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Out of the Shadows

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IT IS PROBABLE that there is not another subject within the entire sphere of medicine which is more widely discussed today than psychiatry, and this is understandable. For not only does the subject have a poignant appeal but also man's emotional problems seem to have acquired a sense of urgency, and seem to be more in need of understanding and attention today than at any other time heretofore. Partly because of extrinsic factors such as the changing social order and the complexity of modern life, man now lives under a greater amount of emotional pressure than ever before. While he dreams and talks of security he seeks a method of coming to terms with a new and rapidly changing culture. Despite the pressure of external cultural complexities however the most pressing insecurities arise because of the emotional conditions inherent in man himself. Faced with the task of adjusting to an insufficiently understood reality, man is at a loss for he has trouble understanding both the reality and himself. Like it or not, in the present day man appeals to the psychiatrist for help with his difficulties. For the psychiatrist is the physician thought to be most expert in handling of intellectual and emotional problems of daily living.

For help with spiritual problems.

he appeals to his clergyman. That there will be inevitable overlapping between these spheres of influence is understandable. That there should be any lack of understanding between them is unthinkable. Each discipline has its own important task to perform, its especial concern—the clergyman with things spiritual, the psychiatrist with problems emotional and mental. There has never been a quarrel with the facts which psychiatry presents. It came under suspicion originally because of the philosophical overtone which accompanied some of its teaching. And yet, philosophy and psychiatry are not the same. Psychiatry definitely is not a philosophy; it is a medical discipline. And to look with suspicion upon a whole, important specialty of medicine or to find in it an enmity to religion because of these concepts, long since modified, is to belabor a dead issue. Were we to do this we would miss an important source of help to mankind in distress.

It is true that the patients who were mentally ill were treated badly in ages past and sometimes it has been alleged that the Church was even a party to this. There is great question about this statement for the Church has always had an especial regard for people who were mentally sick. The reasons why the patients were treated badly

ly were to be found in the nature of man and in man's outlook at that time, rather than in his beliefs. Ethnology shows us traces of magical thinking which impeded treatment and was the cause of the difficulties. This was more or less due to the spirit of the times rather than the belief of the individuals.

In early Christian times there were several notable establishments for the humane treatment of the mentally ill. One was the Monastery at Monte Casino where the Order of St. John of Jerusalem bestowed benign care upon the mentally afflicted. The earliest hospitals about which we know were founded by Innocent III and the leaders were instructed to provide humane care for the mentally sick in special sections of the city hospitals. This practice of establishing psychiatric wards in general hospitals is just now returning to vogue in these enlightened days. The mental colony at Geel, Belgium which has its roots in the tenth century is still well known to us today. This colony which was under the protection of church authorities was founded upon the dedication of the towns people to the care of the mentally ill who came originally to pray at the Shrine of Dymphna, herself the patron of the mentally ill.

The problem of mental disease is with us today as it was when Geel was founded. The hospitals are full to overflowing and the numbers of patients grow as the population increases in age and in size. The problem calls for a multi-disciplinary approach. It's everyone's concern. The law, religion,

medicine, science — all must join hands to help these patients for their suffering transcends physical illnesses, beliefs and other difficulties. It is not helped by the lack of understanding.

Following the example of Thomas Aquinas, we must take truth where we find it. Though truth is eternal, it may be approached from many directions and also it may be approached by means of various vocabularies. Pope Pius XII in giving direction to thinking regarding the relationship between psychiatry and religion at the close of a dissertation to the Fifth Congress of Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology in April, 1953, said: "Be sure that We follow your research, your medical practice with warm interest and with best wishes. You labor on a terrane that is very difficult but your activity is capable of achieving precious results for medicine, for the knowledge of the soul in general, for the religious disposition of man and for his development. May Providence and Divine Grace enlighten your path." Just as this was said and the efforts were blessed on that occasion, so should we today assist in every possible way to help those who suffer from mental and emotional diseases.

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