

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

(Continued from Page 1)

by what they believe to be the enemy.

Modern psychologists have done an admirable service in studying anxieties, revealing a phase of human nature which has been to some extent closed to us. But the cause of anxiety is deeper than the psychological.

Anxiety may take on new forms in our disordered civilization, but anxiety itself has always been rooted in the nature of man. There has never been an age, there has never been a human being in the history of the world without an anxiety complex; in other time, it was studied on all the levels of life.

## The Philosophy of Anxiety

The Old Testament, for example, has one book which is concerned solely with the problem of anxiety—the Book of Job. The Sermon on the Mount is a warning against the wrong kind of anxieties. St. Augustine's writings center around what he called the restless soul. Pascal wrote about human misery. A modern philosopher, Kierkegaard, bases his philosophy on dread, or Angst, and Heidegger has told us Dasein is Sorge, "Self-existence is worry."

It is important to inquire into the basic reason and ground of anxiety, according to man's present historical condition, of which the psychological is only one superficial manifestation. The philosophy of anxiety looks to the fact that man is a falling being composed of body and soul.

Standing midway between the animal and the angel, living in a finite world and aspiring toward the infinite, moving in time and seeking the eternal, he is pulled at one moment toward the pleasures of the body and at another moment to the joys of the spirit.

He is in a constant state of suspension between matter and spirit and may be likened to a mountain climber who ascends to the great peak above and yet, looking back from his present position, fears falling to the abyss below.

## Story of the Mountain Climber

In every human being, there is a double law of gravitation, one pulling him to the earth, where he has his time of trial, and the other pulling him to God, where he has his happiness. The anxiety underlying all modern man's anxieties arises from his trying to be himself without God or from his trying to get beyond himself without God.

The example of the mountain climber is not exact for such a man has no helper on the upper peak to which he aspires. Man, however, has a helper—God on the upper peak of eternity reaches out His Omnipotent Hand to lift him up, even before man raises his voice in plea. It is evident that, even though we escaped all the anxieties of modern economic life, even though we avoided all the tensions which psychology finds in the unconsciousness and consciousness, we should still have that great basic fundamental anxiety born of our creatureliness.

Anxiety stems fundamentally from irregulated desires, from the creature wanting something that is unnecessary for him or contrary to his nature or positively harmful to his soul. Anxiety increases in direct ratio and proportion as man departs from God. Every man in the world has an anxiety complex because he has the capacity to be either saint or sinner.

Let it be not believed that man has an anxiety complex "because he still has traces of his animal origin"; indeed, animals left to themselves never have anxieties. They have natural fears, which are good, but they have no subjective anxieties. Birds do not develop a psychosis about whether they should take a winter trip to California or Florida. An animal never becomes less than it is; but a man can do just that, because a man is a composite of both spirit and matter.

Dread arises because man becomes aware, however dimly, of his contingency and finitude. He is not the absolute, though he wants it; he is not even all that he is or all that he could be. This tension between possibility and fact, this oscillation between wanting to be with God and wanting to be God is a deeper side of his anxiety. Alfred Adler has always emphasized that back of neuroses is the striving of man to become like God, a striving as important as the goal is impossible. The root of every psychological tension is basically metaphysical.

**NATIONAL SOUL**

Despair and anxiety are possible because there is a rational soul. They presuppose the capacity of self-reflection. Only a being capable of contemplating itself can dread annihilation in face of the infinite, can despair either of itself or of its destiny.

Despair, Kierkegaard tells us, is twofold. It is a desperate desire either to be oneself; man wants either to make himself into an absolute, unconditioned being, independent, self-subsistent; or else he wants desperately to get rid of his being, with its limitation, its contingency, and its finitude. Both these attitudes manifest the eternal revolt of the finite against the infinite. Man rebels. By such a revolt, man exposes himself to the awareness of his nothingness and his solitude.

**VICTIM OF DREAD**

Instead of finding a support in the knowledge that he, though contingent, is held in existence by a loving God, he now seeks reliance within himself and, necessarily failing to find it, becomes aware of his nothingness.

Since the basic cause of man's anxiety is the possibility of being either a saint or a sinner, it follows that there are only two alternatives for him. One can either mount upward to the peak of eternity or else slip backward to the chains of despair and frustration.

Yet there are many who think there is yet another alternative, namely, that of indifference. They think that, just as a star hibernates for a season in a state of suspended animation, so they, too, can sleep through life without choosing to live for God or against Him. But hibernation is no escape; winter, cold, and one is then forced to make a decision. Indeed, the very choice of indifference itself is a decision. White fences do not remain white fences by having nothing done to them; they soon become black fences.

**TRUE LOVE**

Man can choose between an earthly love, or the exclusion of Divine Love, or he can choose a Divine Love which includes a healthy, sacramental, earthly love. Either he can make the soul subject to the body, or he can make the body subject to the soul. Consider first those who resolve their anxiety in favor of Godlessness. They invariably end by substituting one of the false gods for the true God of Love.

This god can be the ego, or self. This happens in atheism when there is a denial of dependence on the true God, or when there is an affirmation of one's own wish and pleasure as the absolute law, or when freedom is interpreted as the right to do what one pleases. When such a false god is adopted, religion is rejected as a rationalization or an escape, or even as a fear to affirm one's self as supreme.

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**SIN OF PRIDE**

Atheists commit the sin of pride, by which a man pretends to be that which he is not, namely a god. Pride is inordinate self-love, an exaltation of the conditional and relative self into an absolute. It tries to gratify the thirst for the infinite by giving to one's own attitude a pretension to divinity.

The false god of the atheist can be another person, cherished, not as a bearer of human values, but as an object to be devoured; and used for one's own pleasure. In such a case, the vocabulary of religion is invoked to sollicit the object, such as "adore," "angel," "worship," "god" and "goodness." From it is born the sin of lust, or the adoration of another person's vitality as the end and goal of life.

The unbeliever's god can be things by which he seeks to remedy his own sense of nothingness. Some men seek this compensation in wealth, which gives them the false sense of power. External luxury is pursued to conceal the nakedness of their own souls. Such worship of wealth leads to tyranny and injustice toward others, and thus is born the sin of avarice.

**UNHOLY TRINITY**

Pride, lust, avarice, the devil, the flesh and the world, the pride of life, the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes. These constitute the new unholy trinity by which man is wooed away from the Holy Trinity and from the discovery of the goal of life. Anxiety and frustration invariably follow when the desires of the heart are centered on anything less than God, for all pleasures of earth pursued as final ends turn out to be the exact opposite of what was expected.

The expectation is vain; the realization is disgust. Out of this disappointment are born those lesser anxieties which modern psychology knows so well, but the root of them all is the meaninglessness of life due to the abandonment of Perfect Life. Truth and Love, which is God.

The alternative to such anxieties consists in letting oneself go, not a surrender of the self to the world, the flesh, and the Devil, but by an act of proper abandonment, in which the body is disciplined and made subject to the spirit and the whole personality is directed to God. Here the basic quality of life is transcended in three ways, each of which brings a trace of soul into the God-given enjoyment of life: (1) by controlling desire; (2) by surrendering anxiety from body to soul; (3) by surrendering to the Will of God.

1. By controlling desires. Anxieties and frustrations are due to uncontrolled desires. When the soul does not get what it wants, it falls into sadness and distress. In other generations men's desires were fewer; today even luxuries are considered necessities.

**GREAT DECEPTION**

Disappointment increases in direct ratio and proportion to our failure to obtain the things we believe essential to our enjoyment. One of the greatest deceptions of today is the belief that leisure and money are the two essentials of happiness.

The sad fact of life is that there are no more frustrated people on the face of the earth than those who have too much money for their own good.

Work never killed anybody, but worry has. It is assumed by many reformers that the principal and major cause of unhappiness is economic insecurity, but this theory forgets that there are economic problems only because men have not solved the problems of their own souls. Economic disorder is a symptom of spiritual disorder.

2. The second way man can transcend unhealthy anxiety is by transferring his concern from the body to the soul - by being wisely anxious. For there are two kinds of anxieties, one about time, the other about eternity.

**FOOLISH WORRIES**

Most souls are anxious about the very things they should not be anxious about.

Our Divine Lord mentioned at least nine things about which we should not worry: about having our body killed; about what we shall say in days of persecution when we are called on the carpet before commissioners; about whether we should build another barn (or another skyscraper); about family disputes because we accept the faith; about mother-in-law troubles; about our meals, our drinks, our fashions, our complexion (Luke 12). He did tell us that we should be very anxious about one thing and one thing only - our souls (Matt. 16:24-28).

3. The third way to transcend anxieties is by increasing our trust in God. Love is reciprocal. It is received in proportion as it is given. We generally trust only those who trust us, that is why there is a special Providence for those who trust in God. Contrast two children, one child in a happy family, well provided with food, clothing and education, the other a homeless orphan of the streets.

The first child lives in an area of love, the second is outside of that area and enjoys none of its privileges. Many souls deliberately choose to exclude themselves from the area of the Heavenly Father's Love where they might live as His children. They trust only in their own resourcefulness, their own bank account, their own devices.

Next Week: The origin of conflicts.

## Pontiff Resumes Audiences At Villa

Castelgandolfo - (Radio, NC) - His Holiness Pope Pius XII, now residing at the Papal summer villa here, has resumed his audiences. The long list of those to be received in the near future includes a large pilgrimage of Belgian workmen led by trade leaders and members of the Belgian government.

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