Hope, therefore, is Faith in its dynamic movement. Without faith - that inner knowing of the divine - hope is no more than vague wishing for something better. Without faith it easily becomes disappointment, despair and inertia. For without faith I am thrown back and curled up in my own narcissistic world. There is no hope without the knowledge of a source deeper than myself. There is no hope without experiencing the real possibility of a helping hand.

The despair and inertia of many people and of myself comes from an inability to appreciate the help and energy available either from within or from without. There is nothing more terrifying than a moment of despair - a moment without hope.

We know that early life experiences lay the foundations for our capacity to trust the environment, to trust life itself, to trust God. We know too that for many people, and for everyone to some degree, doubt and mistrust, the fear of being let down and betrayed, is stronger than the capacity to trust. This results in narcissism - escape from life and fanciful wishing.

Before concluding this section let me briefly apply this consideration of Faith and Hope to the therapeutic situation. To teach someone to hope and trust in the divine - to respond to the ultimate environment - I must first teach him/her to hope in the more immediate environment. To teach someone truly to perceive the

divine graciousness within all things and respond to it I may first need to teach him/her to perceive me as steadfast and trustworthy.

And then acknowledging the seed and possibility of betrayal and of being let down I lead him/her to perceive and trust in the more ultimate context that contains within it the betraying environment and the trusting environment.

Perhaps this is the profound meaning of the transference in a therapeutic relationship. Therapist and client struggle and work together to meet at some deeper and more profound level. A good therapist is a bridge to the divine and a good therapeutic relationship leads to trust in life.

Part III: Psychosynthesis as a Model for Articulating a Psychology of Hope

Having construed ultimate human experience as faith and hope we may ask what is the link between psychosynthesis and religion. Every religion admits of two aspects: Theoria and Method. Theoria refers to the original insight, experience, vision or perception. Method refers to the praxis for evoking this insight, nourishing it and expressing it in life. Both aspects are necessary to an integrated religious life. Method does not create the vision and vision without method is fleeting, transitory and without a body. In tantric buddhism the relationship between the two is often presented as male and female figures in sexual embrace. It is easy to confuse the two aspects. There are methods and techniques taught as if they can produce and experience of Divine

graciousness. And some religions teach that behaviour and life style are not important once the vision is experienced.

Psychosynthesis as a model pertains to method and not to vision or Faith. It is not a technique for evoking faith or vision of God. Rather it is a map for construing my experiences and helping me contextualise them. At this particular time in history it seems a useful map because of its psychological parameters.

Other maps, as for example - the map of the interior castles of St. Theresa of Avila, or the Mountain of St. John of the Cross, or the map of the cloud of unknowing or the three ages of Garrigon Lagrange - no longer speak to many of us with the eloquence they once did. In other ages people looked to Christ or to the classical heroes of antiquity as models. In our own age we look to the self. Ours is an age of introspection. And so I need a map for construing the inner territory of my life. I suggest that psychosynthesis is a specially useful map in so far as it acknowledges unconscious energies, direction of energy, a principle of organisation with its integrative expressive function of Will, and that it is particularly useful in articulating and contextualising a psychology of faith and hope.

In the context of psychosynthesis, then, how do I construe this act of perceiving the Divine - of standing in the ultimate context? What I am concerned with here is an act of faith, an act of my total being through my intuitive mind. As such it is a non-rational intuitive

knowledge rather than logical conceptual knowledge. For the purposes of this paper I suggest there are three kinds or modes of knowing.

First, there is rational knowledge with its logical, discrete and fixed concepts. These concepts are often organised into a belief system as for example in a particular philosophy or theology.

Secondly, there is non-rational mythic or symbolic knowledge. This is soul knowledge that contextualises me in all time - past and future. It is the knowledge that allows me to say "nothing human is alien to me". It is the knowledge that allows me to be at home anywhere in the world when I hear the words "Once upon a time".

Thirdly, there is negative knowledge, a knowledge by way of negation. This is spirit-knowing and allows me to contextualise myself in all of life - its heights and its depths, human and divine. It allows me to go beyond the concrete to the universal - the finite to the infinite creation to God. It points beyond itself and is ever receding like the horizon. It is a knowledge of the absence of God that loudly proclaims his presence.

Faith and hope, as they have been defined earlier in this paper, pertain at their deepest level to spirit knowledge. At yet another level they pertain to mythic knowledge and at the least important level pertain to a belief system. All levels interconnect and contain each other in some way.

Faith as spirit knowledge ensues in silence within which the Word is heard and is made flesh.

At mythic level, faith is the story of my life and of all people who have ever lived and will live. The story of my life is the story of my soul - it is the story of my God.

Faith at its most concrete level is my belief system. The logical and coherent organisation of my experience and of my tradition.

Similarly, Hope at its deepest level of spirit is a waiting and deep longing or desire. It is a hope without hoping for I do not yet know fully what it is I hope for. It would be easy to hope for the wrong thing: it is more a waiting without hope.

At mythic level hope is creation. It is my self creating and expressing itself in myriad ways through my will. It is my engagement with my world past, present and future. Especially I engage hopefully with the future.

Hope at the level of concrete belief is the daily working out of my life through acts of my will and imagination. It is the concrete day to day expression of who I am - an ever unfolding being.

Hope is an act of my will - an expressive act is mediated through my imagination.

It is through my imagination that I pass over from who I am and where I stand to who you are and where you stand. And always I return if I am

not to be lost and be without boundaries. It allows me to pass over to other ages and other cultures and return to where I am in my time and space. Imagination allows me to swing into the future in vision and creativity while remaining rooted in the present. Indeed it may well be true as Jonathan Hanaghan - founder of Irish Psychoanalytical Society - suggests: It is in the realm of imagination that the deepest human temptation to creativity and destruction are found. It may well be the realm where visionaries and great leaders such as Jesus are tempered and shaped. For it is in my imagination that I either move forward creatively or I regress in inertia, despair and wistful fantasy.

Through imagination and creative self presence I know that alongside the energies of my unconscious in self preservation and achievement at whatever level in my environment there are other energies. I experience a turning upwards, a waiting for an openness towards creativity, love and joy. And I experience these energies within myself as gift and grace rather than contrived or earned. I never exhaust the mysteriousness of who I am and I never possess myself or God as object of my knowledge. I am always more than any experience no matter how high or how deep - no matter how painful or how joyful. I am always open to further experiences.

In concluding this section may I suggest another central point. Psychosynthesis as a model allows me to construe every level of my experience in relation to every other level. And so when I take care of my

body, my feelings and my mind - when I take care of my life's hurts; I do so not as self indulgence, but so that the deep inner life in me might be made visible. I practise the art of disidentification - the art of experiencing that I am more than my feelings, more than my belief systems, more than my mythic knowledge so that I might experience the Divine and radiate it in my life through will and imagination. I practise in my daily life through meditation, through prayer, through exercising my duty, through my creativity, through every action to create a transparent body for the divine.

Conclusion

It remains only to articulate the hope that is in me. In doing so I make the most intensely personal statement. Jesus embodies the passion of God, the heart of God, the eros of God. In him the ultimate context, the mystery of transcendence, is utterly disclosed. His personality construed as bodily feelings, mind and soul is totally transparent for the Divine. He was transfigured on the Mountain and Peter, James and John saw his glory. Others saw it through the resurrection event. His presence among us, historical, concrete and earthy, points to the ultimate "coincidentia oppositorum", the human and the divine. He is the model - not so much for imitation along fundamentalist lines, but rather as a model of identity. I am not so much interested in a religion to or devotion to Jesus but rather a religion of and devotion of Jesus. His spirit and his power transcend the limits of space and time, culture

and ideology, and create focal points of light and love. His presence is disclosed wherever men and women come together in good will to care for the universe. He is my elder

brother on the WAY. He is himself the WAY. I know him not through mind - not through my will - not through my imagination - I know him in my heart.

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