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

By MONSIGNOR FULTON J. SHEEN
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Installment IV
Chapter Seven

GOD is not hard to find, for He may be quickly discovered by reason, or by our strivings, or by His own gift. St. Thomas tells us that our reason looking out upon the order of the universe immediately concludes to some governor behind it. As the mind concludes to a watchmaker on seeing the watch, so, too, it concludes to a Divine Mind on seeing the order of the cosmos. This immediate knowledge of God, however, is not clear and distinct; that is why a more refined study is necessary to bring out the nature of God. The distinction between this confused knowledge of God and the refined knowledge which comes with the formal proofs for His existence is very much like the difference between the knowledge that most people have of water and the knowledge that the chemist has of it as composed of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen.

Reason clearly used can prove that there is a Power behind the universe which made it, a Wisdom directing its laws, and a Will to make all things attain their goal. God is closer to us than we know. "For in Him we live, and move, and are" (Acts 17:28). Saint Teresa once said, "Some unlearned men used to say to me that God was present only by His Grace. I could not believe that because as I was saying, He seemed to me to be present Himself. Finally a learned man delivered me of this doubt for he told me that He was present in the world and in us, and this was a great comfort to me."

Man is animated by an urge, an unquenchable desire to enlarge his vision and to know the ultimate meaning of things. If he were only an animal, he would never use symbols, for what are these but attempts to transcend the visible? No, he is a metaphysical animal, a being ever longing for answers to the last question.

NATURAL DESIRE
The natural tendency of the intellect toward truth and of the will toward love would alone signify that there is in man a natural desire for God. There is not a single striving or pursuit or yearning of the human heart, even in the midst of the most sensual pleasures, that is not a dim grasping after the Infinite. As the stomach yearns for food and the eye for light and the ear for harmony, so the soul craves God.

There are many who mistake the nature of this Infinite and seek to satisfy the craving elsewhere than in God, just as there are those who know that food is necessary for the stomach and nevertheless ruin their stomachs by a constant diet of gin. Many a soul is like a magnetic needle that quivers first here, then there, seeking at morning when it flees at night, and then, finding all the other compass points to be a fraud, it comes at last to rest in God alone.

GOD is not hard to find, because He gives Himself to us as the Divine Gift. Natural life itself is a gift. The soul has to come into the body from without, directly as a gift from the hands of God. And the supernatural life, too, is given to us from without. The whole meaning of Christianity is contained in the simple phrase of the creed, "He descended from Heaven."

To each single soul, Our Lord addresses the words He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well: "If thou didst know the gift of God, and who he is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou perhaps wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water" (John 4:10). As St. Paul told the Romans, "The grace of God, life everlasting, in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). And later on, to the Ephesians, "By grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

Chapter Eight
If many souls fail to find God because they want a religion which will remake society without remaking themselves, or because they want a Saviour without a cross, or because they want their own blueprints and not God's, it remains to inquire what happens to a soul when it does respond to God. Among many other effects several may be mentioned.

SCHEPICAL PROFESSIONS
First, such a soul passes from a state of speculation to submission. It is no longer troubled with the why of religion, but with the ought. It wishes to please, not merely to parse Divinity.

There is a world of difference between knowing about God through study and knowing God through love — as great as the difference between a courtship carried on by mail and one by personal contact. Many skeptical professions know the proofs of the existence of God better than some who say their prayers; but because the professors never acted on the knowledge which they had, because they never loved the God Whom they knew by study, no new knowledge of God was given to them. They like to TALK about religion, but DID nothing about it, and their knowledge remained sterile as a result.

TURN A STONE
God is the most obvious fact of human experience. If we are not aware of Him, it is because we are too complicated and because our noses are lifted high in the air in pride, for so He is at our very feet. We need only to "turn a stone and start a wing."

The grace of God comes to man in just the degree that only limit to man's capacity to receive Him is his willingness to do so. Some thirsty hearts open up only a crack, while others, with complete abandonment, surrender their empty cisterns to be filled with the waters of life.

NOT MY WILL
The God-responsive soul thinks of religion in terms of submission to the will of God. He does not look to the Infinite to help him in his finite interests, but at the will of God he surrenders his finite interests to the Infinite. His prayer is "Not my will, but Thine be done, O Lord." No longer interested in using God, he wants God to use him. Like Mary he says, "Be it done unto Me according to Thy word" or like Paul he asks, "What wilt Thou have me to do, O Lord?" or like John the Baptist he says, "I must decrease, but He must increase."

MAN OF FAITH
Even in judging such a secular matter as Communism it is worth pointing out that the man of faith, who now Communism as intrinsically evil even when its leaders were the ally of democracy, was a better judge of what would happen in a post-war world than the political realist. He was also moral and spiritual, and cannot be understood by the animal man. The God-centered man sees it plainly, and sees it as Lincoln saw the Civil War as a just chastisement sent by God for our sins.

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