

**THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF  
COMMUNION WITH GOD: A  
STUDY IN THE PSYCHOLOGY  
OF RELIGION; PP. 7-69**

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The Consciousness of Communion with God: A Study in the Psychology of Religion; pp. 7-69 by  
Gilbert Lee Pennock

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The Consciousness of Communion  
With God

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*A STUDY IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION*

BY

GILBERT LEE PENNOCK

(This thesis has been accepted by the Graduate School  
of New York University, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.)

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## The Consciousness of Communion With God

### I. THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM.

The nature of the problem which is to be investigated in the following pages may best be understood by citing at the outset a few typical cases of "communion with God."

The first is the record of a case given by James from the manuscript collection of Professor Flournoy:<sup>1</sup>

"I was in perfect health: we were on our sixth day of tramping, and in good training. We had come the day before from Sixt to Trient by Buet. I felt neither fatigue, hunger, nor thirst, and my state of mind was equally healthy. I had had at Forlaz good news from home: I was subject to no anxiety, either near or remote, for we had a good guide, and there was not a shadow of uncertainty about the road we should follow. I can best describe the condition in which I was by calling it a state of equilibrium. When all at once I experienced a feeling of being raised above myself, I felt the presence of God—I tell of the thing just as I was conscious of it—as if his goodness and his power were penetrating me altogether. The throb of emotion was so violent that I could hardly tell the boys to pass on and not wait for me. I then sat down on a stone, unable to stand any longer, and my eyes overflowed with tears. I thanked God that in the course of my life he had taught me to know him, that he sustained my life and took pity on the insignificant creature and on the sinner that I was. I begged him ardently that my life might be consecrated to the doing of his will. I felt his reply, which was that I should do his will from day to day, in humility and poverty, leaving him, the Almighty God, to be judge of whether I should some time be called to bear witness more conspicuously. Then, slowly, the ecstasy left my heart; that is, I felt that God had withdrawn the communion which he had granted, and I was able to walk on, but very slowly, so strongly was I still possessed by the interior emotion. Besides, I had wept uninterruptedly for several minutes, my eyes were swollen, and I did not wish my companions to see me. The state of ecstasy may have

<sup>1</sup> James, *Varieties*, pp. 67, 68.

lasted four or five minutes, although it seemed at the time to last much longer. My comrades waited for me ten minutes at the cross of Barine, but I took about twenty-five or thirty minutes to join them, for as well as I can remember, they said that I had kept them back for about half an hour. The impression had been so profound that in climbing slowly the slope I asked myself if it were possible that Moses on Sinai could have had a more intimate communication with God. I think it well to add that in this ecstasy of mine God had neither form, color, odor, nor taste; moreover, that the feeling of his presence was accompanied with no determinate localization. It was rather as if my personality had been transformed by the presence of a *spiritual spirit*. But the more I seek words to express this intimate intercourse, the more I feel the impossibility of describing the thing by any of our usual images. At bottom the expression most apt to render what I felt is this: God was present, though invisible; he fell under no one of my senses, yet my consciousness perceived him."

My next example is that of an English naval chaplain, W. J. Carey:<sup>2</sup>

"When I was eighteen years old, and a prayerless, unpleasant schoolboy, it came into my mind that it would be a good thing to run straight. I went into my room and knelt down to ask God to help me, for although I did not pray in those days, I had a good mother who had taught me to pray. As I knelt there, there flooded into my heart and soul such a light and joy and peace that, in my ignorance, I thought I was going to die of sheer happiness and glory. That irresistible, sudden, unexpected flood of light lasted for nine months, and continues intermittently till today. I do not lean on it now or bother if it departs, because there is at my disposal an undercurrent of never-ceasing companionship with God which never goes unless I sin. If I sin it goes out like the extinguishing of a lamp, and leaves me in utter and intolerable gloom. . . ."

My next instance is from that exquisite autobiographical fragment by Professor Rufus M. Jones, *A Boy's Religion from Memory*.<sup>3</sup>

"God was just as real a being to me through my early boyhood as was any of the persons in our nearest neighbor's house. At home he was talked with every morning, and spoken of all day long in a variety of ways. If any sort of a crisis was near us his help was

<sup>2</sup> Carey, *Have You Understood Christianity*, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. 97, 76-77, 103-104.