

CARDINAL ANGELINI'S INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

A New Attitude Towards the Mentally Ill

The question expressed by the title of this international conference does not seek to raise a doubt about the truth that in every human person there is a reflection of the image and likeness of God. Its intention, rather, is to identify and explore through the paths of reason, science and experience itself—where all are illuminated by the faith—those traces of this mysterious reflection of God which are present in those who suffer from disturbance caused by mental illness in a variety of forms and in different degrees of intensity.

What is of utmost importance and seeks to be almost a provocation is not, however, a theoretical and abstract answer in the affirmative. This would not be enough. Because the divine image also shines within man when his faculties are compromised or limited in their use as a result of mental illness, the social community—and Christians in particular—must recognize and celebrate the divine image in man through service to those who suffer from such illness.

The refusal and inability to perform this duty become wrongdoing when they are expressed in indifference to the problem and in a total absence of practical commitment. This is a duty which science and faith, medicine, and both natural and Christian morality are called upon to perform through the use of the increasing advances in and demonstrated effectiveness of therapeutic methods and instruments.

The third international conference, held in 1989, was also dedicated to the "human mind." The subjects discussed by the conference this year represent from many points of view an updating of the work of its predecessor.

Researchers, scientists, experts in biomedicine, psychologists, theologians, and moral theorists—all of international fame—will address during the course of this conference the various questions and problems relating to the *structure* of the human mind, the facts and fig-

ures relating to the presence of mental illness, its direct and indirect *causes*, the *places of such disturbance*, the *various models* of social reference, the *forms and manifestations* of the different kinds of mental illness, and the criteria and *the means of prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation*. From an ethical and spiritual point of view, the tasks and methods of caring for the mentally ill will be examined in strictly medical terms and in terms of pastoral assistance.

Mental disturbance afflicts a fifth of mankind and should not only be studied from the point of view of its causes but in a very special fashion in terms of its consequences. We must do this if we want to face up to, treat, and cure such illness, and to do this we must have a conception and a vision of life which recognize its origin in God; we must perceive the inviolable sanctity and the noble dignity which are present in each and every human person.

We constantly hear that before closing psychiatric institutions we should provide alternative facilities and amenities in town and country, structures and amenities which in many regions do not exist or are inadequate.

This is true, but it is not the whole truth. The structures and amenities are not sufficient if in their use and management human and Christian principles and criteria are not applied elements which involve seeing those suffering from serious mental illness as brothers to love and to serve. We are also dealing here with a problem in the current *mentality*, which, unfortunately, is becoming ever more closed and selfish and tends to want to remove suffering and to marginalize it.

Now that science has achieved great steps forward in the treatment of mental illness, such forms of treatment are clearly totally insufficient if they are not infused with a renewed sense of social sensitivity. Experience shows that one of the most serious problems in the

treatment and care of the mentally ill lies in their presence in families, which on their own are not able to help their afflicted relatives without risk and in an adequate fashion. Even the most modern facilities end up being like the infamous lunatic asylums when the human *heart* is lacking.

In relation to the role of health care workers active in this area, all such workers should be psychologically, professionally, morally, and spiritually trained and prepared for this form of assistance and care.

This international conference will also dedicate itself to the study of the structural causes of mental illness within our society. The key point, however, remains that of the achievement and creation of a new sensitivity and

mentality. Indeed, there can be no doubt that at the root of many and new forms of mental disturbance there is a crisis in values and the dominance of anti-values which propel man into increasing loneliness. The step from this loneliness to mental disturbance is short—indeed, it can be very short. The alliance between scientific resources and spiritual resources is not a mere question of possibility—it is a question of duty. It is, therefore, the irreplaceable solution when we come to consider that an increasing number of pathological phenomena in the field of mental illness spring from a lack of access—in both preventive and therapeutic terms—to the support of spiritual resources.

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