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'Peace Of Soul' - - - By Monsignor Fulton Sheen

(Continued from Page 1)

As a body of water that is blocked turns back upon itself, collecting scum, refuse, and silt, so the modern soul (which has none of the goals or channels of the Christian) backs upon itself and in that choked condition collects all the subrational, instinctive, dark, unconscious sediment which would never have accumulated had there been the normal exits of normal times.

Man now finds that he is locked up within himself, his own prisoner. Jailed by self, he now attempts to compensate for the loss of the three-dimensional universe of faith by finding three new dimensions within his own mind. Above his ego, his conscious level, he discovers, in place of heaven, an inexorable tyrant whom he calls the super-ego. Below his consciousness, in place of hell, he substitutes a hidden world of instincts and urges, primitive longings and biological needs, which he calls the id.

This conception of the human person as consisting of three layers or regions has been emphasized by Sigmund Freud. It forms an essential element in the psychoanalytic doctrine of human nature.

Human Ego Is A Battlefield

The most important feature of this doctrine is the belief that man's conscious mental life, his experiences, and his conduct are determined, not by what he knows, feels, or intends, but by forces largely hidden from his consciousness. His ego is only the battlefield where an incessant war is fought between his biological, primitive urges and the powers embodied in the super-ego.

These powers take the place of conscience; they originate, not in an awareness of a natural law and of man's obligation in face of the divine law, but from social pressure, environmental influences brought to bear on the plastic mind of the small child. Because the fulfillment of the primitive urges is placed under control by society (as in the training of toilet habits), these urges become "frustrated." Their original aims cannot persist in our consciousness because of their intolerable conflict with environmental standards; thereby they become "repressed."

The child thus takes over all laws, viewpoints, and values of the adult world when he accepts these standards as his own. He does this by identifying himself with the person whom he would view as an antagonist in a primitive society. Thus, the super-ego arises and acquires its contents—the rules, taboos, and ideals that happen to be those of the child's surrounding world.

According to such a modern conception of the subjective life, man appears as a captive within his own mind and as a victim of forces which he cannot recognize. To free himself, if that be possible, he must know more about his prison; this is one reason for the great popularity of psychiatry today. This science promises to explain man to himself, to enable him to cope better with his tragic situation.

A certain type of psychiatry tries to explain man by a theory that the conscious is devoid of value, that only through the unconscious may modern man hope to discover a way out of his unhappiness. The conscious, in this belief, is both forced from above by the id and put under pressure from above by the super-ego. Conscious man is helpless between them.

Psychiatry, then, becomes a sort of iron file whereby man hopes to scrape out of this mental prison where he has locked himself, seeing as his own turnkey.

Freedom Denied

Freud and Marx agree, to that all events, social and personal, are strictly determined. Spiritual freedom is denied by both.

The Marxist holds that history is determined by economic forces; the Freudian, that man's personal fate depends on instinctual forces. Both envision the abolition of inhibition as the way toward a better state of affairs. The very existence of this parallel in thinking indicates how modern man understands or misunderstands himself within the general cultural, intellectual, and philosophical "climate" of the times.

Historical materialism, the philosophy of Marx, and psychological materialism, the philosophy of Freud, are children of the same age and express the same basic attitudes.

Chapter II

The complex, anxieties, and fears of the modern soul did not exist to such an extent in previous generations because they were shaken off and integrated in the great social-spiritual organism of Christian Civilization. They are, however, so much a part of modern man that one would think they were tattooed on him.

Whatever his condition, the modern man must be brought back to God and happiness. But how? Should the Christian, with his eternal vertiges, insist that modern man must go back

to the traditional approach, which started its argument with nature? That he must approach God through the five arguments of St. Thomas? It would be a sinner world if he could.

MAN AS ME IS

But it is the point of this book that we must make a start with modern man as he is, not as we should like to find him. Because our apologetic literature has missed this point, it is about fifty years behind the times. It leaves the modern soul cold, not because its arguments are unconvincing, but because the modern soul is too confused to grasp them.

But we who are heirs of twenty centuries of sound thinking must not deal with the supernatural as a dog with a bone. If the modern soul wants to begin its quest for peace with its psychology instead of with our own metaphysics, we will begin with psychology.

God's truth would have few facets if it could not start with human nature in any degree of perfection, or even of degradation. If the modern man wants to go to God from the Devil, why, then, will we ever start with the Devil: that is where the Divine Lord began, with Magdalen, and He told His followers that, with prayer and fasting, they too could start their evangelical work there.

ABOUT THEOLOGY

The psychological approach offers us no difficulty; for Christian theology is, in a certain sense, a psychology, since its primary interest is the soul, the most precious of things. To study souls is nothing new; in the whole career of modern psychology there is nothing written on frustrated fears, and anxieties which an even faintly compare a death of breadth with St. Thomas's treatise on the Passions, Augustine's Confessions, or Aquinas's treatise on Concupiscence.

But, it may be asked, is not the modern soul so different from that of previous ages that the older writers' limited experience of soul's phenomena—so that not even the Gospel can offer a clue? No. There is nothing really new in the world; there are only the old problems being solved by the new methods. The modern man is characterized by three attitudes: he is divided from himself, from his fellow man, and from his God.

SELF-ESTRANGEMENT

The modern man is no longer a unity, but a confused bundle of impulses and nerves. He is too dissociated, so alienated from himself that he sees himself less as a personality than as a battlefield where a civil war rages between a thousand and one conflicting loyalties.

There is no single over-all purpose in his life. His soul is comparable to a menagerie in which a number of beasts, each seeking its own prey, turn one upon the other. Or he may be likened to a radio that is tuned in to several stations; instead of getting any one clearly, it receives only an annoying static.

SOUL AND PH. D.

If the frustrated soul is educated, it has a smattering of uncorrelated bits of information with no unifying philosophy. Then the frustrated soul may say to itself: "I sometimes think there are two of me—a living soul and a P.H.D." Such a man projects his own mental confusion to the outside world and concludes that, since he knows no truth, nobody can know it.

His own skepticism which he universalizes into a philosophy of life) throws him back more and more upon those powers lurking in the dark, dank caverns of his unconsciousness. He changes his philosophy as he changes his clothes.

On Monday, he lays down the


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