

Religious Experience and Its Understanding

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We can and do, in fact, understand each other : this is a common faith of us human beings. It does not fall in the sphere of religion where we are so often confronted with greater difficulties in understanding each other. But we also know by experience that understanding is not an easy thing. What, then, shall be our technique and equipment for understanding other's religious experience? Empathy, or productive empathy, is, certainly an indispensable tool. However, empathy needs to be controlled by the phenomenological restraint and to be well-equipped with a close and systematic study of religious phenomena. Is that enough to secure us against misunderstanding, then? When we turn our eyes to the works of some students of religious experience famed with their rare faculty of empathy, Rudolf Otto as one, we find that they does not always succeed in comprehending others religious experiences as they are. Perhaps it is rather because of inadequacy of their philosophy of religion in elucidating the nature of religious experience than of their deficiency of phenomenological training or equipment. Thus we come to our conclusion : the most important thing for understanding others' religious experiences is that we should have a penetrating insight into the nature of religion backed with our own experience, which, having made a learning-pilgrimage through various types of religious life and belief and having got richer and maturer, may develop into a comprehensive philosophy of religion.