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## Book Review

### *Psychoanalysis Today*

Agostino Gemelli, O.F.M., M.D.  
(Trans. by John Chapin and Salvator Attanasio)

#### Review by

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Any writer who attempts to rethink the thoughts of Freud in the context of a sound concept of man and the simple acceptance of his supernatural destiny is entitled to the appreciative attention of the thoughtful reader, lay or professional. When the writer happens to be at once a medical doctor, a research psychologist and a Catholic priest, the attempt to establish intellectual contact with Freud is all the more significant. This is the recommendation of the three essays on psychoanalysis by Father Agostino Gemelli, O.F.M., M.D., founder of the University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, Italy, and chairman of the department of psychology in that institution.

This series of essays originally contributed to the Italian review, *Vita e Pensiero*, now appears in translation as three chapters of a little book entitled, *Psychoanalysis Today*.

When one sets out to evaluate the contribution of Sigmund Freud to our understanding of human dynamics, whether normal or abnormal, he is faced with a formidable task. This is partly because of Freud's picturesque but often ambiguous terminology and partly because he made up his system as he went along. The result is that there are as many moods and inflections of psychoanalysis as there are people who adopt its viewpoints or methods. In the first chapter, "Freudian Psychoanalysis," Father Gemelli examines from the viewpoint of a psychologist and psychiatrist, the doctrines of Freud as he elaborated them.

The net effect of Father Gemelli's critical exposition of Freudian tenets leaves something to be desired. What one misses particularly is the effort to detach Freud's purely clinical observations and psychological insights from their setting in late nineteenth century materialism and antireligious bias. The author's criticism of Freud for his lack of scientific method, his frequent flights into Greek myth-

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ology, his gross exaggeration of the role of sex in the etiology of mental disorder and his reduction of all religious experience to neurotic origins is sound and justified. But the urgent question for the layman or psychiatrist today is, "What should be the attitude of the enlightened Catholic towards Freud and the movement he instigated?" Are we to reject him completely as being vitiated root and branch by his palpable errors concerning man, which are ultimately philosophical and theological? Or is it possible that beneath all of these philosophical and even psychological misconceptions there is new insight into the dynamics of the human personality and the way opened to a more understanding and fruitful approach to the problem of mental illness? For these questions the author provides no clear and unambiguous answer. While voicing his grave objections to Freudian psychoanalysis he is, nevertheless, unwilling to go along with those critics who completely reject Freud's contribution to psychiatry.

One gets the impression that at an earlier date Father Gemelli had rejected Freud quite unreservedly because of his erroneous concept of man. Now, some years older, he seems to sense that there is an element of profound truth in Freud's clinical conclusions concerning the human personality. But in order to be of much help to the busy layman or psychiatrist, the critique of Freud must carefully sift what is true and verifiable fact concerning man from what is plausible fiction. If, however, these

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unresolved questions awaken new interest in the reader and stimulate him to read a whole work devoted to the subject, like Karl Stern's *Third Revolution* or some of the recent contributions of Gregory Zilboorg, *Psychoanalysis Today* will have amply fulfilled its purpose.

The second chapter, devoted to "The Analytic Psychology of Jung," suffers from none of the ambivalence of the preceding chapter. Here, with deftness and assurance the author points up the danger of being taken in by Jung's pseudo-religious jargon, a booby trap that not all Catholics have avoided. He calls attention to the fact that although Jung speaks boldly of God, religion, morality, redemption and salvation, it would be a great mistake to assume that he is using these terms in their traditional sense. While far from sharing Freud's strictures on religion, Jung gives evidence of the failure to emancipate himself from the insidious error of modernism that finds the origins of religious faith in the projection of unconscious yearnings. In conclusion the author calls attention to the fact that any mere psychotherapy, based on natural techniques and aiming at integration of personality on the purely natural level must always fall short of achieving the complete adjustment of man to his total environment, which at its highest level, includes God.

Following excellent Scriptural precedent, Father Gemelli has reserved the best wine till the last. The final chapter, "The Teaching

of Pius XII on Psychotherapy," is the outstanding contribution of the book. Dr. Braceland, a psychiatrist of international stature, says of it: "The book would be worth the price of admission if only to get the author's comments upon the Holy Father's dissertation on 'Psychotherapy and Religion' . . ."

In this section the author emphasizes the significance of the Holy Father's allocution to the members of the First International Congress of Histopathology of the Nervous System, September 11, 1952, (LINACRE QUARTERLY, Nov. 1952, pp. 98-107) and of the second address, even more important, to the Fifth International Congress of Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology, April 13, 1953, (LINACRE QUARTERLY, Nov. 1953, pp. 97-105). He then offers a commentary that is admirable in its enlightened and balanced interpretation.

Catholic doctors, clinical psychologists and psychotherapists will want to read the papal documents in connection with this chapter. (English versions are to be found in *The Catholic Mind* and *The Pope Speaks*.) From these, as well as from Father Gemelli's timely commentary, they will draw inspiration as they come to realize the genuine interest of the Supreme Pontiff in their profession. At the same time they will find helpful norms to guide them in their exploration of the hidden layers of the human personality, as they try to bring relief to patients caught in the toils of mental illness.

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