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May Catholics Be Psychoanalyzed?

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LAST year Monsignor Pericle Felici, a judge of the Roman Rota and a consultant of the Congregation of the Sacraments, wrote an article in which, though not speaking officially for the Church in any sense, he said some rather severe things about psychoanalysis. For instance, a newspaper quoted one of his statements as follows: “It is difficult, therefore, to excuse from mortal sin anyone who knowing all this, adopts this method of cure (psychoanalysis) and voluntarily subjects himself to this form of treatment.” He clarified this later by saying that he referred only to a certain kind of Freudian psychoanalysis, not to psychoanalysis in general.

But it was probably because of the discussion and confusion aroused by this article that the Holy Father, six months later, took up the question of psychoanalysis and made an important statement concerning one aspect of it. The Pope was addressing an International Congress of physicians and spoke to them about various limitations which the moral law puts on scientific research and medical practice. He did not condemn psychoanalysis in general, much less psychiatry in general, but he did find fault with a certain technique of a certain school of psychoanalysis. He spoke of it as “the phallic method of a certain school of psychoanalysis.” Undoubtedly some Freudian practitioners are referred to.

Here are the words of the Pope on this topic in their entirety:

“Here is another example (of a limitation placed on medical practice by the moral law): to get rid of psychic repressions, inhibitions, complexes, man is not free to excite within himself, for therapeutic purposes, each and every one of those appetites of the sexual sphere which stir or are stirred within his being, and roll their impure waves in his unconscious or in his subconscious. He cannot make them the object of his fully conscious imaginings or desires, with all the disturbances and repercussions which such a procedure entails. For a man and for a Christian there exists a law of integrity and purity, of personal self-respect, which forbids plunging oneself so completely into the world of sexual images and inclinations. At this point ‘the medical and psychotherapeutic interest’ of the patient finds a moral..."