

## EMOTION AND SPIRIT

Since the days of Freud, psychoanalysts and churchmen have been pitted against one another, fighting to prove that they have the cure for the ills of the soul. But now a man who should know—a former Catholic priest turned analyst—says it is time for them to patch up their differences and form an alliance. It is the only way for them both to survive into the 21st century, he says.

Neville Symington, a member of the British Psychoanalytical Society and one of its leading thinkers, maintains that both religion and psychoanalysis are failing, but for opposite reasons. "Psychoanalysis is largely failing to heal those with sick minds because it is devoid of those core values which have been central to all the great religious traditions," he said. "Traditional religions fail in the world today because they apply their values in a realm which is irrelevant to the modern world." He continued: "I think we've come to the end of the era where revealed religion can provide the necessary guidance for people living in the contemporary world. It's a question of formulating an emergence of a new religious value system that could marry up with psychoanalysis." In order to do so, both had to relinquish "excess baggage": the creeds, dogma, rituals and theories which only obscure the deeper values they are trying to express.

Dr Symington, 61, who emigrated to Australia 12 years ago, was in London last week as a guest speaker at the BPS. He is on a mission to stimulate a dialogue between thinkers from traditional religions and the psychotherapeutic movement. The conversation would, he admits, be "uncomfortable". He only has to mention the word "moral" to a psychoanalyst and he is interpreted as meaning "moralistic"; "virtue" is instantly translated as "hypocrisy". In his book *Emotion and Spirit: Questioning the Claims of Psychoanalysis and Religion*, to be reprinted by Karnac Books in March, Dr Symington argues that religious faith and therapy must learn from each other. Few psychoanalysts have turned their attention to religion—Freud was an atheist—but in the past 18 months he has noticed a growing interest in spirituality among psychoanalytic circles. "There's some realisation that there is something missing," he said. Freud founded a movement which replaced a puritanical perspective with "one of understanding, of empathy, the neutral stance, one of acceptance". But in so doing, "the baby has been thrown out with the bath water", Dr Symington said. Psychoanalysts, who regarded the individual's own feeling as "the only index of action", were liable to "smother" rather than "illuminate" conscience.

Dr Symington's biography mirrors a move in some sections of society away from the Church and into the arms of therapists. He grew up "in the bosom of

Catholicism" and was sent to Ampleforth, the Catholic boarding school in Yorkshire, where he was taught French literature by Cardinal Basil Hume. At 21, he enrolled in a seminary and then became a curate in east London. But in 1968, at the age of 31, his life changed. "I realised the irrelevance of Catholic practice to people's real lives," he said, recalling his departure from the Church. The 2nd Vatican Council's ruling on contraception was a deciding factor, he added. He decided to train as a psychoanalyst and has practised ever since. He sees psychoanalysis as "a spirituality-in-the-world" and the field for mystical union with "the Ultimate" as being within the closest emotional bonds. Religion and psychoanalysis have a joint goal: "The conversion or transformation of actions which are destructive into actions which are constructive." Instead of prayer, psychoanalysis has interpretation, but while confession concerns "things that the penitent knows about", psychoanalysis deals with "those things of which the patient is unaware".

Much of what Dr Symington says echoes New Labour's emphasis on personal responsibility. Tony Blair has been attempting to reinstate the values of religion into public life. It appears that Dr Symington is trying to do the same for therapy.

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