

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PIO XII
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE V INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY_***

Monday, April 13, 1953

«*Nous vous souhaitons*»(We wish you...)

1. We welcome you, dear sons and daughters, who, coming from all over, have met in Rome to listen to lectures and discuss issues of Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology. Your Congress is over, and to guarantee its results and the success of your investigations and future activities, you come to receive the blessing of the Vicar of Christ. We would be happy to accede to your wishes and take the opportunity to address some words of encouragement and clear some guidelines.

2. The science affirms that new investigations have made known the deep strata of the human psyche, and it strives to understand these discoveries, interpret them and make them usable. We speak of dynamisms, determinisms and hidden mechanisms in the depths of the soul, endowed with immanent laws from which certain modes of action are derived. These, no doubt, are put into action in the subconscious or in the unconscious, but they also penetrate into the domain of consciousness and determine it. It is intended to have experienced procedures and have as apt to investigate the mystery of these depths of the soul, clarify them and lead them to the right path when they exert a fatal influence.

These questions, which are offered to the examination of a scientific psychology, are a matter of your competence. The same must be said of what concerns the use of new psychic methods. But it is necessary that the theoretical psychology and practice keep in mind, both the one and the other, that can not lose sight of the truths established by reason and by faith, nor the mandatory precepts of morality.

3. Last year, in the month of September, to respond to the wishes of the members of the first International Congress of Histopathology of the Nervous System , We indicated the moral limits of medical methods of research and treatment. Taking what we have said then, we would like to complete it today with some considerations. In a word: to have the intention to indicate the fundamental attitude that is imposed on the Christian psychologist and psychotherapist.

This fundamental attitude is summarized in the following formula. Psychotherapy and clinical psychology must always consider man: 1) as a unit and psychic totality; 2) as a unit structured in itself; 3) as a social unit; 4) as a transcendent unit, that is, with a tendency toward God.

I. Man as a psychic unit

4. Medicine teaches us to look at the human body as a mechanism of high precision, whose elements overlap each other and are linked together; the place and the characteristics of these elements depend on the whole, since they only serve for their existence and their functions. But this conception applies much better to the soul, whose delicate gears are assembled with much more care. The various psychic faculties and functions are framed within the whole of the spiritual being and are subordinated to its purpose.

5. It is useless to explain this point more extensively. But you, the psychologists and the therapists, must take this fact into account: the existence of each faculty or psychic function is justified by the end of the whole. What constitutes man is mainly the soul, a substantial form of

his nature. Ultimately, all human life springs from it; in it lie all the psychic dynamisms with their own structure and organic law; it is to her that nature commissions the government of all energies, until they have not yet acquired their final determination. From this ontological and psychic data it is deduced that it would be to depart from reality to trust, in theory or in practice, the determining function of the whole to a particular factor, for example, to one of the elementary psychic dynamisms, and thus deliver the rudder to a secondary power. These dynamisms may *be in* the soul, *in* man; however, they are neither the soul nor the man. They are energies, perhaps, of considerable intensity; but nature has entrusted its direction to the central position, to the spiritual soul, endowed with intelligence and will, capable, normally, of governing these energies. The fact that these dynamisms exercise their imprisonment on an activity does not necessarily mean that they force it. It would deny an ontological and psychic reality, arguing to the soul its central position.

6. It is not possible, therefore, when studying the relationship between the *self* and the dynamisms that compose it, to grant without reservation, theoretically, the autonomy of man, that is, of his soul, and at the same time add that, in the reality of life, this theoretical principle often appears unsuccessful or, at least, less, reduced to the minimum expression. In the reality of life, it is said, man always has the freedom to lend his internal assent to what he executes, but not the freedom to execute it. The autonomy of free will is replaced by the heteronomy of instinctive dynamism. The Creator has not thus formed man. Original sin has not taken away the possibility and the obligation to govern itself through the soul. It is not intended that the psychic disturbances and diseases that impede the normal functioning of the psyche be the usual state.

II. Man as a structured unit

6. Man is a unit and a whole ordered; a microcosm, a kind of state whose fundamental law, determined by the end of the whole, subordinates to this very end the activity of the parties according to the true order of their value and their function. This law, in the last analysis, is of metaphysical ontological origin, not psychological and personal. It has been thought that the opposition between metaphysics and psychology had to be emphasized. How wrong! The psychic also belongs to the domain of the ontological and the metaphysical.

We have reminded you of this truth to unite to it an observation about the concrete man, whose internal ordering we examine here. It has been tried, in effect, to establish an antinomy between traditional psychology and ethics on the one hand and modern psychotherapy and clinical psychology on the other. Traditional psychology and ethics have as their object, it is asserted, the abstract being of man, the *homo ut sic*, which certainly does not exist anywhere. The clarity and logical connection of these disciplines deserve admiration, but they contain a basic error: they are inapplicable to the real man, as it exists. Clinical psychology, on the contrary, is part of the real man, of *homo ut hic*. And it concludes: between the two conceptions opens an abyss impossible to overcome until traditional psychology and ethics do not change their position.

7. Anyone who studies the constitution of the real man must, in effect, take as his object the *existential* man as he is, as his natural dispositions have done, the influences of the environment, education, his personal evolution, his intimate experiences and all external events. There is only this concrete man. And yet, the structure of this personal *self* obeys even the smallest detail to the ontological and metaphysical laws of human nature, of which we have spoken above. They are the ones who have formed it and who, therefore, must govern and judge it. The reason for this is that the *existential* man identifies himself in his intimate structure with the *essential* man. The essential structure of man does not disappear when the individual notes are added; it does not change into another human nature either. But precisely

the fundamental law, of which it was treated recently, rests on its main statements about the essential structure of concrete, real man.

Therefore, it would be erroneous to fix for real life norms that deviated from the natural and Christian morality and which would be called willingly with the word " *personalist ethics* "; the latter, undoubtedly, would receive from it a certain orientation, but would not entail a strict obligation in the same measure. The law of structure of the concrete man is not about to invent, but to apply.

III, Man as a social unit

8. What we have said so far concerns man in his personal life. The psychic also includes its relations with the external world; and it is a work worthy of praise, a field open to your investigations, to study the social psychism in itself and in its roots and make it usable for the purposes of clinical psychology and psychotherapy. There is, however, to be very careful in distinguishing precisely between the facts themselves and their interpretation.

Social psychism also touches on morality; and the conclusions of morality affect those of a serious psychology and psychotherapy. But there are some points in which the application of social psychism sins by excess or by defect; this is what we would like to stop briefly.

9. *The default error.* - There is a psychological and moral discomfort, the inhibition of the *self*, whose causes you want to discover with your science. When this inhibition invades the moral field, for example, when it comes to dynamisms, such as the instinct of domination, superiority, and sexual instinct, psychotherapy could not, without further ado, treat this inhibition of the *self* as a kind of fatality, as a tyranny of the affective stimulus, that springs from the subconscious and that simply escapes the control of the conscience and the soul. Do not quickly reduce the concrete man with his personal character to the rank of the brute. Despite the good intentions of the therapist, there are delicate spirits who bitterly resent this degradation to the plane of instinctive and sensitive life. Neither forget our previous observations on the order of value of the functions and the role of its central management.

10. A word also about the method sometimes used by the psychologist to rid the *self* of its inhibition in the cases of aberration in the sexual field: we refer to the complete sexual initiation, which nothing wants to keep quiet or leave in the dark. Is not there here, perhaps, a pernicious overvaluation of knowledge? There is also an effective sexual education, which with total security teaches in calmness and objectively what the young person must know to govern himself and deal with what surrounds him. On the other hand, we must insist particularly on sexual education as in all education, in the domain of oneself and in religious formation. The Holy See has published norms in this regard shortly after Pius XI's encyclical on Christian marriage (S. Congr. S. Off., March 21, 1931: AAS 23 [1931] 118). Those standards have not been retracted, neither expressly nor *via facti*.

11. What has just been said about the inconsiderate initiation, for therapeutic purposes, also applies to certain forms of psychoanalysis. They should not be considered as the only means of attenuating or curing psychic sexual disturbances. The repeated principle that the sexual disturbances of the unconscious, like the other inhibitions of identical origin, can not be suppressed except by its evocation of consciousness, it has no value if it is generalized without discernment. Indirect treatment also has its effectiveness, and it is often more than enough. As regards the use of the psychoanalytic method in the sexual field, our speech of September 13, already mentioned, already indicated its moral limits. Indeed, it can not be considered, just as legitimate, the evocation of the conscience of all the representations, emotions, sexual experiences that slept in the memory and in the unconscious, and that are made real in the

psyche. If the protests of human and Christian dignity are heard, who will risk pretending that this procedure does not carry with it any moral danger, whether immediate, and mediate, while, even when the therapeutic necessity of an exploration without limits, such a need is not, in any case, proven?

12. *The error by excess*. - It consists in emphasizing the demand of a total abandonment of the *self* and of its personal affirmation. In this regard, we want to highlight two things: a general principle and a point of psychotherapeutic practice.

From certain psychological explanations the thesis arises that the unconditional extraversion of the *self* constitutes the fundamental law of congenital altruism and its dynamisms. This is a logical, psychological and ethical error. There is a defense, an esteem, a love and a service of oneself, not only justified, but also demanded by psychology and morality. This is of natural evidence and also a lesson of the Christian faith (S. Th. *Sum. Theol.* II-II q.28, 4 in c). The Lord has taught: " *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (*Mk* 12, 31) .Christ proposes, then, as a rule of love for one's neighbor, charity for oneself, not the other way around. Applied psychology would disregard this reality, if it qualified any consideration of the *self* of psychic inhibition, error, regression to a previous stage of development, under the pretext that it is opposed to the natural altruism of the psyche.

13. The point of psychotherapeutic practice, which we point out, touches an essential interest of society: the safeguarding of the secrets that the use of psychoanalysis endangers. It is not entirely excluded that a fact or secret knowledge and retracted in the subconscious cause serious psychic conflicts. If psychoanalysis discovers the cause of such disturbance, he will, according to his principle, evoke that unconscious completely to make it conscious and suppress the obstacle. But there are secrets that it is absolutely necessary to keep silent, even to the doctor, even in spite of serious personal inconveniences. The secret of the confession does not allow to be revealed; it is also excluded that professional secrecy is communicated to another, even to the doctor. Tell yourself the same of other secrets. It appeals to the principle: *Ex cause proportionate gravi licet uni viro prudenti et secreti tenaci secretum manifesre*. The principle is exact, within restricted limits, for some kinds of secrets. It should not be used without discretion in psychoanalytic practice.

Regarding morality, and the common good, in the first place, the principle of discretion in the use of psychoanalysis will never be considered enough. It is, of course, first and foremost, no longer the discretion of the psychoanalyst, but of the patient's, which often has no right to dispose of its secrets.

IV. Man as a transcendent unit, in a tendency towards God

14. This last aspect of man raises three issues that we would not want to ignore.

In the first place, scientific research draws attention to a dynamism that, rooted in the depths of the psyche, would push man towards the infinite, which surpasses him, not making him known except by an ascending gravity derived directly from the ontological substratum. You see in that dynamism an independent force, the most fundamental and the most elemental of the soul, an affective impulse that immediately leads to God, like the flower, which spontaneously opens to the light and the sun, or as the child, who breathes unconsciously just born.

15. This affirmation leads us immediately to an observation: If it is declared that this dynamism is at the origin of all religions, and that it means the element common to all of them, we know, on the other hand, that religions, the Natural and supernatural knowledge of God and his cult, do not come from the unconscious or the subconscious or from an affective impulse, but from

the clear and certain knowledge of God through his natural and positive revelation. This is the doctrine and faith of the Church, from the word of God in the book of Wisdom and in the epistle to the Romans to the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* of our predecessor Blessed Pius X.

16. Affirmed this, there remains the question of that mysterious dynamism. One could say, for this purpose, the following: it is not necessary, in truth, to accuse the psychology of the depths if it seizes the content of the religious psyche, strives to analyze it and reduce it to a scientific system, although this research is new and its terminology is not in the past. We remember this last point because mistakes are easily created when psychology attributes a new meaning to expressions already in use. On both sides, prudence and reserve will be needed to avoid false interpretations and make possible a reciprocal understanding.

It belongs to the methods of your science to clarify the questions of the existence, structure and way of acting of that dynamism. If the result is positive, it should not be declared irreconcilable with reason or with faith. This would only show that *esse ab alio* is also, even in its deepest roots, an *esse ad alium*, and that the expression of Saint Augustine: "*Fecisti ad ad te; et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te* » (*Conf.* 1.1.1), find a new confirmation even in the most intimate of the psychic being. And, if it were a dynamism that reached all men, all peoples, all times and all cultures, what help and how appreciable it would be for the search for God and his affirmation!

17. It also belongs to the transcendental relationships of the psyche the *feeling of guilt*, the consciousness of having violated a higher law, whose obligation, however, was recognized: consciousness that can become suffering and even psychological disturbance.

Psychotherapy deals here with a phenomenon that does not result from its exclusive competence, because it is also, if not mainly, of a religious nature. Nobody will argue that there can be, and this is not uncommon, an irrational, even pathological sense of guilt. But one can also be aware of a real lack that has not been erased. Neither psychology nor ethics have an infallible criterion for cases of this kind, because the process of consciousness that engenders guilt has a too personal and too subtle structure. But, in any case, it is certain that the real guilt will not be cured by any purely psychological treatment. Even if the psychotherapist denies it, it may be that in very good faith, it lasts. Even if the feeling of guilt is removed by medical intervention, by autosuggestion or by persuasion of another, the lack remains; and psychotherapy would be deceived **and** deceive others if, to erase the feeling of guilt, pretend that there is no fault.

18. The means of eliminating the fault is not purely psychological; it consists, as every Christian knows, in perfect contrition and in the sacramental absolution of the priest. Here is the source of evil, it is the fault itself that is extirpated, although the remorse may continue to torment. It is not uncommon in our days that in certain pathological cases the priest sends his penitent to the doctor; in the present case, the doctor should rather direct his client to God and to those who have the power to forgive the same fault in the name of God.

19. A final observation regarding the transcendent orientation of the psyche towards God: respect for God and his holiness must always be reflected in the conscious acts of man. When these acts deviate from the divine model, even without the subjective fault of the person concerned, they go, however, against their final end. This is why what is called *material sin* is something that should not exist and, therefore, in the moral order, constitutes a reality that is not indifferent.

A conclusion is derived for psychotherapy: before material sin can not remain neutral. It can tolerate what, for the moment, is unavoidable. But you must know that God can not justify this

action. Even less psychotherapy can give the patient the advice to calmly commit a material sin, because he will do so without subjective lack; and that advice would be equally wrong, although such action might seem necessary for the psychic rest of the patient and, therefore, for the purpose of healing. You can never advise a conscious action that would be a denomination, and not an image, of divine perfection.

That is what We thought we should expose. For the rest, be assured that the Church continues with warm sympathy and with your best wishes your investigations and your medical activities. You work in very difficult terrain. But your work can obtain precious results for medicine, for the knowledge of the soul in general, for the religious dispositions of man and his development. May Providence and divine grace illuminate your path! As a pledge of it, we, with paternal benevolence, give you our Apostolic Blessing.

* AAS 45 (1953) 278-288.

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