

Dear Fr Pascal,

This note is prompted by David Holbrook's comment on Rosemary Haughton's book *The Transformation of Man*, which appeared in the October *New Blackfriars*. Regarding Sartre as a major influence on Mrs Haughton's thought, he launches a two-pronged attack: (1) on Sartre's philosophy as being schizoid; (2) on *The Transformation of Man* as being an attempt to Christianize this schizoid philosophy. Over against both of these, Holbrook sets a third view of man, that of 'those who study human nature professionally' (p. 27). We are not writing a defence of Rosemary Haughton but simply questioning on empirical grounds the premise about human nature on which Holbrook's attack is based.

Holbrook asks (p. 28) 'Why does she have an estimate of human nature so much lower than that which comes to me from those who study human nature professionally?' Could it not be that Rosemary Haughton's estimation is more comprehensive than Holbrook's in terms of the height and the depth of human experience?

Now R. D. Laing is one of Holbrook's chosen authorities. Too wide a spectrum of readers of Laing's *The Divided Self*, however, have felt *themselves* at some point of his analysis to justify Holbrook's restriction of this kind of experience to what he calls 'the schizoid minority'. In *The Divided Self*, *The Politics of Experience*, and *The Bird of Paradise* (two Penguins) Laing shows the schizoid problem to be in some degree universal.

Holbrook goes on to affirm that '“the vague, untamed areas of life” are what make life significant and marvellous', but he stops short of a fully historical and personal exploration of this affirmation, concluding with what is virtually the myth of the noble savage, based on his belief 'that man just grew, as a manifestation of the dynamics of matter'. There is a failure here to recognize the enormous complexity of the psychic growth of human personality, witnessed to not only by the artistic, poetic and musical giants, but by the schizoid element in all men who are sufficiently conscious to be able to articulate their inner life. Of course the articulate are a minority, but are they therefore to be regarded as an insignificant and rather distressing fringe phenomenon?

It is a truism (admittedly seldom taken with full seriousness by

Christians themselves) that properly nurtured adults will tend to produce properly nurtured children. But Holbrook's naive belief in nurture as the way to create a non-schizoid humanity carries little practical weight, if Laing is right, in a situation where the lack of proper nurture, leading to radical inadequacy in relationship, is universal and deep-rooted. Holbrook isolates this inadequacy by describing the emotionally insecure as a minority, but is this true? Laing thinks not, and is at pains to stress (cf. *The Politics of Experience*) that 'schizophrenic' is not a clinically precise term but a label given by society to those unable to conform to conventional routines of thought and behaviour. He even suggests that a time may be coming when the schizophrenic in this sense will be seen as the wiser man, insofar as he has embarked on the journey into the uncharted darkness which his labeller fears to face. At this point it is the man who restricts the schizoid problem to a minority from which he excludes himself who is arbitrarily limiting the area of experience in which the search for meaning can usefully proceed. Holbrook's very emotive use of the term 'schizoid' as a stick with which to beat Sartre and Rosemary Haughton is in stark contrast to Laing's whole approach here.

In conclusion, here is Laing asserting the drastic inadequacy of all human life as actually experienced and lived. He speaks of his own writing: 'This writing . . . remains like all writing an absurd and revolting effort to make an impression on a world that will remain as unmoved as it is avid. If I could turn you on, if I could drive you out of your wretched mind, if I could tell you, I would let you know' (*The Bird of Paradise*, p. 152).

Yours, etc.,

SEBASTIAN MOORE and PETER HARVEY, O.S.B.

St Mary's, Highfield Street, Liverpool.
17th October 1967.

*Mr Holbrook is in fact having an article published in *Encounter* early in the new year under the title 'R. D. Laing and the Death-Circuit'.