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Psychiatry, Religion and the Future

FRANCIS J. BRACELAND, M.D., ScD., F.A.C.P.

Editor's Note: The National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds pays tribute to Reverend Gerald Kelly, S.J., noted Jesuit moral theologian who died in August 1964. His writings and correspondence for many years interpreted for physicians the mind of the Church in the medico-moral field, and to honor his memory an annual Lecture has been inaugurated. Dr. Francis J. Braceland, outstanding in the field of psychiatry and especially well-known for his work at the Institute of Living in Hartford, Conn. where he is psychiatrist-in-chief, delivered the first of these Lectures on June 23 in New York City at a breakfast meeting of members of the National Federation and their guests. We publish his paper for the interest of our LQ readers.

I am greatly honored to have the privilege of addressing the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds in this, the first, Father Gerald Kelly Memorial Lecture. As to the wonderful man we honor today, Father Lynch's eulogy of him, written in the *Linacre Quarterly* — that excellent journal for which Father Kelly did so much — contains a descriptive statement which obviates and makes pale and stumbling attempt at tribute from me:

For those whose privilege it was to know Father Kelly, no encomium is necessary. For those who were denied that blessing, no eulogy could possibly suffice. Unquestionably, he was outstanding as a man among men, a priest among priests, a theologian among theologians. Christian humanity, the Catholic priesthood, and moral theology suffered an immeasurable loss in his untimely death.

The same tribute noted that "he talked the language of doctors with medical and theological exactitude" and that he was in part responsible for much of the mutual understanding and respect which exists between

Catholic physicians and moral theologians in this country. This is particularly impressive to me for we in psychiatry were late in gaining the understanding and confidence of some theologians and late in settling our differences. It is ironic that it took so long for two disciplines, concerned deeply with man's health and salvation, to form a relationship but that we did it eventually was due in large part to man's vision, like the one we are honoring here today.

I had intended to talk to you about psychiatry's past problems, relate some of its advances and prophesy its future, and exhort Catholic doctors to maintain constant interest in their patients' emotional problems. However, I became fearful of "flogging dead horses" and more fearful of getting exhortative and even wasting your time. All of us admit that man's behavior, and sometimes his symptoms, are deeply influenced by his background, his education and training, his abilities, and the state of his physical and

mental well being. No man is "an island entire of itself" and what happens to him in his home and his personal life goes with him to his work, whatever that may be. There is a hidden human logic in the turmoil of feelings, thoughts, attitudes and expectations, and even in the sudden unexpected impulses and conflicts that arise in each enterprise in one's life — some of them astound friends, family doctor, and dergyman alike.

Perhaps by two quotations I can dispose of the religio-psychiatric problem which was allowed to get a bit out of hand when it should not have been. One is from Father Noel Mailloux, O.P. and the other from Pope Pius XII. Father Mailloux said of the interdependence between the work of the priest and psychiatrist:

As vegetative life cannot take root in an earthly soil which is not properly cultivated, so too moral life cannot really thrive in a mind overwhelmed by the pangs of anxiety, impoverished by crippling regression, or encumbered by the weeds of wild disruptive instincts. While he is busy disentangling the complexities of an ill-integrated mental functioning, then the psychologist is undoubtedly accomplishing an essential task.¹

And Pope Pius XII, after a brilliant discourse on psychotherapy and religion, while imparting his blessing to a psychiatric group, said: In addition, be assured that the Church follows your research and your medical practice with her warm interest and her best wishes. You labor in a terrain that is most difficult. But your activity is capable

of achieving precious results for medicine, for the knowledge of the soul in general, for the religious dispositions of man and their development.²

We might now turn our attention to man's emotional reactions in this present day and speak of some of the startling things that are going on around us. Ours is a world of rapid change and we move from epoch to epoch, as man walks in space and prepares to land upon the moon and send a probe shot toward Mars. Having provided man with the potentials for his own destruction on earth, scientists are now going to see what they can do about Luna, the moon, which, you may recall, was once thought to be intimately associated with my particular profession. A change is taking place between the individual and his surroundings and man is concerned a bit, as he ponders his destiny in a world clever enough to invent nuclear power and foolish enough to be in constant danger of using it to destroy itself.

There is an ever increasing need now for spiritual direction, for an intelligent approximation of our assets and our capacities, and a need for our being well rounded individuals — "complete" persons, physically, intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally. Among other things we need to know why man, who is able to conceive of such fabulous machines as color presses, computers, and space vehicles; man, who can replace organs and operate upon the human heart and brain and who is

¹Mailloux, N., O.P. "Modern Psychology and Moral Values," in *Christianity in an Age of Science*. Toronto, Canadian Broadcasting Co., Publications Branch.

²Pius XII. Address to the 5th International Congress on Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology, April 13, 1953.

willing to bravely give up his life for his neighbor on a battlefield, is unable to live with him in peace and dignity in the community.

Santayana once said: "All nature falls for every living creature into two strands—the friendly and the hostile, the beloved and the detested. The question is only by how noble a nature the division is made and with how much knowledge of the world."

Man does indeed have negative emotions and Osler, seeing the continuous warfare in which man is engaged, said: "The history of the race is a grim record of passions and ambitions, of weaknesses and vanities, a record too often of barbaric inhumanity, and even today, when the philosopher would have us believe his thoughts had widened, he is ready as of old to shut the gates of mercy and let loose the dogs of war." Despite the overwhelming evidence throughout history that man has allowed his destructive tendencies to gain the upper hand, there is also ample evidence that there are opposing tendencies present within him which are of a constructive nature. It is certain that man's aggressiveness has two sides, one constructive, one destructive. We can almost be sure that, if man could freely acknowledge the reality of his aggressive impulses, he would be better able to understand them and perhaps divert this valuable source of energy to creative and useful purposes.

A definition of terms here might help to clarify our discussion. Aggression signifies action carried out in a forceful way; it is an action

of attack and most activities distinguish between constructive and destructive aggression. Constructive aggression is preservative; it is evoked with real reason when we are threatened. This kind of aggression contains the self-assertiveness necessary for the protection of one's existence. Destructive aggression, on the other hand, because it takes place in response to internal hostility (aroused often by threats which are unrealistic), is not essential for self-preservation nor protection and it can be, therefore, and often is, injurious to others.

The principal emotions associated with aggression are fear and anger, which can lead to hatred and violence. Unpleasant as aggression is, it has survival value—it is biologically determined; primitive man had no other alternatives than to fight, to run away, or to perish. His body prepared him for action through a series of physiological changes familiar to all of us. Modern man, despite evolutionary progress, still reacts to strong emotion with the same bodily changes as his primitive ancestors, the same physiological changes which help mobilize energy for violent action.

The presence of anger, therefore, is a signal that aggressive impulses are trying to emerge and the anger may range from petty annoyance to raging fury. It is a destructive emotion, implying a desire to harm or destroy; as Vergil put it, fury and anger carry the mind away. Its arousal by no means signifies that there is real danger; more often than not it serves no real purpose. Though we are often inclined to

retaliate and strike back at the offender, expediency indicates to us that control is necessary in the situation. The energy has been mobilized, however, and it will be discharged in some way, and one way to master it is to consider it and express it:

I was angry with my friend;

I told my wrath and it did end.

I was angry with my foe;

I told it not; my wrath did grow.

Sometimes we express our anger in diluted form and fight the offender with spiteful comments—sarcastic remarks and critical attitudes—and though we may try to repress or deny the anger, it does not disappear until it has manifested itself in some way, directly or indirectly, whether we are conscious of it or not. More often than not the physical accompaniments of these emotions are brought to your offices as physical symptoms.

Closely related to anger is hostility, which builds up slowly; it is a gradual mulling over, a subjective interpretation of real or imaginary hurts. Because hostility is not associated with the need for action, however, it is not accompanied by the same physiological changes as is anger. One might say that the hostile person "nurses his wrath to keep it warm." Unrecognized and unexpressed, it deprives the person of the use of large quantities of energy that might better be spent in more positive directions. One sees this in his practice in families and, indeed,

at times in the staff room of the hospital.

Hostility is the basis of many negative attitudes, one of which is prejudice—an attitude deeply ingrained somewhere along the way from childhood. The prejudiced person finds it convenient to direct his hostility toward individuals simply because they belong to a particular group. By so doing such a person builds up his status, at least in his own eyes, and convinces himself of his superiority and power. The evil within is displaced from its real source to individuals who cannot retaliate. This is the scapegoat principle; let us look a little deeper into it.

The secure person is not bothered by the prestige marks of others, nor by the discovery of ability greater than his own. This is not true of the envious nor the jealous; we were warned about this in the scriptures. Although envy is egoism in its most unpleasant form, people who are ruled by it have somehow come to appraise themselves as inadequate. Somewhere along the line, at home or in school, something happened. Some were children of whom too much was expected; they undoubtedly had gifts, but the gifts were not enough to satisfy their parents. Some had been given extravagant pictures of themselves while young and, when they failed to live up to these impossible and extravagant heights, they came to the conclusion that they were inadequate.

In the wake of such experience, the individual comes to overvalue all sorts of things which seem to

carry approval in society, and search for satisfaction in worthwhile pursuits is apt to fail badly. Envy arises and the dynamism of envy, which is frequent in our culture, is productive of a great deal of unhappiness. The remembrance of one's own inadequacy fades and the thought of the injustice of it all replaces it. Now there is trouble ahead, either in the form of bitterness or depression. Envy is just one step from hatred and is more irreconcilable than it. It is, Pindar says, "the attendant of an empty mind. It keeps no holidays; nothing can allay the rage of biting envy."

Unpleasant as bitterness may be to deal with, either in one's self or others, it nevertheless remains in great part rational and conscious. In this it is unlike prejudice. Bitterness stems from cause, exaggerated or misconstrued though that cause may be. Prejudice, however, is something else again. Bitterness is internalized; prejudice is externalized. Bitterness is subject to reason. Prejudice, once it has taken hold, is not. The word itself stems from *prae-judicium*, meaning, originally, a judgment based on previous decisions and experiences.

Now prejudice has come to mean a pre-judging, a reckoning of the situation before the facts are in, a before-thinking response of people and things with a large emotional component and without reference to data. Opinions which are rooted in prejudice are usually sustained with great violence. Prejudice is not an instinct; it is home grown; it is emotional learning inculcated at an early age, and it becomes part of

the central core of the personality. H. G. Wells once said: "The power of most of the great prejudices that strain humanity lies deeper than the intellectual level."

Prejudice can be our own, but it is not easy. To bring the light of reason to bear upon emotional reactions requires not only enlightenment, but also an environment which encourages rationality. Prejudice is resistant to contradictory evidence, because so many times it is an integral part of the individual's entire orientation to the world in which he lives. Although much racial and religious prejudice is little more than slavish conformity with the prevailing attitudes, enough of it serves a self-gratifying purpose to make rational argument an exhortation against it unavailing. Highly prejudiced people are convinced that those against whom they are prejudiced seek some advantage and they feel completely justified and even virtuous in their efforts to keep these groups at a disadvantage. The unfortunate thing to consider now is that you and I also have prejudices hard as it is to admit it.

The loyalty to the cause one espouses is frequently militant to a degree and amounts to an antipathy to all others. If you are not with us you are against us, is the cry. Verbal rejection comes easily, erupting into all sorts of irrelevant contexts and tortured logic. The more spontaneous and irrelevant the argument, the greater the hostility behind it. Now the stage is set for trouble—what happens now depends upon circumstances—all that is needed is a little more strain and the way

will be easy and the door is open for a rabble rouser. Once he can arouse the group to fever pitch, mob-mindedness takes over—the term is Dr. Strecker's—and this implies a sacrifice of one's own individual personality. We usually think of a mob as a violent, unruly, destructive crowd and a group as a dignified gathering. But this definition by numerical strength is not the test; it is the dilution of rationality that is the test of mob-mindedness.

In crowds prejudice becomes active delusion and bitterness turns about and frames slogans that at first glance seem to be of highly moral nature. Whether it be the apparently virtuous cry of "free speech," which really means "free speech for me but not for you," or the Red cry of "peace and justice," it can become a high sounding rationalization for acts of brutality. Rationalization is such a simple and commonplace reality-evading device that only when it is employed by demagogues and mob leaders do we realize its pathological implications.

It takes a stern discipline to root out rationalizations, bitterness and prejudice and replace them with the educated heart we all desire. Tolerant people come from tolerant homes in which there is understanding and loving, rather than a depriving atmosphere. Tolerant people tend to believe that they themselves are responsible for their destiny; they do not seek exclusionary values, but rather they pursue their way with a reasonable serenity.

All of history—the scriptures, the sayings of wise men, the observa-

tions of philosophers and scientists—caution against anger and hatred: "Anger may repose with thee for an hour but not repose for a night. The continuance of anger is hatred, the continuance of hatred turns to malice. The anger is not warranted which has seen two suns." Lamartine says: "Life is too short to spare one hour of it in the indulgence of this passion"; while More told Horace Walpole that, if he wanted to punish an enemy, it would be by fastening on him the trouble of continually hating someone. Plutarch warned that men should not even hate their enemies, for the heart gnawing on itself is self-punishment. To harbor hatred in the soul, it is said, makes one irritable, gloomy, and prematurely old. We as spiritual men must make careful self-examination and see how the seeds of hatred and violence are sown. There are more ways than murder to destroy people and we must avoid any semblance of them.

When worthy men fall out, it is said only one of them is at fault at first; but if strife continues long, commonly both become guilty. The saddest thing of all to behold is that the hatred of persons related to each other can become the most violent.

Another of contemporary man's problems is loneliness. By this we do not mean the daily singular examples which the doctor encounters in his practice—the perpetual hired man—the bunk house hand who is fated to travel from farm to farm, from ranch to ranch; and not

the old person whom people have forgotten — one old lady in a New York institute dressed up every Sunday for 25 years waiting for visitors who never came. Not that older person, either, who once having been in good circumstances now belongs to a bank or trust company — they are the saddest of all people, the loneliest, to my mind—not that I have anything against banks, mind you (you might even say I am indebted to them), but they make cold relatives. We in mental hospitals have seen these people die, forlorn and alone, except for the hospital people who love them and, then, strangely enough, if there is an estate, relations begin to appear, as if out of the woodwork.

What I am talking about here is that existential loneliness that many business and professional men suffer, feeling anxiety and loneliness because of their failure to stand out in the manner they desired. In this present culture many contestants feel that they must place first, no matter what the circumstances or the handicap, or they are failures. This attitude can ruin good men, if they let it make them envious or bitter. Fortunately, however, this challenge often lights upon an individual who sees and understands this and honorably accepts the situation. Emerson says that a man's defects are made useful to him and he draws strength from his weaknesses and, like the wounded oyster, mends his shell with a pearl. It is obvious and fortunate that a large number of healthy compensatory mechanisms are open to everyone who refrains

from pitying himself and feeling so alone.

It is said that the conquest of loneliness can be accomplished by those who are willing to find and destroy two foes and obstacles which are at the bottom of the trouble — they are inordinate self-love and hostility. We, as physicians, must keep this always in mind, for the professional man, working alone — an individualist to begin with — might fall prey to the two evils — inordinate self-love and hostility. Should he do so and become estranged from his family, there is the danger that he may go looking for someone to appreciate and to comfort him, and it is known that there are a number of temporary comforters and appreciators about.

Both of these evils make it impossible to communicate properly with people in the environment and render one unable to see or feel a real relationship with others. In examining himself once, while feeling terribly alone, Admiral Byrd said with rare insight: "The most likely explanation of the trouble lies within myself. Manifestly, if I can harmonize the various things within me that may be in conflict and fit myself more smoothly in the environment, I shall be at peace." That is a wonderful statement, isn't it? "The most likely explanation of the trouble lies within myself."

Then there was one more thing which the same man thought and entered into his diary as he faced almost certain death after 43 days alone in Antarctica: "At the end only two things matter to a man, regardless of who he is, and they are the

affection and understanding of his family. Anything and everything else he creates are insubstantial. They are given over to the mercy of the winds and tides of prejudice, but the family is an everlasting anchorage, a quiet harbor where a man's ship can be left to sway to the moorings of pride and loyalty." We here would want to add the great necessity of a spiritual belief to that observation, but otherwise we would let it stand as it is.

Well, had I adhered to my original thesis, I would tell you now that there are hopeful signs, that the community is showing evidence of interest in the individual and in that "everlasting anchorage," the families of which it is composed. It is axiomatic that, if the individual is to serve society, society must serve the individual and we may safely assume that health — especially mental health — is indeed a concern of society. Any community is dependent on the well being of the individuals of which it is composed for its own health. A complex society cannot, however, exert direct influence upon individuals, so it transmits this responsibility to its smallest social unit — the family — into which the infant is born. It is the task of the family to protect the child, to supervise his development and prepare him to adapt to the world and, eventually, take his place as a mature, responsible and healthy member of the larger segments of society.

Mental health in the family in the aggregate should assure mental health in the community. In the family the child should learn how

to control his instincts and to respect the rights of others in the interest of law, order and good government. He learns that "he that would govern, first should be master of himself."

Heretofore the community handled the problem of those who became ill by banishing them to distant, sometimes overcrowded, institutions. They now are calling upon you and me, as physicians, for advice and asking what they can do to help. It is our task, yours and mine, to respond and to teach our young men of their responsibility and of the necessity for them to interest themselves in these problems, which are productive of so much distress. I preach no socialistic doctrine when I say that families, sharing in and contributing to the activities and general needs of the community, should in turn look to the community to provide support when a catastrophe, such as mental illness, strains its emotional and financial resources. To allow the mental health of the entire family to be undermined by the illness of one sick member is too high a price for either the family or the community to pay. Just as the family tries to protect its individual members, so does the community have the responsibility to preserve the health and protect those vital segments of it—the families.

The mind of man has such limitless possibilities for growth and creativeness that neglect of it would be a serious matter. Daniel Webster put it this way:

If we work upon marble, it will perish.
If we work upon brass, time will efface it.

If we rear temples, they will eventually crumble to dust. But if we work upon men's immortal minds, if we imbue them with high principles, with the just fear of God and love of their fellow men, we engrave on those tablets something which no time can efface and which will brighten and brighten to all eternity.

Ours is a calling — yours and mine — which requires us to help mend not only the bodies, but also minds which have for various reasons fallen prey to illness. This is a blessed calling, which in no way can be minimized. It is only now that the community is becoming better able to understand it; for that reason we cannot fail to respond to the community's call for help and for guidance when it comes.

You will remember that LaRoche-foucauld said: "Old men are fond of giving good advice because they are no longer able to serve as bad example." I have said these things before — maybe even to you — but I make no apologies for repetition of them, for they are ever old and ever new. Father Kelly, I am sure, would have me repeat them to you.

The heart, the friendliness and the warmth expected of us as physicians, and of our hospitals, is an essential part of our armamentarium. It is especially demanded of us

as Catholic doctors. Tolstoi might have had this in mind when he wrote of the unhappiness we sometimes cause one another:

It all lies in the fact that we think there are circumstances when one may deal with men without love, and there are no such circumstances. One may deal with things without love — one may cut down trees, hammer iron and make wheels without love, but you cannot deal with men without it, just as you cannot deal with bees without being careful. If you deal carelessly with bees, either they will get hurt or you will get hurt. And so with men.

And we may add: certainly with physicians and particularly with members of this Federation.

And, finally, Ruskin's remarkable observation:

I believe that the test of a truly great man is humility. I do not mean by humility doubts about his own ability. But really great men have a serious feeling that greatness is not in them but through them and they see something divine in every other man and are endlessly, foolishly and incredibly merciful.

I suppose if all of us could be "endlessly, foolishly and incredibly merciful," we would have much less prejudice, bitterness, hatred, and violence. There are men who are that way and their mere presence in our midst adds another candle to those already lit. Father Kelly did just that.