a better contact, a deeper relationship, on the plane, between the penitent and Christ himself.

The golden rule of a therapist should be: teach your patient to become himself.

The golden rule of the priest, as a spiritual adviser, is the rule that St John the Baptist established for himself in the third chapter of St John's Gospel: '*He* must increase, but I must decrease' (III, 30).

THE PRIEST IN AN AGE OF PSYCHOLOGY

NEVILLE BRAYBROOKE

IT is impossible to maintain a neutral attitude towards the priest; by his very calling, he must either attract or repel. In society, he may serve as a scapegoat, like the Jew, or he may become the beloved shepherd of his flock; he may heap confidences upon himself as easily as insults; he may even arouse feelings of *guilt*, though no sooner is the word out than the presence of psychiatrists is felt. Today their influence, though not emphatic, is everywhere pervasive. Indeed, if the eighteenth century was called an Age of Reason, so perhaps might the present century be called an Age of Psychology; a definition far nearer the mark than any newspaper headlines about an Atomic Era. For in the end, mind always proves to be superior to matter, just as 'all argument proves to be ultimately theological'. Behind the psychiatrists, fluttering in his red robes, hovers the presence of Manning, while the halls of seminaries, smelling of beeswax and oil, still reverberate with his dictum that a course in Dickens is as necessary for their students as a course in Aquinas. Accordingly when W. H. Auden a few years ago first spoke of 'the real world of theology and horses' there was forged an immediate link between cardinal and poet, such as also exists between priest, psychiatrist and novelist.

'If I were an Irish hodman I would be a drunkard', his Eminence would repeat at Westminster. This was plain speaking. 'Do you know the Jews are taking better care of their working girls... than we are? What are our people doing? Oh, I forgot, they are

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examining their consciences'. Again this was plain speaking. Moreover, when he referred to Dickens' novels as 'a complete course of moral theology', he was underlining the reality which lay behind them, of words being used as servants of the vision, of words being finally no more than servants of the Word. A novelist must needs write the truth as a priest must preach it, though on occasion each might invade the territory of the other. Yet by this none were the poorer; the truth was only made more manifest. Similarly nowadays the psychiatrist may seem to invade the territory of the priest; there are obvious resemblances between the consulting-room and the confessional. Yet by this neither is the loser. For example, when the psychiatrist tries to remove the burdens of guilt from his patient (a process known as 'a transference' in psychological terms), the act may stir dark memories for an individual, a shadowed church and the echoing voice, 'He died for you, He died for me; for your sins, my sins. . . .' Such is the case perhaps with the lapsed believer; yet even with the non-believer, or the man who has so far not been encompassed directly by the problem of belief, there are memories stirring, race-memories about which I shall say more later. Here it may be enough to observe that the words patient and penitent are not unalike and that guilt frequently proves to be a synonym for sin.

So, from one point of view, it might be said that the greatest act of 'transference' took place on a cross, although to speak thus is to realize exactly how pervasive has been the influence of psychology on language. Inevitably men are the children of their landscape, and novelists, reflecting the world about them, will present characters as much subject to the history and geography of their countries as they will be flawed with the marks of their particular decade or age. The psychiatrist may sum up these flaws as the marks of guilt; the priest may prefer to describe them as the stains of Original Sin; though, if this suggests too theoretical a division, then when it comes to reality there is a general blurring so that, seen at middle distance, the general landscape appears to be one where the two views merge. I simply use such a division to show the two main attitudes or trends of thought.

A century ago Newman referred to grace taking its effect like dew on the grass; the image is quiet and peaceful, reflecting the morning stillness of the winding lanes about Birmingham, or of

the seed gently thrusting up between the grey paving-stones of some Oxford college. In contrast, Graham Greene with much more clinical imagery in his novel, *The End of the Affair* (1951), has compared the effect of grace to 'the taking of an injection'; in his prose, there is a contemporary feeling of knees cut on the city's asphalt, or of the deadly sting of the tsetse fly in the lawless swamps of some unmapped continent. Allowing for a century's change of idiom, the principal difference between the cardinal and novelist remains one of approach.

Modern advertising has made men particularly conscious of any flaw in themselves, lack of protein; decaying teeth; encroaching baldness. From the huge hordings of any town, figures beckon, offering for half-a-crown or fifty cents the remedy for all such defects. The hope that they inspire represents the forgotten image of the witch-doctor. Then in the popular press, confidential father-figures promise the power to overcome blushing or stammering. Their white coats carry with them a suggestion of the monastic habit or the Klu Klux Khlan tunic. So partly consciously and partly not, it is against such a background that any American or English novelist must work: any character of the priest that they draw will have to be seen not only from this popular advertised conception of 'doctors in religion', but also dissociated from this background and seen as part of the tradition fostered by poets like Chaucer in his sketch of the 'poor parsoun of the towne', or by Daniel Defoe when he introduced the first Benedictine into the English novel in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). 'And now I speak of marrying', begins the passage, 'it brings me naturally to speak of the . . . ecclesiastic that I had brought with me out of the ship's crew, whom I took up at sea. . . . He was a grave, sober, pious and most religious person; exact in his life, extensive in his charity, exemplary in almost everything he did'.

Fiction is storytelling, and Defoe's portrait was based on fact; the first priest in English fiction was a priest in fact. The author had merely held up a mirror to life. If justice demanded that he should give him a due character, then he was careful to add, again in the cause of justice, that it was his 'opinion, perhaps as well as the opinion of others . . . 'that he was mistaken in his beliefs'. Yet, if the centuries have brought little difference to the shape of the sickle or cross, then beneath the habit or soutane, which have remained the same throughout the ages, there have been not only

men who differ from each other, but who all the time have been growing and developing. In Chaucer's day, there were many frauds prepared to dress in cloaks, to put on the outward semblances of a friar in order to sell their quack cures or forty days indulgences. Unsconciously modern advertizing often re-echoes this practice with its many bottles whose prescriptions guarantee a refund or cure within forty days!

Such echoes or observations for the novelist turn to signs and symbols in the mind of the psychiatrist, though once more I simply use such a theoretical division to show the two main attitudes or trends of thought. For a novelist must always be something of a prophet, so that he sees ahead as well as deep into his own times: not to record what he sees there, would be to fail in his vocation, just as a priest (or psychiatrist for that matter) would be failing in his were he to refuse a sick call. In seminaries, as in all religious houses or medical institutions, there is a noticeable cult of polishing and beeswax; and sometimes on Sundays the faithful will be harrangued about those who have not come to church, about those who are still in the streets washing down their cars. It requires perhaps the psychiatrist to point out the religious significance of beeswax and oil or to draw attention to the power of race-memory; it requires perhaps the novelist to take in the scene and then unconsciously bring out by juxtaposition the irony or link between the church-goer and the blue-domer as he rubs until his face is reflected in the shining mudguards. His car is his mount and he would groom her as a fine mare: 'the real world of theology and horses' draws close. For the Hell-fire sermon is growing out of date, or maybe it would be truer to say that it is dying because a pit with demons now strikes less terror than suggestions of everlasting loss, complete isolation, or sustained anguish. A pit and demons are too near the reality of a city under aerial bombardment to hint any longer at supernatural terrors; and the conception of Hell as a waiting-room of sustained anguish strikes the profoundest terror in those who have least fulfilled their potentiality and therefore fear death most. This is religious as well as psychological reasoning; it can be described as guilt, or sloth in virtue, as some might call it from the pulpit. A rule for the preacher, with appropriate variations for the analyst, might be formulated thus: 'As far as I understand my people (or patients), so far will I understand my country. As far as I am in tune with

my age and country, so far will I understand how religion will affect my life and people'.

This is probably the best point at which I may introduce a true story concerning the Italian stigmatist, Padre Pio, which has a bearing on my argument. The story has not been printed before and concerns a world famous psychiatrist whom I shall refer to as Dr X.

Dr X, a devout Catholic, went to Foggia to talk with Padre Pio: on several occasions he asked if his confession might be heard, but on every occasion Padre Pio told him to return either later or on another day. The last time that he made this request, Dr X, on finding that the answer was the same as before, asked if instead he might be allowed to serve the stigmatist's mass the next day. But the following morning at the moment when the server usually washes the priest's fingers the order was reversed and the psychiatrist found the water being poured over his. From then on he knew that it was not necessary for him to go to confession while he was in Foggia; his pilgrimage had achieved its end, not the end as many pilgrims have known it, but an end which both religiously and psychologically was absolutely right in this case.

The story stands as an example of the recognition by both priest and psychiatrist of their different callings. 'Begin by purifying the source and those that drink of the waters shall not be poisoned'. To see clearly then is always to be contemporary in the best sense, no muddying, no murky searching, but a drawing straight from the source. The novelist can only present a contemporary clergy if he himself is a contemporary man of his own age. Otherwise he will present either a gallery of nineteenth-century characters or a series of clerics of no more authenticity than the beckoning white figures on posters. Alternatively, if he goes farther afield to the missions he may be able to tell stories in which sick calls involve shooting the rapids, or to countries where persecution forces the priest to adopt a disguise: in either case, excitement of narrative frequently hides a lack of psychological perception. The question remains: How is the novelist to treat the seemingly uneventful life of the ordinary secular in London or New York, Boston or Birmingham? Although the fact that the question arises at all shows how little are understood the crosses borne in these seemingly uneventful lives. Let me explain. Suppose Monsignor Y is sent a newly ordained curate. Soon the elder

priest may begin to adopt a fatherly attitude, an interest at first appreciated by the boy, but later resented. Yet if Father Z is a reasonably intelligent man he will know that the time will come when he too may be sent a curate thirty years his junior whom he will try and adopt in precisely the same way as the monsignor. Celibacy is never easy, but it is not necessarily the hardest cross to carry; as middle age ends, so the having of no sons to whom to give one's name may become far harder to bear. And there is the constant agony as youth becomes middle age of knowing that this state is arriving. To be aware of the truth never lessens the burden of carrying it.

'Mine is a parish like any other', Georges Bernanos began his famous novel set in the form of *The Diary of a Country Priest* (1936). Yet holiness can be an adventure anywhere, crossing the swamps to bring the Last Sacraments, or sitting before the dying embers of a presbytery fire. Holiness can be an adventure anywhere because the depths of the mind are always accessible. Holiness and wholeness go together; the world of Dickens and the world of Aquinas; the London of Queen Victoria or the sun beating over the olive-trees at Aquino. To all these, the passage of the centuries brings little change. 'For every high priest is taken from among men and is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God, that he may offer gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can have compassion on them that err: because he himself also is compassed with infirmity (Hebrews, 5)'.

As when Defoe sketched the first portrait of a Benedictine, so, in the Age of Psychology, that still remains the only approach for the novelist.