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

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Installment III

Chapter Five

The intellectual world has suddenly rediscovered that man is a seat of conflict. Marx found conflict in society, Kierkegaard in the soul, Heidegger in man's being, and psychologists in the mind.

To the credit of all of them, it must be said that they come much closer to an understanding of man than did the Liberals of the last few centuries, who taught that man was naturally good and progressive and on the high road to become a god without God.

Anyone who would say today that modern man (who has fought two world wars in two decades) needs only evolution and education to make him a deity would be less observant than the ostrich with his head in the sands. It is apparent to all that the God-less man of the twentieth century has somehow got himself and society into a condition of disorder and chaos.

The psychiatrists who have investigated these conflicts and tensions have described them in various ways. To some of them, the conflict is between the conscious and the unconscious mind; to others, it is a tension between ego and environment; to others, a duel between instincts and ideals; to others, a war between the id and the super-ego.

Common to all these theories is the idea that inharmonious outputs of the individual, common to the race itself, condition him personally and cause his conflicts. Though psychiatrists have rediscovered man's conflict and described it as the unconscious level, the human race has always known about it.

Plato, for example, described personality as a charioteer driving two headstrong steeds. One of the steeds is appetite, or instinct; the other is spirit. The driver is reason, who has the greatest difficulty in keeping both steeds headed in the same direction.

THE CONFLICT

Shakespeare, the ancient Greek dramatist, spoke of some great primeval discrepancy gray with age within internal of man. Ovid, the Latin poet, wrote, "I see and approve the better things of life, the worse things of life I follow." St. Paul described the human condition as warfare between the law of the mind and the law of the members.

Every human being must bear witness to the experience that opposites are not all on one side, either of the body or of the spirit. Good people sometimes act like bad people, and very bad people sometimes act better than good people. Goethe regretted that God had made only one man of him when there was enough material in him for both a rogue and a gentleman.

Stevenson's "Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is too well known a story of the conflict inside of man and of his possible duality to need retelling.

The Little Catechism, summarizing the best wisdom of the ancients and Christianity, asks the question, "Of which should we take more care, the body or the soul?"—a question which assumes that it is possible for either one to gain the primacy or mastery of life.

PSYCHIATRY TELLS

The fact of conflict in human personality is not new. It is only its detailed description on the psychological level that is new. Psychiatry pronounces that there is some primordial tendency to evil in the collective unconsciousness which influences all the members of the human race; in throwing new light on this tension it has added new knowledge to what mankind has generally known about itself, namely, that it is not all that it ought to be.

It may very well be that the new apologetic to the modern soul will start with the contributions of modern psychology on the subject of conflict, that it will be a kind of preface to the tract, De peccato originali, which is relatively the most important treatise on theology for the modern mind.

We are interested here, not in the conflict on the unconscious level, but in the underlying cause of all conflict in the body or soul, the will or the heart, society or the individual, of which the psychological is a superficial manifestation. We can eliminate immediately the antiquated idea that poverty is the cause of [illegible] disharmony—for if that were so, all the rich would be normal. Yet there is more abnormality among the rich than the poor.

LAUGHTER AND ART

Order is the cause of conflict to be found in the animal kingdom. Man for man marks a complete break with the animal. It is evidenced by the fact that [illegible] can laugh and animals cannot, that man can create art, which animals cannot. Laughter and art are impossible without [illegible] and ideals.

[illegible] of conflict is not [illegible] because the golden [illegible] makes the better [illegible] than [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]