**Eulogy for Neville Symington by his son Andrew, 19 December 2019**

Our father’s life, from his origins in a wine family in Portugal, via the priesthood to psychoanalysis, was characterised by a deep desire to understand.

Though he read widely, he did not do so to accumulate the knowledge of others but rather to use their wisdom to help gain a **personal** understanding of the matter in question.

As his son, this could be pretty irritating – I remember trying to convince him totally without success that the temperature of our swimming pool depended on what the weather had been like – but it was a key foundation of much of the good he did.

I’ll give you an example. One day I came home to find him reading the paper with a puzzled look on his face. He pointed to a word and asked if I knew what it meant. It was populism.

It revealed something of Dad’s curious innocence about everyday life that he had not noticed this word before – the whole world had been talking about it for years already – and I told him that of course I knew what it meant. I then tried to explain it to him and realised that perhaps I didn’t know what it meant quite as much as I had thought. This was typical of his search for understanding: it forced others around him to reevaluate their own knowledge and think a level deeper.

Allied to this quest for understanding was one of two outstanding characteristics that I want to focus on today: honesty. In our world of fake news and truth-for-hire Dad was a remarkable beacon. I can’t recall him ever being consciously dishonest. Reflect for a moment on how extraordinary that statement actually is.

He couldn’t pretend and was never afraid to admit that he didn’t know something or that he had been wrong.

Likewise, he was never afraid to admit that someone else was wrong. This lost him some friends over the years but gained him many more.

This intellectual honesty was at the core of his personal search for meaning through theological college, parish life, philosophy, psychology and clinical work.

It was also deeply helpful to others around him and was the key to his analytic approach.

His other outstanding virtue was something with many facets; we can call it generosity, compassion, humanity, love. He was a deeply generous man in all senses of the word: as a father, as a mentor, as a friend or as a host cooking up a huge paella and pulling the cork from another bottle. Many of the kind tributes we have received in these weeks speak of his laugh; it was the wonderful laugh of a generous man who loved good company and conversation.

His analysands benefitted greatly from this humanity. His personal concern for their wellbeing was in contrast to much of the theory but was crucial to his work. Someone he was seeing was going to Spain on holiday; he gave them my email address for some travel tips. Others were from poor countries, so he charged them a tiny fraction of his normal fee. He viewed this as common humanity but it is not so common as all that.

As someone who feels at home all over the world, I owe a lot to my father’s global viewpoint. Though he struggled to get up the stairs at home he was happy to jump in a plane – often flying it himself – and head to any corner of the globe to teach.

I don’t know that Dad was a natural father but he was a wonderful one. While his honesty and humanity gave us excellent grounding, we were also beneficiaries of a complete failure of his normal critical faculties. He was supremely confident in our abilities to do absolutely anything that we might turn our hand to and considered us in general totally praiseworthy in every aspect. While I regret to admit that in my case his gaze was extremely rose-tinted, being the beneficiary of such paternal pride has left me with strong and lasting inner belief.

One of my father’s favourite stories – and yes you may have heard it a few times, but not as many as we have - concerned his old school headmaster, who was asked at a conference what he prepared his boys for. ‘Death’ was his answer.

I feel that Dad’s philosophical and spiritual questing had prepared him well for death. He viewed it as serious event but one that he was ready for. He said to me a few months back that he felt a father’s role was to launch his children, that he considered us launched and that he was ready for the next step. He took that step with respect but without fear.

Dad felt that good psychoanalysis was a generative force that could foster inner creativity that he considered essential to health.

In many ways he was the personification of that generative force for so many of us. He will be sorely missed but he will live on here through what he has written, taught, laughed and loved.