Spirituality for Our Times

THEOLOGY OF THE WORLD

(Twelfth in Series) By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

A number of even conscientious Christians have given up the habit of private prayer. In the flight to "action" and the world, many have lost their spiritual baggage, and they seem not to moan the loss. God may still be regarded as an object, but few experience Him as a Subject of Encounter.

This is justified on the grounds of "Holy Worldliness" and "Servanthood" and "being authentically human"; Evangelism is reduced to "social outreach"; piety becomes "political action". Everything today is considered sacred, forgetful that when everything is sacred, nothing is sacred, just as when everything is spinach, nothing is spinach.

This conspiracy of silence against piety is due. not only to the discovery of the world as the arena of God's redemption, but also to a reaction against formalized prayer and meditation with its "three points and a spiritual bouquet". Just as in reacting against a too legalistic concept of sin, some have concluded there is no sin, so in righteous rebellion against mechanical piety, some have become impious, renounced prayer and thrown the baby out with the water.

Prayer is made synonymous with "involvement in the world"; knees are no longer necessary to man religiously, but only hands --- and not uplifted or folded hands, but just open hands.

Action No Substitute for Prayer

This does not mean to suggest that love of neighbor is secondary. It is not, because Our Lord said to love the needy is "like" the first commandment — loving God. In fact, the shortest distance between God and man passes through neighbor. What is here under dispute is the idea that action is a substitute for prayer. Peter made this mistake in the Garden. He was told to "watch and pray", but he first slept, and then arose for action and crudely hacked away at an ear with a sword. Goethe's Faust could not bring his dia bolical self to translate John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word", so he substituted: "In the beginning was Action". This primacy of Action over the Word is the essence of the demonic.

Our concern is with the modern man, even the modern churchman who does not like to pray: he wants to eat the cake, but not bake it; he yearns to be a product of the Chuch like Vincent de Paul keeping hands busy with orphans on the streets, but he does not want to manufacture that product as did Vincent on his knees.

The overkill on detachment from the world has now produced the total-kill of spirituality in favor of attachment to the world, or what is called, in that overworked word, "commitment". Sometimes

common in the past to contend that holiness must start with negation of the world. It was just such marrowness which made groups in the Middle Ages condemn marriage as evil. Many a hermit who fled the world, which he confused with worldliriess, found that he had still to battle with worldlimess even in the desert. Astronauts will have te-motations on the moon even though they leave the earth behind.

Augustine once contemplated the flight from the world, and then decided to be a saint in the world: "Terrified by my sins and by the mass of my wretchedness, I had mulled in my heart and m editated flight into the desert. But you forebade, arad strengthened me saying: 'Christ died for all m-en so that they who live may now not live to self but Him Who died for them'."

III. Spirituality begins with the centrality of Christ. Detachment, or mortification, or asceticism, is a bridesmaid not a bride; it is a by-product of lo=ve, not a condition. A young man in love does not begin to love a young woman by tearing up his address book with the telephone numbers of all the other eligibles. He first begins to love then he narrows down the field. Paul did not first chas tise his body and bring it in subjection, but he first loved the Lord and then endured the strifes. As he wrote: "Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened, or even attacked I am certain that neither death nor life . . . nor amy created thing can ever come between us and and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus Our Lord". (Rom. 8/35/39)

-Christified thinking is first, then Christified action. We do not leave the world to discover Christ; we discover Christ and then leave the world.

He who reduces spirituality to "seeing Christ in others" soon degenerates into sentimentality, and discovers that unless he sees Christ in himself, he will not long see Christ in others. How ofEten, too, those who equate service of the Secular City with Christian piety, end by seeing anti-Christ in those who disagree with them. Seeing Clhrist in others is often a rationalization for failirag to have Christ in self: "Without Me you can do nothing."

St. Jerome, who represented the one extreme of detachment without attachment, was crotchedy, cranky and wrote disgruntled letters. The other extreme of attachment without detachment makes for over-serious, unlaughable and clique-minded iradividuals who find no peace except in protest and blame. The first have too much silence; the latter too little. The ascetics like Gretta Garbo say: "I want to be alone"; the worldly are like those who propose marriage in a shopping center at a reash hour, ignoring all the "ascelical" require ments of silence and aloneness. First love, then purgation. This is because every affirmation of love is also a negation. A young woman may say to a proposal: "How do I know you love me more than anyone else? Do you know the 62,804 other eligible young women in this city?" His answer will be: "In a certain sense, 'Yes', the mere fact that I choose you, I reject all the others". Spiritual love as well as carnal love demands some asceticism, or what Simone Weil has so beautifully called "the separation of good from covetousness". Charity is the inspiration and the goal: "If I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, it will do me no good whatever". (1 Cor. 13/3)

Role of Suburbia

Courier-Journal-Friday, March 21, 1969

LETTERS

to the editor

Editor:

Objects to Argument

The prospect of legalizing abortion thas aroused heated arguments. I recognize that the opposition by the Catholic Church to any reform is based on high principles of ethical, religious and medical nature.

Editor:

My objection is toward a very often and passionately used argument that there is only a very short step from legal abortion to legalized killing by society of children, the sick and the old, and even of politically unwanted persons.

We know that a high percentage of Protestant ministers and of rabbis as well as many members of the medical and legal professions support new abortion legislation. To us the above argument is to imply that some or many of the above mentioned groups have as ulterior motive the eventual adoption of these barbaric methods

I feel that the argument as used by the Church or by individuals is a sad example of unfair fight tactics, unworthy of any noble principle, which in the long run must damage the cause it wants to help, as every demagoguery eventually does.

-Eugene Schoeman, Rochester

Sex Education

Editor:

As a mother of seven children and aftery 20 years of marriage, I would like to make some observations concerning sex education in schools.

1. I am appalled that the State Education Department can insinuate into schools a subject which I feel belongs under complete parental authority. Without any opposition from public or private school parents or educators, I fear future mandates from the State as to what may or may not be taught in either public or private schools.

2. The grouping of children by grade level (and not maturation) for reception of prescribed material and the implementation by local schools as to how much may be included, conClinton Avenue, in Rochester, for what this place has been for quite some time: a pusher of movies which are an insult to the people who live in that depressed neighborhood.

> Are we right to allow this trash to be shown in an area we do not have to live in? The group called "Citizens for a Decent Community" are walking a peaceful picket-line at 7 p.m. these nights in front of this theater urging the public to note the kind of low-class movies always shown there and to refuse to patronize it. The people of the inner city were not the "distinguished-looking" men I saw going in as we walked in the cold night air several evenings last

> > -George Bedford, Rochester.

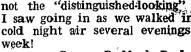
Press Criticized

Editor:---

I sincerely hope that when the abortion controversy has subsided that your paper and the Right to Life Committee will spend at least an equal amount of time and effort in protecting the rights of the "born". I refer specifically to the legalized murder of Americans and other humans in our totally immoral national commitment in Vietnam.

I find it incongruous that the Catholic press can get so agitated over the abortion issue and completely ignore the most pressing problem we face today, a problem that could have been resolved a long time ago with moral pressure massively applied.

> -Dr. James F. Hammond Dansville, N.Y.



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MAIL

agement of the Lyric Theater, North In a two-day parish with an opening addres Fulton J. Sheen, more sons viewed slides, booth literature which combi them a panoramic pictur participation and 'invo

The convention, held Cardinal Mooney High

Holy Name

Parishioners of Hol

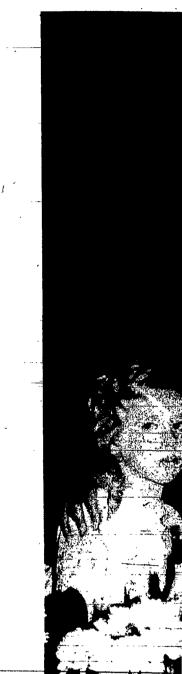
Jesus Church in Greece

their parish take a majo

answering the question

Christian Community A

Reality?



Decency in our community needs help from a large number of people. Will you help us show up the man-

Editor:

aged, the person in whom it's easyto see Christ, have a role in "suburbia" to help achieve that day when urban-suburban is forgotten and we are metropolitan in thinking and actuality.

"If your heart is in the Inner City,

There are many reasons - a fami-

But the question overlooks a more

fundamental reason: those of us

whose hearts and empathetic feel-

ings are for the poor, 'the disadvant-

ly and home, an enjoyment of sunsets

why don't you move there?" - a fair

question asked of me last week.

and moonlight, etc.

Many individuals who live and work in the Inner City become so-immersed in the people there, they tend to forget that the suburbanite does have a part to play because we cannot have a "healthy Inner City without a healthy Outer City"

So one role we do have is trying

to change the climate of opinion in

our own communities while also sup-

porting with money and/or time the

A Public Insult

-Mrs. Don J. Arganbright,

people more directly involved.

Rochester.

words like that are empty trains carrying the burden of those who are too lazy to think for themselves.

The crisis is something like that which faced Our Lord when the disciples said to Him: "Show yourself to the world". (John 7/6) Go into the Secular City of Jerusalem! Our Lord actually later did go to the Big City, not for publicity but for redemption. One can see the sea best from the sea shore, and the astronauts had a better view of our earth from the moon than we who fight traffic on the streets. The Secular City, too, is best seen from the Heavenly City, and the Holy City is better viewed from aloft a cross on Mount Calvary, than from seeing it at the finger tips of Satan on the Mount of Temptation.

The problem is: Does the reaction against what was at one time excessive withdrawal from the world, demand a radical departure from what were traditionally regarded as sound religious practices?

Consider Five Propositions

The Vatican Council concentrated itself on the Decree on the Role of the Church in the World. but it forebade its people and religious to be "comformed to the world". It repeated all the ways of sanctification that have been practiced since the beginning, and yet bade the Church practice a Christian Humanism in the world. How reconcile the two? We set down the answer in terms of five propositions:

I. The world is good, and as such is an arema for the salvation of persons and nations. No radical incompatibility exists between love of God and love of the world. The cosmos is the transparency of the Divine, for "from the visible things of the world the invisible God, His Power and Wisdom is known" (Room. 1/19) Love-of God is not-in competition with His creation anymore than His love is in competition with the love of husband and wife. In fact, he who loves the spark of creation implicitly loves the flame of the Creator. Francis Thompson at one time thought of God's love as "fearful lest having Him I should have aught else beside". God does not want to be loved in opposition to His world, but through His world and often starting with it.

Giving glory to God for His creation is like having a secret almost too good to keep. The Latin definition of glory is clara notitia cum laude, or the deep knowledge we have of something that makes us want to burst out in song and thanksgiving. We do not give glory to God for the beauty of the constellation or for a happy wedding feast because He needs it. He does not need it any more than a mother needs the "glory" her little daughter gives her in the bouquet of a few dandelions culled from the lawn. But if the mother spurned the gift, the child would never be trained in than kfulness, loving dependence and the heart necessity to express love by giving.

Glory-given to God at the sight of a sunset, like a "host setting in the flaming monstrance of the West", is not because God will pout if we do not shout, but because just as there is something in a young man which makes him whistle at the sight of a pretty girl, so there is something in the soul of man which makes him praise God at the beauty of His works.

II. Because the world is distinct from worldli. ness, spirituality does not begin with detachment from the world, but with love for God Who made

IV. Our modern world needs mortification, or asceticism to make up for the "new" mortificalion and asceticism which is without love.

Let no one say that mortification has passed out of the world; never before did the Secular City have so much of it. Everything Christians drop, the world picks up: if the faithful give up the rosary, the world puts on beads; if priests take off Roman collars; the world puts on the Nehru jackets; if the faithful no longer act as if they were "taken out of the world" and different from it, the "hippies" put on the externals of dress to indicate alienation from a corrupt society; if Christians no longer search for mystical union with Christ, the youth take "flights" to the transcendent through L.S.D. Christians today surrendered fastirig, self-denial, and asceticism only to have mortification become almost a law of modern life.

Here is the twist, however: purgation is practiced on the neighbor, not on self. Our Lord told everyone to take up his cross, which is made up of h is human situation with its trials and sorrows. The-new ascetics, however, instead of practicing discipline on themselves, practice it on others. It used to be that the innocent took on the sins of the guilty, as did Our Lord, the Carmelites and Poor Clares and Catherine of Siena. Now it is the gaulty who impose guilt on the innocent. The scourges once laid on a penitent's back are now laid on someone else's back.

We live in the time of Judges when souls release their guilt by finding scapegoats. "Take up your cross and expiate your sins", has now become "take up your placard and expose the guilt of others". The Pharisees of old "found the woman in adultery". What snooping that demanded! But the new Pharisaism, or sadism, delights in holdirig Our Lord guilty for not allowing them to throw stones at the woman. Protests abound, but no reforms.

This is partly because having denied individual guilt, the only sins left are social sins. The unconscious need of explating for personal guilt is n-ow transferred to a group, or class, or race, or institution. What a contradiction! Many are troubled_about their "self-identity", but because it is the "other fellow" who is to blame, they never look to the hell within their own hearts.

The violation of private property, the obstruction of business life, irrational demands on persoms and institutions which must be granted immediately - all these are degenerate forms of modern asceticism. "They pile up back breaking burdens and lay them on other men's shoulders, yet they themselves will not raise a finger to move them". (Matt. 23/4)

tradicts individualized instructional theories in other subjects.

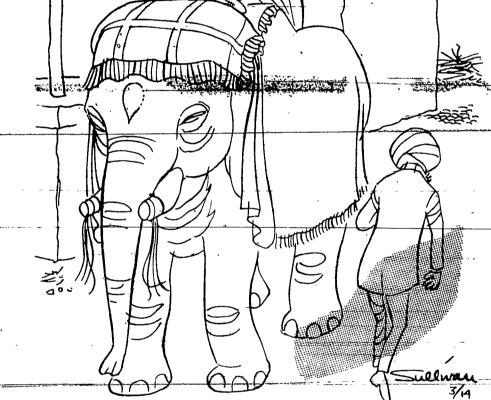
3. This approach and program denies the parent his right to treat a child is an individual? If intruder into familiar, marividual, cheological, moral, and ethical philosophy as pertains to the formation not only of the child's conscience, but also of the family group.

If education takes over the development of the essence of a child without the parent's consent, the parent should no longer be held responsible for the actions of the child.

4. I question the ability of any teacher to properly teach "sex" in toto. Questions will be answered in light of the teacher's own age, experience, values, education, and moral philosophy. This may or may not agree with family teaching. Hence, the problem of dual authority arises.

5. The "fact" that most parents approved of a sex education course does not necessarily make it either right or acceptable. "Most people" want to practice artificial birth control, but that doesn't make it right.

> -Mrs. Herbert J. Schuhart, Penfield.



HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A CONVERT?

COURIER-JOURNAL

BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

Rev. Richard Tormev

Editor

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Word for Sunday

Of Unbelief: Error Is in the Mind

By Father Albert Shamon

"If I am telling the truth, why do you not believe me?" For two thousand years that has always been a question — "Why unbelief?"

Christ blamed the unbeliever. "The reason why you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

In philosophy we have an axiom: "The kind of mind one has colors whatever comes into it." The color of the sunlight-is determined by the landscape it shines on. Water takes the shape of the container into which it is poured. An accident to a child is received differently by the mother and the insurance agent

Thus nature reveals herself to him who has eyes to see and ears to hear. The poet gets something out of the meanest flower that blows: he "finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones." To unspoiled youth "the hills are alive with the sound of music, with songs they have sung for a thousand years.' Don Quixote sees in a slut a Dulcinea.

Two looked down into the Grand Canyon of Colorado. One said, "Doesn't it make you feel small?" The other veritably shouted, "Small? This makes me feel big. To think that God for thousands of years has been carving with His hammer of wind and chisel of rain this sculpture of nature so that one day I could behold it. It makes me feel great!" One had only sight; the other had vision.

"So why do you not believe me? Iam telling the truth!" Error is in the

cave flattens you out and makes you short and dumpy and fat; the convex slims you out into twice your length. What moulds the mind? What causes it to see things as they are or

Love fashions the mind. Love can color a fellow's judgment so much that friends can say, "Whatever in the world does he see in that girl?' The fool says in his heart, there is no God — in his heart, not in his

Another moulder of the mind is one's deeds. As one thinks, he acts; but equally true, as one acts, he thinks.

Our Lord said, "Men have loved the darkness more than the light, for their works were evil." The thief hates daylight, not because he hates light, but because light reveals his

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works. The thief must either give up his trade or else shun the day.

It is easier to give up the unseen God than things one can see and feel. It is easier to deny One who is in heaven than to deny oneself. Therefore we have unbelievers.

Such atheists often become vilifiers of the Church. Light hurts sick eyes; the Church stabs the conscience of the guilty. So they say, "Aren't we right, after all in saving you are a Samaritan, and are mad?

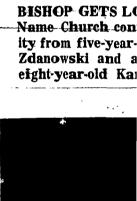
The proclamation of the Gospel began with the words, "Do penance, which meant, "Change your heart." As St. Remigius told Clovis, the King of the Franks, "Change your heart now: burn what you have loved, and love what you had burned." Only the clean of heart shall see God with undistorted vision - and believe.

Anthony J. Costello

Advertising Director

Arthur P. Farren

Associate Editor





Sishop To Kn

> **Retired Bishop Jam** is beginning to rival an "Irish legend," it b at the 34th annual Kni dinner in Rochester M Sheraton Hotel.

Speakers noted tha 28th time that the E tended the annual eve

Nearly 400 Irish and day" citizens packed to laud the "ould Many local politicia whose names could be anything but Irish, w shake hands.

Characteristically, B rose to the occasion. edgement of "the ma tributions of the Irish he gained the amaze of the audience by rec five or six minutes v

of script, several poem and tradition.

