

Theology of Worldliness

THEOLOGY OF THE WORLD
(Twenty-second in Series)
By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

We breathe polluted air without knowing the chemical composition of that pollution. We breathe the spirit of the times without knowing the philosophical assumptions which undergird it. Any discussion of the Theology of the World must necessarily involve the Theology of worldliness. As in the Divine Trinity there is a constant interflow of Life, Truth and Love, so too in the trinity of worldliness there is an inter-communication of the three following assumptions:

I. ANTI-REASON

Reason as a method of perceiving meaning, goals and purpose of life must be considered obsolete. Speculation is metaphysics, metaphysics is mythology and mythology is superstition. Even if reason could arrive at certain truths, the statements it makes would be meaningless. Words are only "blinks" which refer to nothing that is real.

The Greeks believed that everything in the cosmos was made according to an idea existing in the mind of God. Matter was a kind of wrapping or an envelope in which the Divine Idea was enclosed. Man, with his intellect, is able to denude the Divine Idea of the matter which surrounds it, and thus arrive at some understanding of eternal verities. Christianity added to this the fact that not only was creation pervaded by Divine Ideas, but it was also invaded by the Divine Word or Reason or Intelligence Itself who, in human flesh, was Jesus Christ the Son of God.

If, however, there is no Mind or Author behind the Book of Nature, two consequences follow:

- a) History is meaningless. The past has nothing to teach the present; in other words, it has no future; parents are necessarily "behind the times"; the "generation-gap" implies that no youths in previous history were as silly or made the same mistakes as the youths today.
- b) Life is absurd since it has no rational ground. In literature the absurd hero either stops thinking or else blows his mind with drugs in order to lose the illusion that there is any connection between his reason and reality. Once the mind is blown free of reason, one can drift in the stream of "happenings".

Sartre and Camus expressed for youth the absurdity of life which Sartre called nausea. Later dramatists like Beckett and Ionesco carried the absurdity even to a style of writing in which both the dialogue and events lacked connection and consequences, or what are called happenings, namely, a sequence and a cluster of irrational events.

Some of the ways in which anti-reason manifests itself in the Church are the following:

Anti-Reason Loves Talk and Criticism

a) By a passion for incessant dialogue for the sake of discussion but not for the sake of decision. All positions are given equal weight at the beginning of the dialogue. No distinction is made between revealed truth, national law and human opinions. For example, there will be dialogue between the right to life and the right to take life; between six and six makes twelve and six and six make sixteen; between the priest as a representative of God (Heb. 5/1) and the priest as a white-collared protester. The basic assumption of anti-reason is that there are two sides to every question, but it is forgotten that they are never like the two sides of fly paper. Without a norm of reason to guide, such dialogues do not conclude; like the modern novel, they just stop.

b) Anti-reason starts with the basic principle of Rousseau: "All men are naturally good. It is institutions which make them bad. Destroy institutions such as government, police, colleges, churches and parishes, and society will be at peace." Hence, the fondness for using words such as "structure", "establishment" and "official" to imply that what is rotten is necessarily outside of the individual.

c) Anti-reason digs holes but never fills them; it excavates but never constructs. Since it is assumed that the mind has no other faculty than the critical, it must show itself in what the French call constation — opposition to everything.

It makes little difference whether a protest is justified, for that would demand reason; the negation is directed not just to what is evil, but to what exists. The goodness of creation and the value of contemplation which builds up positive values in the mind are ignored and repudiated. The intellect must be made a tabula rasa — a blank wall for new scribbles. They who are given to constation have a special contempt for meditation; they do not seek revolution; they just want to be revolutionaries; they want to storm Bastilles, but not build a republic; they love the violence of Communism, but are without a Manifesto; they have no flags, no programs; they are not prophets; they only are grave-diggers.

II. PRIMACY OF EMOTION

Feeling and emotion take the place of reason. The norm of conduct becomes "my freedom", "I feel it in here", "my conscience tells me". Do whatever you feel like doing and whenever you want to do it. Blow the mind of anyone who appeals either to reason or to history.

As Robert Elliot Fitch describes it in his *Odyssey of the Self-Centered Self*: "The old gods have gone into a decline: God, Nature, Humanity, even Society. The Self is the new god". Max Stern, in his essay on *The Ego and His Own*, writes, "Nothing is more to me than myself. My relation to the world is this: I no longer do anything for it for God's sake, I do nothing for man's sake, but what I do do for 'my sake'".

Whatever is right for me is right. Despite the fact that Fletcher develops his situation ethics on four working principles and six propositions, the popular understanding of it is that we are no longer governed by law but by love, and nothing is wrong if you love.

A loving lie is right; an unloving lie is wrong, and so is a non-loving truth. Man is completely free to construct his own values. There is nothing in heaven or earth to which he must bow. If there is any "right" or any given standard of good and evil, or any measuring rods, or targets, or bulls-

eyes, or destinies, it is considered as an invasion of human life by powers outside of the ego, and is a destruction of freedom.

Sensitivity and Emotional Jags

The Primacy of Sensation or Feeling spawns such ideas as these:

a) Encounter or sensitivity groups are formed by the sentimentalists in which the sensation of touch is made the means to self-revelation of everyone in the group. Sometimes this clasping of one another to break down inhibitions and barriers in the ego is complemented by nudity. The shedding of clothes becomes the symbol of the shedding of one's defenses.

The participants generally agree at the end of the session that they "feel" better. Though there has always been a value to group therapy, as is proven by the long use of "confession of infractions against the rules" in monasteries, there is a grave danger in the uncontrolled emotional binge in which individuals strip themselves, like layers of an onion, until they find nothing left. They are no longer persons with an inalienable self, or an inviolable center which has communion only with God.

As Dr. Edward Sampson of Berkeley calls it: "It is religion in the worst sense... they come in wanting to touch somebody or to have an experience. The participants are people who epitomize the trouble with society. They come for an emotional jolt, for the week's pill".

b) The emotional jag which despises reason and metaphysics, means that there is no longer a common standard of action. It is possible to communicate a thought, but one cannot communicate a toothache. Reason is universal; experience is subjective. I have often wondered why we have museums for certain extremes of art which are expressions of the personal feeling of an artist, as when he throws buckets of paint on a canvas. To put that on exhibition for others is like trying to communicate the incommunicable.

If all our values and standards are subjective because they are dependent on feelings, then how decide which shall prevail except by a show of power? The tie to an objective, immutable moral code outside our feelings or present situation, does not produce stagnation. As C. S. Lewis put it: "To infer that whatever stands long must be unwholesome is to be a victim of metaphor. Space does not stink because it has preserved three dimensions from the beginning. Love is not dishonored by constancy, and when we wash our hands we are not seeking 'stagnation' and 'putting the clock back'".

So much has emotionalism taken the place of the Holy Spirit, the magisterium of the Church and reason, that some convents, seminaries, monasteries and priests are riddled with the "new magisterium": "If you do not feel like going to Mass, or if it will spoil your day — do not go to Church". Never before was the Christian vocation left so much to the mercy of a stomach, a gland or the absence of a Roland.

As a matter of fact, all the great moments of life are bound up with doing what is contrary to "the way I feel". No one "feels" like walking the extra mile when forced to walk the first, which indeed Our Lord recommended. The Marine whose leg was fractured by a bullet, said that he did not "feel" like carrying a wounded mate on a stretcher to an evacuation center, but he did it.

III. THE SACRED IS A BARRIER TO FREEDOM

This leads us to the third principle of The Theology of Worldliness:

The sacred is a barrier to freedom. In the name of unlimited freedom, the holy must be banished from the world, whether this holy be the Church, civil or religious authority, parents, or in general, religion and morality. Eliad has spoken of the consistent, secular man as one who "makes himself completely in proportion as he de-sacralizes himself and the world. The sacred is the prime obstacle to his freedom. He will become himself only when he is totally de-mysticized. He will not be truly free until he has killed the last god."

The "Death of God Theology" is an intellectual expression of the man-god taking the place of the God-Man. As Altizer put it: "Once God has ceased to exist in human experience as the omnipotent numinous Lord, there perishes with Him every moral imperative addressed to man from beyond, and humanity ceases to be imprisoned by an obedience to an external will or authority."

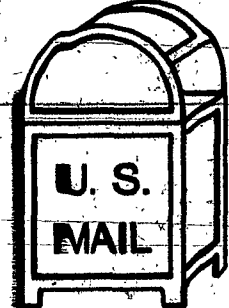
a) One finds this principle of The Theology of Worldliness in the assumption that religion belongs to a prescientific and pretechnological age, and has no place in our contemporary world. If Christianity is to survive, it must be separated from religion — by de-mythologizing God, the Divinity of Christ and the Church. All vestiges of the sacred are eliminated; seminarians need not go to Mass or meditation, priests and religious must concentrate on secular activities; anything outside of helping a neighbor is mythology. Everything must become something else than it is: educational institutions must become political forums; those who were called to be Christs must become more and more lay, blushing at any sign which would distinguish them from the rest of men, thus becoming like Peter cursing and swearing to the young girls in the courtyard of Caiphas: "I do not know the Man".

God and man are on a teeter-totter, and this is the moment when man is "up" and God is "down", or where man is "in" and God is "out". Any time spent in prayer is a loss, for it should be spent storming a supermarket, or justifying carrying guns to take over administration buildings. Under the pretext of exalting man, adoration is demolished; just as during Holy Week, the assassins of the faith "gang up" against the Divine out of pretext of love of the nation (John 11/50).

An evidence of sentimentality inherent in the Theology of Worldliness is the loss of balance, the inability to distinguish between taking aspirin and cutting off a head to cure a headache. Simply because the Church in these days has changed the emphasis, the non-rational theologians are like the boy in the following example:

(Continued on Page 16)

LETTERS to the editor



Priestly Apology

Editor: I received a letter this week from Father Ed Golden of our Padres de Rochester mission in Bolivia. He chided me gently for an oversight in my column on the Priests Association meeting (5/2/69).

One of my criticisms of priestly inactivity in developing ministries for new groups of people had to do with conscientious objectors to the war and the selective service process. Father Golden reminded me of the brave, hard work of Fathers David Connor at Cornell and Mark Sullivan at the University of California at Berkeley.

In apology, I can only plead parochialism — thinking only in the city, non-campus context as reason for my omission.

The letter from my brother priest in Bolivia reminds me how much we need the support and criticism of our own community. Outside of comments by my friends among the priests and laity and a half-dozen letters over the last year, how few take the time and energy to offer criticism and comment to one often feeling his way rather gingerly toward new directions of service for the church in our time.

—Rev. P. David Finks, Office of Urban Ministry.

Help! I am a woman. I have no name.

I belong to YOU — Your mother, Your wife, YOURS ad nauseam.

I have a role — cook, caretaker, CAREER-LESS.

I am a symbol — of emotion, of tenderness, of love. Dare I be logical, demanding, dynamic, I am like a MAN.

If I do dare to stand, to argue, I am not taken seriously. (The immortal bard, Wilfrid Sheed, says women are just too cute when they are protesting.)

Help! Help! I remove my hat in church and I challenge "God's own eternal subjection of woman to the rule of her husband" (Rev. B. A. Baur, D&C 5/12/68)

"In Christ there is neither male nor female" Yipes! What GOOD NEWS! Is anyone listening?

—Helen Quigley Williams, Rochester.

Editorial Praised

Thanks for printing the Mother's Day editorial — "A Plea For Womanhood."

This poem truly echoes my feelings. Too long have the movies, advertising and communications lowered the dignity of womanhood.

A copy of this poem should be sent to every publisher, editor etc. that can be reached.

—Mrs. Walter O'Neill, Rochester.

PANIC Is Dead

Editor: PANIC (Poor Areas Neighborhood Improvement Committee) is dead! Long live its objectives!

A gray power structure dedicated to neighborhood improvement through private enterprise, education, law enforcement, and increased social concern by the churches, it has been killed by its inability to get law enforcement for the poor areas, being ignored by the news media, not supported by the churches, and only recognized by the politicians when it was necessary to break the law in order to get equality in city services or enforcement of the property code.

While the "Muddled Cities" program spends half a million dollars on a band-aid to cure the cancer of litter and rats, we predict that because the penicillin of property code enforcement is not being injected where needed, the litter and rats will soon blight the area again — when the taxpayers' money is gone. Finally, we charge discrimination against the rest of the city where virtually nothing is being done to combat the growing rat problem.

—Roy E. Fries, 41 White Drive, Ex-director, PANIC

Black Manifesto

Editor: As a white Catholic I found your editorial of May 16 very disappointing.

Black people do us a Christian service in demanding we correct our past behavior. Instead of calling it "wanton interruption of worship" we should be warning our parishioners that more than worship will be interrupted if we don't start working for an end to racism in our society.

How beautifully Christlike it would have been for the Catholic Church to support the National Black Economic Development Conference and its "Black Manifesto."

—June Gill, Rochester.

Opposes School Aid

Editor: May I point out one certain effect of Dr. Joseph Sergent's plea for state aid to Catholic schools? (Courier: 5/16/69)

No amount of logic shopping or legal maneuvering can alter the fact that all American law-making bodies are required by the Constitution of the United States to ignore the existence of any religious denomination. That prohibition would surely extend to the schools maintained by any religious sect. Not to do so would be evidence of partiality, of the kind of favoritism our First Article of the "Bill of Rights" forbids.

By that law of our land Congress may neither "establish" a religious denomination and by that very fact any of its schools nor may it "prohibit the free exercise" of any denomination's operation of its schools.

This scrupulous attention to religious neutrality on the part of the state is made clear by this fact: tax exemptions for church owned properties. By not taxing such properties the state does not become financially involved with any church-operated schools.

The religious freedom we Americans enjoy permits the proliferation of new sects. If these new sects wish to establish schools, they will neither need the permission of the state nor face its opposition. If the state were willing and able to grant such schools financial aid, why should they not increase and multiply?

If state aid to private or religious schools were required by law, who could foretell the results? Taxes would increase to support both public and private schools. Religious schools increasing in number would add to the demands for state aid.

—John J. A. Overlander, Rochester.

On Womanhood

Editor: In regard to the Courier-Journal front page feature, A Plea for Womanhood, 5/9/69, may I submit the following?

Word for Sunday

The Holy Trinity and the Family

By Father Albert Shamon

When I interview little children for First Communion, one of the doctrines about which I quiz them is that of the Holy Trinity. Generally, we glide into this discussion after the child tells me that Holy Communion is the receiving of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The natural question to this answer is, "And just who is Christ or Jesus?" Usually one gets either "God" or "Son of God."

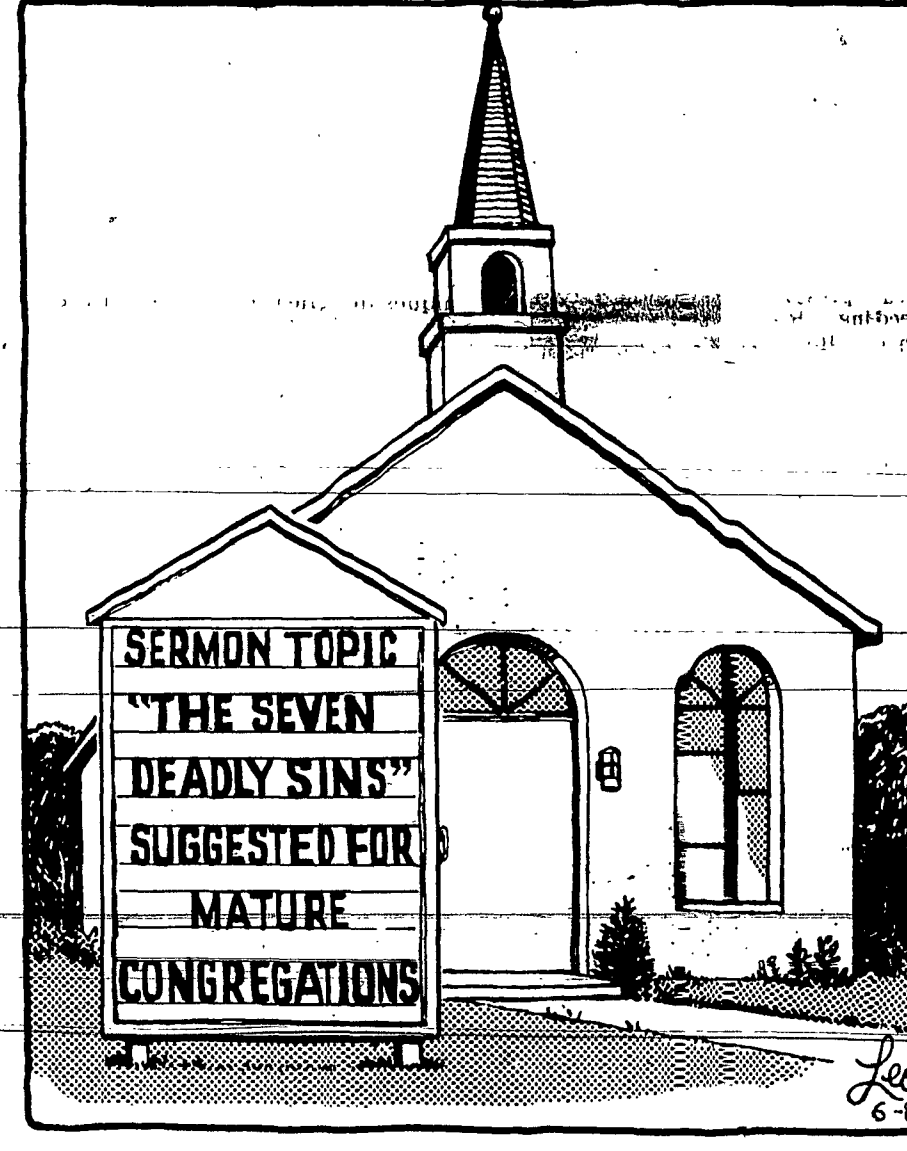
This evokes a "wonderful" from me. But then with a puzzled look, I ask, "If Jesus Christ is God, just how many Persons are there in God?"

The child might say "four." For to a child, God is sometimes thought of as a person, as well as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In any event, I ask the little one to make the sign of the cross. After he has, I repeat the question, "How many Persons are there in God?" By now I will get "three."

To eliminate any danger of the child's thinking of God as a fourth person, in the remainder of the interview, I always avoid using the term "God" alone. Instead I refer to God either as God, the Father, or God, the Son, or God, the Holy Spirit. Then to remove the doctrine from the realm of mathematics, I personalize it.

"Who is the head of your home?" Believe it or not, I have never had a child answer, "My mother." Invariably, he will say "My father, or Daddy is."

CHURCH HUMOR



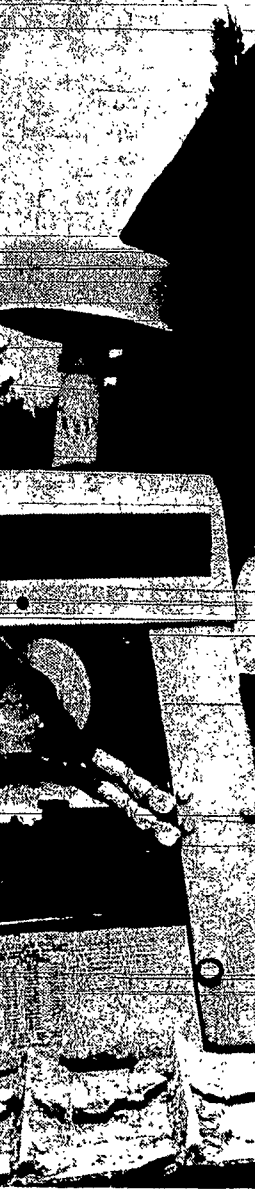
Then I point to the mother if she is present. "You see your mommy here, she is like the Holy Spirit. You know why? She is so filled with love. She loves your daddy very much and she loves you — oh so much! And the Holy Spirit is the Person in God who is all love."

Finally I point to the child himself. "And you — do you know whom you are like in God? You are like the Son of God. You see, God is like a family. There are many Persons in God, as there are in your family. And just as the family you belong to is only one family no matter how many persons are in it, so God is only one God even though there are three Persons in the family of God."

How much better members of families would get along if they were as humble and self-effacing as the Persons in God. Only twice are the Father's words recorded in the Gospels and both times He is speaking of His Son — "This is my beloved Son, hear him." The Son always spoke of His Father — "I say nothing of myself. I do always the things that please my Father." And of the Holy Spirit, Christ said, "He will glorify me" — not Himself.

When does each of us become most ourselves? When we are alone to think over our hearts? To ruminate our mistakes? Is it not when we think of others? Is not the Father a father only in relation to His Son? Are we not fully persons only when we relate to others in love?

New F Begun



Sister Helen Dani bulldozer lever a million dormitory reth's board cha

Layme Study

Members of the Rock Laymen's Association l ed their attention to u as they elected new o

Robert McLaughlin, Ave., associate profess phy at St. John Fish elected president, succeeding Raymi ond Hensler. The meeting was held May 21 in St. Charles Borromeo School hall, Greece.

In one of three resolutions, the group called on Bishop Fulton J. Sheen to name a successor soon to Father P. David F the Office for Urban next week assumes a the U.S. Catholic Conf ington, D.C.

The resolution urge vicar be chosen "in co clergy and laity invo problems."

Another resolution



Father Wilfrid A. native of Rochester, his 25th anniversary hood on Sunday, J o'clock Mass in the church, St. Paul of parish of relatives, now at St. Francis C town Providence, R years in teaching Siena College and S University. He atten ily school here Institut

84 Fre Get C

Auxiliary Bishop ferty presided at Mass and presented 84 Southern Tier R persons in the Confec tion Doctrine teach gram, last Sunday in Mother Church, Hors Concelebrating Ma McCafferty were Fat ligan, Roy Kiggins a her. Bishop McCaffert the relationship bet

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