

# From the Couple to the Community

by Roberto Assagioli

## I. Spiritual Psychosynthesis of the Couple

In order to complete this brief paper on the psychosynthesis of the couple, we need to examine its highest and most essential aspect, that of communion between marriage partners and their mutual participation in the transpersonal spiritual Reality. In psychological terms we may call these:

1. The communion between the spiritual Self of the couple.
2. The recognition - or rather the actual lived experience - of union and of the identity of individual Selves with the Universal Self.

This neutral language may be applied to any metaphysical or religious concept. Moreover, recognition, in this scientific, psychological sense, of the reality of the spiritual Self and its intimate relationship with the other Selves and with the Supreme Reality, opens the door to all superconscious experience of every conviction and faith.

The methods for achieving this spiritual communion are the same as those used for the realisation of individual psychosynthesis. In this instance I need only enumerate them: they are meditation, invocation, inner listening; after which follow inspiration and illumination. Through their use the personal 'I' increasingly recognizes its essential identity with the spiritual Self, "rises" and approaches it until more or less temporarily achieving complete identification.

When these methods are used jointly by a couple, by marriage partners, a doubly beneficial result is obtained. Thanks to the reciprocal influences - exchanges which happen naturally, I would say inevitably, in every interpersonal relationship. Moreover, communicating what they perceive in their respective silence leads to mutual integration and also the possibility of reciprocal regulation and correction. For example, one of the partners may receive a symbolic image and the other may help to interpret and understand it.

Furthermore, the sharing of this "inner activity" facilitates and increases the spiritual communion between the partners, as well as their integration and synthesis, on every level. In fact, these methods can and should be used to solve the problems and eliminate the conflicts of cohabitation. Dealing with human problems in the light of the Spirit, asking for light and guidance from the superconscious and from the spiritual Self, depersonalizes, so to speak, these problems and eliminates, or at least diminishes the emotional reactions which stimulate and complicate them. This greatly facilitates their solution and sometimes can be the only way to reach a solution and attain a real and solid psychosynthesis of the couple. By what I have said here I hope I will have succeeded in showing how necessary psychosynthesis of the couple is, especially in marriage and what could and should be done to prepare young people for this task. This requires above all a widely diversified knowledge and appreciation of its importance, through a well organized educational system that could and should be established in schools. This education should consist of four parts:

1. *General psychology*, knowledge of human beings. It is absurd that it is neglected when it should be the fundamental subject in every school. In a more advanced civilization our present method of teaching will be considered primitive and barbarian!
2. *Differential or typological psychology*, or knowledge of the various psychological types.
3. *Differential psychology of the sexes*.
4. *Specific preparation for marriage*, for the psychosynthesis of the couple.

Besides this education which could take place in the school - and afterwards - *pre-marriage counsellors* should be available for the discussion of individual problems. And finally, for those who have already formed a family, marriage counsellors would be very helpful.

These are the most effective and necessary means to deal with the serious crisis in marriage and the family today. Everyone who is convinced of this need should unite in voicing it and stirring public opinion to bring about action in this direction.

## II. The Family Group

Now we will go beyond the couple. We must recognize that psychosynthesis of the family group is not confined to the relationship between the marriage partners and their children and that between the children themselves. The family, especially in the psychological sense, is a vaster entity which takes in the past and the society. This is evident in the case of so-called "old" families which have strong links with tradition. In some families tradition can have a decisive influence even in the choice of marriage partners, and the new family group becomes an extension of the "historical" family group. This happened much more often in the past but it still exists to some extent, especially in some countries. In addition, there is the family background of the respective marriage partners; i.e. each partner brings to the marriage all the psychology of his or her own family, and these psychologies are very often different and even conflict with one another. There is the influence often direct of both sets of parents. They sometimes have a positive function, especially in modern society where both parents work, the grandparents providing valuable assistance by looking after children. But in other cases they constitute an element of disharmony, because of the old-fashioned mentality which elderly people often have and which is not in keeping with modern life. Such problems can seriously hinder the psychosynthesis of the family group.

## III. Group Dynamics

I would like to briefly mention the different human groups which both the family and the individual have relationships with, indeed of which they are often an active part. These relationships (which are often conflicts) *in* and *between* the various human groups are rapidly increasing and becoming more complex in modern life. Hence the prolific development of *social psychology* which deals specifically with human relationships and with what has been called "group dynamics". It deals with fundamental psychological problems, even when they are complicated by various factors - economic, technical, as well as political - and has been the subject of strong and even violent debate. A serious and objective treatment of this subject would require an entire course of lessons and would go beyond the specific field of psychosynthesis, and therefore I cannot deal with it here. On the other hand I do feel

it would be appropriate to make brief mention of a sector of inter-individual psychosynthesis which is particularly relevant to the present day: that of the *psychosynthesis of nations and between nations*. It could be called a 'hot' issue since it appears to invade the political field; I say "appears" because psychosynthesis is in fact neutral in the fields of philosophy and religion, as well as social and political neutrality. Psychosynthesis is a scientifically based concept and procedure which deals with problems from the psychological point of view in an objective, impartial manner, without prejudice.

#### **IV. Nations and Internationalism**

Where there is nationalism and internationalism there are always the attendant problems of peace and war, competition and co-operation. These are particularly serious and acute today and the solution may be decisive for the future of humanity. It is therefore of utmost importance to search in every way possible for constructive solutions.

The starting point is the indisputable reality of growing world *interdependence*. The last war proved to be tragic evidence of this. No nation can truly prosper while others do not; one nation can momentarily dominate and conquer others by means of violence, but this provokes reactions that doom such domination to failure. This fundamental principle of the interdependence of nations has also been proclaimed in the past. I need only mention Emerson and Mazzini who demonstrated this clearly in the last century. But now with the enormous development that has taken place in all kinds of transportation, communication and exchange of raw materials and commercial products, personal and cultural relationships are continually multiplying and all this leads to a growing recognition of the *solidarity* of all mankind and all nations. This solidarity is not only an ideal, but is an absolute necessity and every violation of good relationships between men and nations has damaging and sometimes ruinous consequences to the perpetrator<sup>1</sup>.

All this may seem obvious, just elementary common sense. And yet it is far from being universally recognised - and above all practised! Why? The answer can be found in the field of psychology. The obstacles are neither logical nor political in themselves: they are *psychological obstacles*. It is a well known fact that around the turn of the century there was a great internationalist movement in which various "international organizations" were created. There were a number of pacifist movements which were more or less dedicated, but they all failed in their goal: they did not succeed in arresting the outbreak of world war. Why? Because of a psychological error. Those noble idealists were fascinated by the vision of humanity as a whole and they saw the nations only as an obstacle to the realisation of their grandiose projects of a World Government, an international State, and this attitude led them to oppose the nationalistic element. Their mistake was, and still is, a failure to recognise that a nation is a psychological reality.

#### **V. Nations as "Psychological Entities"**

Leaving aside territories and other factors of a materialistic or socio-economic character, a nation is a "psychological entity". There are enormous psychological

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<sup>1</sup> This theme has been dealt with very effectively by Harry Overstreet in his book *A declaration of Interdependence*.

forces inherent in every nation: cherished traditions, emotional attachments, pride, tendencies to self-assertion, internal solidarity. All these put together have produced and are still giving rise to patriotism, the spirit of dedication and the sacrifice of so many for their country. These attachments may be called irrational, yet they may have a profound psychological justification.

It is a fact that nations, peoples, are not just simple aggregations of individuals, but rather "psychological entities", which may have their place and their specific function in the great body of humanity. The popular analogy which depicts an individual as a cell in the body of humanity, has an aspect that has not been sufficiently emphasized and from which conclusions have not yet been drawn. The cells of a living organism are not directly and uniformly connected with their vital centre or with the directive power of the organism. The marvellous intelligence, which presides over all, regulates the vital functions and tends to conserve life. At the most one could say that the blood cells have, to some extent, this direct relationship. But in general the cells are grouped into well defined organs, like muscles, glands and larger organs such as the stomach, liver, etc. These organs are, in turn, grouped into systems according to their *individual physiological* function, i.e. the *digestive system* (from the mouth down through all the organs - stomach, intestine, glands - which collaborate in the digestion and assimilation of food), or the circulatory system (heart, arteries, veins, etc.). They are all directed by a regulatory principle and a central co-ordinator, but each differs considerably from the other.

The psychological structure of humanity is composed of similarly differentiated systems, rather than having the uniform constitution of an amoeba or other unicellular beings. Nations are therefore very real, alive and distinct, though not separate entities, in the great body of humanity.

Just as every organ which becomes separated from the organism dies, so every nation that chooses to be outside or in conflict with the human community dies psychologically, and can be invaded and conquered. Yet it is also true that intermediate groups between the individual and humanity as a whole are necessary. Therefore the individual psychosynthesis of each nation should be realised as a preparation and introduction to the psychosynthesis of humanity.

Nations, as individuals, have a "body" which consists of their material means of expression; that is to say, native soil, geographical Position and material assets. In addition each nation has an emotional life consisting of feelings and the modes of reaction prevalent among its citizens, as well as its own "mentality". All this constitutes a "personality", possessing well-defined and recognizable psychological characteristics. We may even go further and say that every nation has a *soul*. However this is in a latent state, so to speak, as it is in the vast majority of individuals; it is not manifest or, if it is, only in a limited and imperfect way. But at certain times, especially in moments of great crisis or danger, the soul manifests itself, both collectively and individually through superior human beings.

If we take an objective look at the degree of development and integration which existing nations have achieved, we are bound to admit that it is rather lacking! The "personalities" of "nation-entities" show psychological characteristics and types of behaviour which roughly correspond to those displayed by children of 11 to 14 years, the age of pre-adolescence, or in some cases, children in mid-adolescence (14 to 17 years).

This realisation should not shock or depress us, for it explains and partially justifies much of what has happened and is happening now. I would say, on the contrary, that

we should be reasonably optimistic about it. We may hope that the wrongs due to immaturity will decrease with growth.

The characteristics of the pre-adolescent stage may be regarded as having several aspects similar to those of primitive man. According to the "law of recapitulation", the individual, in his development, actually goes through a rapid re-run of all the stages through which humanity has passed. Even biologically the ontogenesis repeats the phylogenesis; i.e. the human embryo, during the nine months of gestation, goes through the various stages of animal evolution (at a certain point it even has a temporary formation similar to the gills of fish). The same thing happens psychologically from birth to maturity. Thus, when a child begins to develop his individual conscience, he shows it in an excessive and exuberant way, with separate and aggressive self-assertion.

Here it might be argued that there have been nations with glorious pasts and with highly developed forms of culture and civilization. However we are not considering nations in general, but more specifically nations as established entities, and these have only come into being relatively recently. Moreover, we must recognise that a nation can produce works of art of great literary and artistic value and men of genius, without having acquired a well-defined mature national personality. They can be compared to "child-prodigies", who, although they create works of great value, remain children or adolescents and never develop a mature personality. This is the case with many artists. A typical example is Mozart, who began composing at the age of three or four. He was unconsciously inspired by his superconscious, but psychologically he always remained an adolescent.

The evolution of nations does not follow a continuous line of progression, but rather it unfolds in a cyclic manner, passing through highs and lows. An analogy may be drawn with the lives of individuals in which periods of activity and rest, progression and regression, maturity and rejuvenation alternate. We find a good example of this in the life of Goethe, who experienced such a rejuvenation that he fell in love with a girl of 19 and wrote juvenile poems to her.

But there is still another important point: at present the cycles of particular nations are affected - and in a sense overshadowed by a greater cycle of global character which corresponds to the end of an era and to the birth pangs of a new age. The first manifestations of every new cycle are inevitably of a primitive type with barbaric characteristics. This was very obvious at the beginning of the Christian Era, when a series of barbaric invasions took place in the decadent Roman world. One could say that at present there is an "inward return to barbarism". In every nation the old forms are decaying, falling apart, before new, more adequate ones are constructed. This produces a period of confusion, of chaos and conflict, an explosion of instinctive forces, that is a real "return to the barbaric". This is happening everywhere, in "old" nations and in "new": it is a worldwide phenomenon.

The study of national entities as psychological beings brings to light another interesting fact. The greatest part of a nation's psychological life corresponds to that in the individual which takes place at unconscious levels. This life is mainly instinctive, irrational, emotional, imaginative and suggestible, often dominated by elements of the collective unconscious, e.g. ancestral images (such as tradition and myths). It is easy to recognise these characteristics of psychological life in crowds and, to a large extent, in the public at large.

The self-aware part of the "national personality" is represented by the minority of people, and especially by those who *think*: philosophers, historians, scientists,

psychologists, and a few statesmen who seek to awaken and develop the true "consciousness of the nation", to interpret its past and point the way to its future development. But this minority is still, more often than not, at the stage of investigation and research rather than that of sure solutions. Its members are often in disagreement and have contrasting opinions.

The Self, the true spiritual Centre, is "superconscious", in nations as well as in individuals; it exists at a higher level than that of normal consciousness. As mentioned earlier, there have been clear indications of its existence and its effect when it has burst forth during exceptional moments of national consciousness. Sometimes it is manifested in moments of emergency or danger and in the form of surprising and unexpected collective manifestations, reawakening latent energies and producing un hoped-for and almost miraculous effects which save the life of the nation. This has happened several times, in Italy and in other nations, during both the first and second world wars.

More often the spiritual Self of a nation manifests itself through its unusual beings in various fields: its leaders, its geniuses, its saints, those who are carrying out constructive and humanitarian endeavours. These individuals have reached a certain degree of psychosynthesis, of fusion between their personality and their Self, and this enables them to be instruments, spokesmen, representing the Self of the nation. Generally no single individual can represent this in toto: each one expresses the aspect which corresponds to his own individual qualities and constitution.

In the United States the Self has found partial and differing expressions at various times through men such as Washington, Franklin, Lincoln, Emerson, Walt Whitman. At the beginning of Italy's life as a nation a great genius, Dante Alighieri, gave expression to the highest and most essential characteristics of the Italian people. It should be recalled that Dante had a great vision of a universal State, formulated naturally in terms of his day.

Sometimes the Self of the nation, manifests through individuals who act simultaneously, but not necessarily in harmony, since each one represents only one aspect of the national entity, and these often contrast and even conflict sharply with one another. One example is the passionate discussion, sometimes to the point of schism, among those who launched the "Declaration of Independence" which marked the birth of the American nation; another is Italy's struggle for political independence, which was accomplished despite the country's divisions into various states and its partial occupation by the powerful Austrian Empire. This miraculous unification was brought about by the co-ordinated efforts of four men of totally different character, all of whom played a vital part, but were in open conflict with each other: Victor Emanuel II, Cavour, Garibaldi and Mazzini. Each of the four performed a separate, unique task, and if we size up their activities from an historical point of view, it is clear that they fit together like the pieces of a mosaic.

This examination, albeit brief, of the psychological character of nations constitutes a necessary foundation on which to base a consideration of how one might and could go about realising their psychosynthesis.