

THERAPEUTIC AND PASTORAL WORK<sup>1</sup>

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*Introduction: the real unity of man's personality*

THE title of this article seems to imply a dichotomy. First, let me affirm that man, as a living being, and still more as a spiritual being, is a unity, a whole, that cannot be split into two parts.

This may seem obvious when it is question of a normal, balanced, adult man; one who does not need psychotherapy, but only pastoral guidance. On the other hand, when we are talking of a neurotic, we make use of numerous expressions, or ways of speaking which introduce a dichotomy, not in the way in which the neurotic is approached, but in the subject himself. For instance, we make a distinction in his psychology between a healthy part and a part which is diseased. We say that the therapist must ally himself with the healthy part in order to fight, with the sufferer, against the diseased part. Sometimes we even find it written that the psychotherapist should occupy himself with the sick part, while the priest or adviser takes the healthy, or, still worse, the supernatural part in charge.

It seems more and more obvious to me that such distinctions by way of dichotomy, which come very near being divisions, are precarious. They are artificial and do not take the reality into account, but are rather a somewhat conceptual defence, which results in the shedding of a pseudo-light where problems, and perhaps some kind of mystery, do really exist.

It is no doubt very tempting to say that the scrupulous person, for instance, asked to obey his spiritual director blindly, receives as a consequence and validly an absolution which guarantees him the divine friendship, and that, on the spiritual plane, *everything* is therefore all right. It is tempting, perhaps, because easy. . . . But, in reality, while the obsessional neurosis lasts, this scrupulous person is incapable of perceiving psychologically the significance of the divine pardon. Helped by the powerful suggestion of his director,

<sup>1</sup> The substance of a Paper read at Spode House by Fr Godin of *Lumen Vitae*, the International Centre for Studies in Religious Education. 184 Rue Washington Brussels.

he is able at regular intervals to perform acts of obedience, to which infused grace will give supernatural efficacy, but he remains incapable of himself realizing, and still more of expressing, the splendour of the pardon and the divine mercy. His basic anxiety prevents him from living the totality of Christian dogma and it must be recognized that, owing to the profound unity of his scrupulous personality, he is impeded in his own spiritual development.

On the other hand it is perhaps tempting to say that, during a psychoanalysis, the moral and religious values, in which the personality of the subject was living before the beginning of the treatment, cannot be reached or disturbed in themselves, since they do not depend upon psychic mechanisms, nor on the affective genesis of the mental structures of the subject. It is tempting to say this, because easy. All the same, in reality, the disturbance which the affective structure of the subject must undergo in the course of treatment, owing to the transference relationship which comes into play and develops with the personality of his psychoanalyst, this disturbance does *not reach a part, but the whole* of the subject; were it only to do the former there would be no real healing in psychoanalysis. It is not here merely the question of a slightly different use which his freewill has to make of psychic gifts modified by the treatment; it is in fact that freewill itself, which is brought into play, questioned, invoked, is raised to a degree of maturity which, up to then, in consequence of the neurosis, it was not able to attain.

There is therefore a real unity in man's personality, even if he is neurotic; and this is what I have tried in particular to emphasize in this introduction.

*Theoretical foundation upon which to distinguish therapeutic and pastoral work*

Now, the substantial unity of man's personality does not prevent us from searching for a proper ground for distinguishing two ways of approaching it. On what basis can we thus find a distinction between therapeutic and pastoral work?

I do not think that a clear view on the matter is possible as long as we do not admit the discovery, made by modern psychology and tremendously accelerated by the work of Freud, that there is

in man a psychic level<sup>2</sup> of life, a *field of psychic forces*, which is largely, if not totally, subject to determinism. By determinism, I mean, here, not a philosophical theory, but first a method of discovery (such and such a consequent, all things being equal, always follows upon such and such an antecedent), and then a correct application of the scientific method, a psychological theory covering a certain number of facts and laws. This methodological determinism has led, during the last few years, to astonishing success in many researches into the psychic life of man. In spite of the fact that the factors influencing the psychic life are incredibly numerous, (and therefore many studies in psychology are still lacking in precision and in exactness), there is no doubt that a new series of pre-determined psychic phenomena will be progressively brought to light. K. Stern calls this 'the third revolution': the first is that of Darwin with the series of deterministic causes in the area of biological evolution, the second is that of Marx with the series of deterministic causes in the area of economic and social causation.

Many reactions of the psyche, which seems to the consciousness of the average man an exclusive effect of his own will, revealed themselves, after scientific scrutiny, as being largely founded on unconscious dispositions, which are closely related to the genetic causes operating in them.

Persons choosing a tie, for instance, from a quantity of equal price and quality, will show a preference for those slightly perfumed, so slightly that experts, warned beforehand, could not have detected the perfume.

In the case of a neurotic under psycho-analytic treatment, one could certainly predict fairly easily certain reactions as, for example, the general direction of his dreams at a given phase of the treatment.

Of a group of children, or even of adults, of whom one possesses a former sociogram, it is possible to foresee which leader—or leaders—the group will 'spontaneously' choose after a certain number of meetings.

Even in religious commitments, the chances of perseverance are not equal. Among a large number of communicants chosen

<sup>2</sup> As we shall say below, the word *level* should be deprived here of any topographical connotation. Perhaps the word *field* is better suited, with the dynamic meaning it has acquired in the French expression 'un champ de forces': a point of convergence where several forces or factors are operating.

haphazard from various social 'milieux', it is possible to predict (with a high degree of probability, itself predictable) what proportion will still be attending Sunday Mass ten years from hence according to social grouping: workers, country people, liberal professions of such and such a town, and so on.

Undoubtedly, many more examples could be found from individual or social psychology, both secular and religious. The influencing factors of conduct will be known, with an ever increasing precision.

Does this imply that freedom will disappear? Will it even follow that there will be an increased power of predicting the conduct of individuals? I do not think so. The aim of psychology has never been to *predict* conduct. Its rôle is to recognize certain factors which influence the dispositions to act. Note well that, neither before nor after scientific research, were these dispositions the effect of mere chance, nor of chaos; they were never pure indeterminism.

The tendency to choose a tie perfumed in a subtle way—the foreseeing of dreams that indicate a displacing of affective powers in the unconscious affective life—the talents demanded spontaneously by such and such groups of their leader—the structure of social pressures exercised on the practice of religion by the faithful: all these are the objective *data from which we* exercise our liberty.

Here is a point often overlooked: freedom itself has everything to gain by a greater consciousness of exterior data (social) or interior data (psychic) which determine, not its choice or conduct properly so-called, but the tendency or inclination to act, which *ally to exercise itself in a given matter. The determinations, scientifically discovered in psychism, are not opposed to freedom, rather they are the matter on which it is exercised, on which it depends and in which its decisions are embodied.*

Let us go further. If psychotherapy is a real technique, and I think it is, it *must* be based on a certain number of factors which affect, in a determined way, the relation between the neurotic and the psychotherapist. I feel that psychotherapy, and particularly psychoanalysis, will appear progressively, as it actually is, a scientific technique (however complex and delicate) to obtain

results from a starting point, following determined procedures. And I feel also that, progressively, its very nature and boundaries will be revealed; a technique to transform *not* the whole man, not even his psychology (in the broader sense of this word, including the deliberate attitudes, decisions and behaviour), but only the psychic 'terrain' in man; mental mechanisms, affective dispositions, customs, all together forming the point of departure from which man can and must orientate his life.

If somebody would like a thomistic translation of what I have just said, it would be easy to state that the psychic life is the '*causa materialis dispositiva*', the *dispositive material cause* (only), of our human, moral or religious acts. It is the '*causa ex qua*', the *cause from which*, we take the point of departure for our human decisions or lines of human conduct. The psychic matter is imposed on us at any moment of our life, but the use of the psychic dispositions, and the meaning which we give them, is in our power. The final use and meaning, which a man introduces into his life, constitutes his innermost life, with the help of God. The priest, as a spiritual adviser, is the intermediary between Christ and the soul. The psychotherapist, confronted with the neurotic, is supposed to restore the material psychic dispositions as far as he can, but he is not concerned directly with their use or meaning.

You have also recognized the classical view of man: substantial unity between body and soul, which leads us to distinguish: (1) the consideration of the body as such, the subject matter of physiological science. (2) the consideration of the soul as such, as principle of action that is, not intrinsically dependent on the body; the form of the human composite that may unite itself with the divine grace always operating in it. And (3) the consideration of the human composite as such (composite as composite). This comprises all the psychic mechanisms and operations which depend intrinsically on the body. This third consideration (note, please, that I am not speaking of a third part, or of a third layer or stratum; those topographical expressions would introduce a dichotomy which I intend to avoid) is exactly what the psychotherapist is concerned with. And the spiritual adviser is not concerned directly with it, because the grace of God does not depend directly on the psychic dispositions, and can perfectly operate the sanctification of the neurotic man *before, during and after the treatment.*

*Practical applications*

Is there any conclusion about the means to be used by the pastoral adviser and the psychotherapist respectively?

As their goal is different, so is the relation with their consultant, so are the means of establishing that relation, and of bringing it to a happy conclusion.

(a) *The pastoral guide does not aim at psychic modification*, but he is concerned with the conscious manifestations of the life of his client, in order to lead him to be more and more inspired by the Spirit of Christ. The pastoral guide does not scrutinize the behaviour of his client primarily from the genetic point of view (for instance, the first causes operating in him at the time of his childhood or babyhood), but he focuses his attention on the present problems in the moral or religious order.

(b) *The pastoral guide does not use technical devices*—as in projective or personality testing, elaborated questionnaires, and so on. Those technical devices would spoil the right pastoral relationship; because the person consulting is treated as an object, and this renders impossible, or rather very difficult, the pastoral attitude that should subsist between two persons in regard to their subjectivity, their moral and religious standing. Even in the words or the questions used in the interviews, the pastoral counsellor must maintain an attitude, or a technique, if you like, which never gives the person consulting him the impression of being an object of investigation.

(c) Finally, and this is more delicate, *the relationship itself must be kept 'pastoral'*.

Any priest quickly recognizes when a relationship, say with a woman, is becoming too friendly to be really pastoral. Any priest feels the moment when there is a risk that emotional feeling will interfere with good, sound, pastoral work. But, in these days, owing to the amount of reading done by priests in psychology, and even in psychoanalysis, it is doubtful whether the tendency to slip from a pastoral relation into a merely clinical or therapeutic one is clearly appreciated. And, to explain this point, I will choose that particular relationship which is called *transference*.

*About transference*

Transference does not mean the fact that a person consulting is 'in sympathy' or in love with the counsellor, nor that he or she is

consciously aggressive against the counsellor (say in the interview or in his behaviour). There are many incorrect ways of speaking along such lines. Transference (in the strict sense) means the special kind of unconscious relationship, that is due to a repressed element in the past. For instance, in spite of the fact that the person consulting expresses (consciously) the complete confidence he has in me as a priest, at the same time (but unconsciously) he establishes the relationship with me on a basic feeling of fear, which is based on the repressed fear he has retained from the time his father frightened him in his childhood. The repressed fear leads him to adopt an attitude of passive dependency, a submissive and apprehensive way of contacting me, and of following my advice.

Now, in the presence of a transference kind of relationship (let us note that we are speaking of a *psychic* consideration of it), three attitudes are possible for the counsellor:

(a) Ignorance. The counsellor does not notice the transference element. He thinks of a genuine attitude of obedience, of a supernatural way of acting. And he confuses a moral or religious attitude freely adopted, with a psychic need of submissive behaviour in the presence of a substitute for the father.

(b) Awareness in the presence of the transference of passive dependency, and promptness to use it, in a religious, pastoral manner, without any attempt to render the person consulting conscious of it, at least as to its origin, and without revealing the special character of the relationship. This is the sound attitude for the priest. Faced by a transference relationship he uses it along symbolic lines, without attempting to suppress it on a psychic ground which he is unable to manipulate correctly. If a slightly neurotic person is oversubmissive, the psychic relationship with the pastoral adviser is surely affected by that submissiveness. But the spiritual guide (and the tradition of spiritual direction has always followed that line) will explain the symbolic meaning of a submissiveness to God, *trying to introduce a freely chosen relation of obedience towards God, where there was simply a pre-determined transference relationship of submissiveness towards man.* This example could be repeated for any special kind of transference which a pastoral counsellor may suspect. The transference relationship may be understood, in the case of a neurotic, as analogical, and used as such.

It is here, and here only, that I should like to find spiritual directors better informed in psychology. Not to use the psychic relations in a technical way, not even to manipulate them explicitly with the person consulting, but to be aware of the double relation that is established between the client and himself. The great danger of not being aware of the transferential elements in the relationship, becomes evident when the priest begins to react himself blindly, unconsciously, with a countertransference; say, when the authoritative, rigid attitude of the priest seems to respond to the submissive attitude of the consulting. Then the double relationship, on the psychic, and on the religious level, becomes a source of confusion. The pastoral adviser is unable to be the mere intermediary between the soul and the grace of God, because the relationship is inextricably bound up with the psychic, unconscious mechanisms of both the person consulting and the priest.

(c) Finally, there is a third attitude in face of a transferential relationship; awareness and technical manipulation leading progressively to insight on the part of the client. This, precisely, is the character of a psychotherapeutic relationship. And no priest, if I am correct, should attempt to work in that direction, unless he is fully qualified.

### *Conclusion*

Let us summarize the whole difference between pastoral and therapeutic work in this way:

In a therapeutic relationship, we have a system of two persons, one confronting the other. The transference binds progressively the psychotherapist and the client on a psychic basis, which is controlled by the therapist, and finally becomes a source of insight for the client. A transferential relation becomes gradually a personal, functional relationship, I mean a relationship between a real doctor, psychiatrist or psychoanalyst, and a neurotic who learns progressively to perceive reality, and to adjust himself to it.

In the highest meaning and aim of a pastoral relationship, we have a system of three persons: a 'triangle-situation', in which an Invisible Partner has to play a rôle, which, as it grows, becomes more and more exacting. The pastoral adviser is not there to establish a face-to-face relationship either on psychic or on moral grounds, with the person consulting, but to obtain progressively



a better contact, a deeper relationship, on the plane, between the penitent and Christ himself.

The golden rule of a therapist should be: teach your patient to become himself.

The golden rule of the priest, as a spiritual adviser, is the rule that St John the Baptist established for himself in the third chapter of St John's Gospel: 'He must increase, but I must decrease' (III, 30).



## THE PRIEST IN AN AGE OF PSYCHOLOGY

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IT is impossible to maintain a neutral attitude towards the priest; by his very calling, he must either attract or repel. In society, he may serve as a scapegoat, like the Jew, or he may become the beloved shepherd of his flock; he may heap confidences upon himself as easily as insults; he may even arouse feelings of *guilt*, though no sooner is the word out than the presence of psychiatrists is felt. Today their influence, though not emphatic, is everywhere pervasive. Indeed, if the eighteenth century was called an Age of Reason, so perhaps might the present century be called an Age of Psychology; a definition far nearer the mark than any newspaper headlines about an Atomic Era. For in the end, mind always proves to be superior to matter, just as 'all argument proves to be ultimately theological'. Behind the psychiatrists, fluttering in his red robes, hovers the presence of Manning, while the halls of seminaries, smelling of beeswax and oil, still reverberate with his dictum that a course in Dickens is as necessary for their students as a course in Aquinas. Accordingly when W. H. Auden a few years ago first spoke of 'the real world of theology and horses' there was forged an immediate link between cardinal and poet, such as also exists between priest, psychiatrist and novelist.

'If I were an Irish hodman I would be a drunkard', his Eminence would repeat at Westminster. This was plain speaking. 'Do you know the Jews are taking better care of their working girls... than we are? What are our people doing? Oh, I forgot, they are