

The Linacre Quarterly

Volume 11 | Number 1

Article 5

January 1943

Thoughts on Psychiatry and the Church

J. R. Dundon

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

Recommended Citation

Dundon, J. R. (1943) "Thoughts on Psychiatry and the Church," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 11: No. 1, Article 5.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol11/iss1/5>

THOUGHTS ON PSYCHIATRY AND THE CHURCH

BY J. R. DUNDON, M.D.

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

The Church has very definite and valid reasons for teaching that the human mind is composed of a spirit operating a material organ. Psychiatry has gone on the assumption that it deals with merely a physical structure. True it does not claim to have located centers for all intellectual functions but its assumption is that in time it may be possible to so advance in anatomical investigation with possible new technics as to thoroughly establish an organ for each mental act.

In the meantime Catholic psychology continues to teach the fruitlessness of such expectation as far as the higher functions of the mind are concerned. She teaches the revealed truth, that there is a spiritual factor which will not die. Her great minds pondering the problem through the ages have proven that only a spirit can comprehend spiritual ideas, i.e., ideas which are abstracted from nature such as of species, universal ideas, ideas of justice, etc. Since these ideas do not exist in nature, they must have been abstracted from the evidence which the senses garner from their environment. The agent which abstracts the immaterial essences of sense impressions and at the same time is conscious of itself so abstracting must be itself immaterial. This reasoning should appeal to the average physician un-

less it finds him emotionally un-receptive or intellectually unwilling to grant the conclusion. He would not be guilty of confusing a stone with a radio but is apparently willing to endow a material brain with powers of abstraction, ideation, and self-contemplation which distinguish man from other animals and which can only be explained by postulating a spiritual factor in the mind.

It may be objected that it is unimportant to the psychiatrist whether there be a spiritual factor in the mind. Since by nature a spirit cannot become insane, any abnormality, it is argued, must be charged to the material organism. This puts the psychiatrist in the position of being willing to pose as an expert on an entity in part of which he denies interest, if not existence. Surgeons and obstetricians who spurned Semelweiss' exhortations to cleanliness in the last century could teach him a lesson in humility.

One very definite ailment of the spirit is sin. So-called schizophrenia has been attributed, at least "post hoc," to sin among other things. A new and sinful sexual experience sets up a center in the brain which disturbs the normal government of the soul, much as ectopic tumors arise to upset normal rhythm of the heart. Fatiguing scrupulosity and resulting exhausting insomnia ensue.

Besides this type of effect of the soul on the body any exorcist can testify to the mental symptoms simulated by demoniacal obsession and vice versa. This condition in which two or more spirits operate in one body gives a picture of apparent cleavage of the personality. Since nothing is more cleft than two separate spirits which are not even of the same species, much more must be accredited to the keenness of psychiatrists who detect the apparent "schizophrenia" than to that of the cleric who has more sensitive diagnostic instruments and is unaware of their efficacy. C. F. J. De Tonquedec: "Les Maladies Nerveuses Ou Mentales Et Les Manifestations Diaboliques."

Regarding the coining of the term "schizophrenia" as an improvement on "dementia praecox" the very definition of "person" signifies its indivisibility. No

Thomist would be guilty of such inaccurate terminology as signifies "split personality" (schizophrenia).

Materialistic psychiatry's denial of the spiritual side of life gives it a weakness which makes it peculiarly unfit for diagnosing the mental experiences of those who have the gift of passive contemplation. Deficiency of belief produces ignorance of an exalted human state, the direction of which is routine duty of any priest.

In conclusion let us state that psychiatry needs Thomistic psychology as much as surgery needs anatomy.

Spiritual directors need mystical theology more than they need psychiatry, because the data, contemplated passively by an intellect, are not hallucinations or illusions and because spiritual ailments simulate bodily disease.

A NEW MEAD JOHNSON PRODUCT

Dextri-Maltose With Yeast Extract and Iron

This product supplies vitamin B complex and ferrous sulphate in important amounts, as well as carbohydrate, in the infant's milk formula. It represents a considerable advance over previous similar Mead Johnson products, as follows:

1. There are now four tablespoonfuls to the ounce instead of six;
2. The patient now receives 16 ounces per can instead of 12, without increase in retail price.

For further information, please write to Mead Johnson & Company, Evansville, Indiana.