

Walter Clark on Mature Religion

Walter Clark. (1902 – 1994) Clark was a professor of the psychology of religion at Andover Newton Theological School in Massachusetts in the 1960's and a dean at Hartford Seminary in the 1950's.

A friend of Gordon Allport, he named ten "Criteria for a Mature Religion" in his book, *The Psychology of Religion*. These correlate rather closely with Allport's work. His criteria are listed in the form of questions.

- 1) Is it primary? (mature religion must always be alive.)
- 2) is it fresh? (a sense of curiosity and wonder)
- 3) It is self-critical? (can the person see weaknesses in the religion and still remain loyal to it?)
- 4) Is it free from magic? (is it more than a means of securing magical favors from a divine source?)
- 5) Is it meaningfully dynamic? (is it a satisfaction for its own sake?)
- 6) Is it integrating? (does it demonstrate moral results consistent with the person's own aims as well as those of a wholesome society?)
- 7) Is it socially effective? (does it strengthen the person's sense of community?) This is an interesting consideration as sometimes people try to equate a mystical spirituality with the idea of sequestering oneself alone on a mountaintop to meditate while "escaping" interaction with the rest of humanity. In contrast, in the sense we are discussing here, an inclination toward active community with others is a requirement for a mature spirituality.
- 8) Does it demonstrate humility? Humility in this sense is somewhat different from the way the word is generally understood. It does not mean self-effacing or lowly. But it does mean the person sees himself as NOT being the most important thing. The humble person in this sense realizes that sometimes the greater good of all must supercede his own immediate needs or preferences. It means also that the person avoids the triumphalist notion that he has found the only answer while everyone who does not believe the same thing is wrong.
- 9) Is it growing? (does it include an expanding search for deeper truths?)
- 10) Is it creative? (is there a an element that is personal to the individual as opposed to being a mere repetition of the religion of others?) These criteria correlate well with the traits of our Mystic level.

The way Clark portrayed what he called mature religion pretty much correlates with the upper stages of spiritual development. The same traits that are typical of the Mystic level pretty well match Clark's "criteria" for mature religion.