

Preface
to
Religion

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Religion

A R C H B I S H O P
FULTON J. SHEEN

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fulton J. Sheen". To the left of the signature is a small cross symbol (+).

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

ARCHBISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN (1895–1979) was one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century. As the first Catholic televangelist on prime-time television, his program, *Life is Worth Living*, inspired an audience of nearly thirty million people weekly, more listeners than St. Paul ever could have reached during a lifetime of preaching. With his eloquent writing and preaching on television and radio, he movingly and masterfully portrayed life, eternity, love, sorrow, joy, freedom, suffering, marriage, and so much more. His memorable style was distinguished by his booming voice, his Irish wit and wisdom, and his warm smile.

In this carefully selected set of books, Sheen offers clear guidance on the problems affecting all people in today's world, including key ideologies that seek to destroy the Church and society, including Marxism and Freudianism, what is today called "Cultural Marxism." His spiritual and practical wisdom cover a wide variety of subjects that range from discussions of down-to-earth spiritual

and moral problems to provocative conversations on the meaning of life, family, education, Christianity, world affairs, and more. Together they add up to a stirring and challenging statement of Bishop Sheen's whole philosophy of life and living. With ease, Sheen shows the relationship between human reason and religion. He shows that the world of today has reached a point of irrationalism that is in utter contempt of lasting truths. With honesty and capable scholarship, Sheen has something to say for everyone. His works are of immediate concern to all men and women seeking understanding, belief, and purpose in these troubled times.

Bishop Sheen reminds us that if we are to help cure the modern world of pessimism and despair, hatred and confusion, we must enlist as warriors of love and peace. Sheen's daily Holy Hour before the Most Blessed Sacrament was the catalyst behind his preaching and writing but also his great love for the Blessed Mother. She was the woman he loved most, "The World's First Love," in addition to his great love for St. Thérèse, patroness of the foreign missions.

Sheen wrote over seventy books, many of which are still widely read today. When the first nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated in 1930 on NBC, Sheen was chosen as the first preacher. He hosted this nighttime radio program for twenty years from 1930 to 1950 before moving to television where he had his own show on prime-time TV from 1952 to 1957. Sheen twice won an Emmy for Most Outstanding Television Personality and was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine. But more important than any earthly awards, Fulton Sheen's tireless evangelization efforts helped convert many to the Faith, especially Communist organizer Bella Dodd.

Entombed in a side altar at the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Peoria, Illinois, Sheen's cause for canonization was officially opened in 2002. May readers be inspired by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, a timeless voice described as one of the greatest Catholic philosophers of our age.

CHAPTER ONE

Are You Happy

If you saw hordes of peoples tramping the fields, with axes in their hands and pans strapped to their shoulders, you would conclude that those people had not found all the gold they wanted. If you saw armies of nurses and doctors riding ambulances, or carrying cots, you would conclude that health had not been found. When you see people crowding into theaters, charging cocktail bars, seeking new thrills in a spirit of restlessness, you would conclude that they have not yet found pleasure, otherwise they would not be looking for it.

The very fact that you can conceive of greater happiness than you possess now is a proof that you are not happy. If you were perfect, you would be happy. There is no doubt that at one time or another in your life you attained that which you believed would make you happy, but when you got what you wanted, were you happy?

Do you remember when you were a child, how ardently you looked forward to Christmas? How happy you thought

you would be, with your fill of cakes, your hands glutted with toys, and your eyes dancing with the lights on the tree!

Christmas came, and after you had eaten your fill, blown out the last Christmas light, and played till your toys no longer amused, you climbed into your bed, and said in your own little heart of hearts, that somehow or other it did not quite come up to your expectations. Have you not lived that experience over a thousand times since?

You looked forward to the joys of travel, but when weary feet carried you home, you admitted that the two happiest days were the day you left home and the day you got back. Perhaps it was marriage you thought which would bring you perfect happiness. Even though it did bring a measure of happiness, you admit that you now take your companion's love for granted.

Why is it that all love songs are about "how happy we *will be*;" who ever hears a song about "how happy we are?" The beloved may be the sun of all delight, but sooner or later someone becomes disillusioned

Observing how

He had assigned to his dear mistress more

Than it is proper to concede to mortals.

Lucretius

One is never thirsty at the border of the well.

Perhaps it was wealth you wanted. You got it, and now you are afraid of losing it. "A golden bit does not make the better horse." A man's happiness truly does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses. Maybe it was a desire to be well-known that you craved. You did become well-known only to find that reputation is like a ball: as soon as it starts rolling, men begin to kick it around.

The fact is: you want to be perfectly happy, but you are not. Your life has been a series of disappointments, shocks and disillusionments. How have you reacted to your disappointments? Either you became cynical or else you became religious.

If you became cynical, you decided that, since life is a snare and a delusion, you ought to get as much fun out of it as possible. In such a case you clutched at every titillation and excitement your senses afforded, making your life an incessant quest of what you called a "good time." Or else you reacted to disappointments by becoming religious and saying: "If I want happiness, I must have been made for it. If I am disappointed here, it must be that I am seeking happiness in the wrong places. I must look for it somewhere else, namely, in God."

Here is a fallacy to the first reaction: believing that the purpose of life is to get as much pleasure out of it as possible. This would be the right attitude if you were just an animal. But you have a soul as well as a body. Hence, there are joys in life as well as pleasures.

There is a world of difference between the two. Pleasure is of the body; joy is of the mind and heart. Lobster Newburg gives pleasure to certain people, but not even the most avid lobster fans would ever say that it made them joyful. You can quickly become tired of pleasures, but you never tire of joys. A boy thinks he never could get too much ice cream, but he soon discovers there is just not enough boy.

A pleasure can be increased to a point where it ceases to be a pleasure; it may even begin to be a pain if carried beyond a certain point; for example, tickling or drinking. But the joy of a good conscience, or the joy of a First Communion, or the discovery of a truth, never turns to pain.

Man can become dizzy from the pleasure of drink, but no man ever became dizzy from the joy of prayer. A light can be so bright it will blind the eye, but no idea was ever so bright as to kill the mind; in fact, the stronger and clearer the idea, the greater its joy. If, therefore, you live for pleasure, you are missing the joys of life.

Furthermore, have you noticed that as your desire for pleasure increased, the satisfaction from the pleasure decreased? The dope-fiend, to have an equal pleasure, must increase his dose. Do you think a philosophy of life is right that is based on the law of diminishing returns? If you were made for pleasure, why should your capacity for pleasure diminish with the years instead of increasing?

Then, too, have you observed that your pleasures were always greater in anticipation than in realization? With the joys of the spirit, it is just the contrary. The cross, for example, is unattractive in prospect, but is sweet in possession. To Judas, the prospect of thirty pieces of silver was attractive, but he brought back his thirty pieces of silver. He got what he wanted and it filled him with disgust.

If your philosophy is always to have a good time, you have long ago discovered that you never really have a good time for you are always in pursuit of happiness without ever capturing it. By a twist of nature, you make your happiness consist in the quest for happiness, rather than in happiness itself, just as so many modern professors much prefer to seek the truth than to find it. You thus become most hungry where you are most satisfied.

When the first thrill of ownership is gone, and your possessions begin to cloy, your sole happiness now is in pursuit of more possessions. You turn the pages of life, but you never read the book.

That is why those who live only for pleasure become cynical in middle age. A cynic has been defined as one who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. You blame things, rather than self. If you are married, you say: "If I had another husband, or another wife, I could be happy." Or you say, "If I had another job . . .;" or, "If I visited another night-club . . .;" or, "If I were in another city, I would be happy." In every instance, you make happiness *extrinsic* to yourself. No wonder *you* are never happy. You are chasing mirages until death overtakes you.

Never will you find the happiness you crave because your desires conflict. Despite the advertisements, "Eat and dance," you cannot do both at the same time. There is an exclusiveness about certain pleasures; they cannot be enjoyed in company with others. You cannot enjoy a good book and a football game at the same time. You cannot make a club sandwich of the pleasures of swimming and skiing. Even the best of pleasures, such as the enjoyment of good music or literature, cannot go on indefinitely for human resources are incapable of enjoying them without relaxation. There may be no limit to our returning to them, but there is a limit to our staying with them.

*More! More! is the cry of a mistaken soul:
Less than all cannot satisfy Man.*

Blake

Your whole life is disordered and miserable if it is based on the principle of always having a good time, simply because happiness is a by-product, not a goal; it is the bridesmaid, not the bride; it flows from something else. You do not eat to be happy; you are happy because you eat. Hence, until you find out what your purpose in life is, you will never really have a good time.

Time is the greatest obstacle in the world to happiness, not only because it makes you take pleasures successively, but also because you are never really happy until you are unconscious of the passing of time! The more you look at the clock, the less happy you are! The more you enjoy yourself, the less conscious you are of the passing of time. You say, "Time passed like everything." Maybe, therefore, your happiness has something to do with the eternal! You can find happinesses in time, but what you want is Happiness that is timeless.

The other reaction to disappointment is much more reasonable. It begins by asking: "Why am I disappointed;" and then, "How can I avoid it?"

Why are you disappointed? Because of the tremendous disproportion between your desires and your realizations. Your soul has a certain infinity about it because it is spiritual; but your body and the world about you are material, limited, "cabined, cribbed, confined." You can imagine a mountain of gold, but you will never see one. You can imagine a castle of 100,000 rooms, one room studded with diamonds, another with emeralds, another with pearls, but you will never see such a castle.

In like manner, you look forward to some earthly pleasure, or position, or state of life, but, once you attain it, you begin to feel the tremendous disproportion between the ideal you imagined and the reality you possess. Disappointment follows. Every earthly ideal is lost by being possessed. The more material your ideal, the greater the disappointment; the more spiritual it is, the less the disillusionment. That is why those who dedicate themselves to spiritual interests, such as the pursuit of truth, never wake up in the morning with a dark brown taste in their mouths, or a feeling that they are run down at the heels.

Having discovered why you are disappointed, namely, because of the distance between an ideal conceived in the mind and its actualization in flesh or matter, you do not become a cynic. Rather, you take the next step of trying to avoid disappointments entirely. There is nothing abnormal about your wanting to live, not for two more years, but always; there is nothing queer about your desiring truth, not the truths of economics to the exclusion of history, but all truth; there is nothing inhuman about your craving for love, not until death do you part, not until satiety sets in or betrayal kills, but always.

Certainly you would never want this Perfect Life, Perfect Truth and Perfect Love unless it existed? The very fact that you enjoy their fractions means there must be a whole. You would never know their arc unless there were a circumference; you would never walk in their shadows unless there were light.

Would a duck have the instinct to swim if there were no water? Would a baby cry for nourishment if there were no such thing as food? Would there be an eye unless there were Beauty to see? Would there be ears unless there were harmonies to hear? And would there be in you a craving for unending life, perfect truth and ecstatic love unless Perfect Life and Truth and Love existed?

In other words, you were made for God. Nothing short of the Infinite satisfies you, and to ask you to be satisfied with less would be to destroy your nature. As great vessels, when launched, move uneasily on the shallow waters between the narrow banks of the rivers, so you are restless within the confines of space and time and at peace only on the sea of infinity.

Your mind, it would seem, should be satisfied to know one leaf, one tree, or one rose; but it never cries: "Enough."

Your craving for love is never satisfied. All the poetry of love is a cry, a moan and a weeping. The more pure it is, the more it pleads; the more it is lifted above the earth, the more it laments. If a cry of joy and ravishment interrupts this plea, it is only for a moment, as it falls back again into the immensity of desires. You are right in filling the earth with the chant of your heart's great longing for you were made for love.

No earthly beauty satiates you either for, when beauty fades from your eyes, you revive it, more beautiful still in your imagination. Even when you go blind, your mind still presents its image before you, without fault, without limits, and without shadow. Where is that ideal beauty of which you dream? Is not all earthly loveliness the shadow of something infinitely greater? No wonder Virgil wished to burn his Aeneid and Phidias cast his chisel into the fire. The closer they got to beauty, the more it seemed to fly from them, for ideal beauty is not in time but in the infinite.

Despite your every straining to find your ideals satisfied here below, the infinite torments you. The splendor of an evening sun as it sets like a "host in the golden monstrance of the west," the breath of a spring wind, the divine purity in the face of a Madonna, all fill you with a nostalgia, a yearning, for something more beautiful still.

With your feet on earth, you dream of heaven; creature of time, you despise it; flower of a day, you seek to eternalize yourself. Why do you want Life, Truth, Beauty, Goodness and Justice, unless you were made for them? Whence come they? Where is the source of light in the city street at noon? Not under autos, buses, nor the feet of trampling throngs because there light is mingled with darkness. If you are to find the source of light, you must go out to something that has no admixture of darkness or shadow, namely, to pure light, which is the sun.

In like manner, if you are to find the source of Life, Truth and Love, you must go out to a Life that is not mingled with its shadow, death, to a Truth not mingled with its shadow, error, and to a Love not mingled with its shadow, hate. You go out to something that is Pure Life, Pure Truth, Pure Love, and that is the definition of God. And the reason you have been disappointed is because you have not yet found Him!

*If there had anywhere appeared in space
Another place of refuge where to flee,
Our hearts had taken refuge in that place,
And not with Thee.*

*For we against creation's bars had beat
Like prisoned eagles, through great worlds had sought
Though but a foot of ground to plant our feet,
Where Thou wert not.*

*And only when we found in earth and air,
In heaven or hell, that such might nowhere be—
That we could not flee from Thee anywhere,
We fled to Thee.*

Richard Chenevix Trench

It is God for Whom we are looking. Your unhappiness is not due to your want of a fortune, or high position, or fame, or sufficient vitamins; it is due not to a want of something *outside* you, but to a want of something *inside* you. You cannot satisfy a soul with husks! If the sun could speak, it would say that it was happy when shining; if a pencil could speak, it would say that it was happy when writing—for these were the purposes for which they were made. You were made for perfect happiness. That is your purpose. No wonder everything short of God disappoints you.

But have you noticed that when you realize you were made for Perfect Happiness, how much less disappointing the pleasures of earth become? You cease expecting to get silk purses out of sows' ears. Once you realize that God is your end, you are not disappointed for you put no more hope in things than they can bear. You cease looking for first-rate joys where only tenth-rate pleasures are to be found.

You begin to see that friendship, the joys of marriage, the thrill of possession, the sunset and the evening star, masterpieces of art and music, the gold and silver of earth, the industries and the comforts of life, are all the gifts of God. He dropped them on the roadway of life, to remind you that if these are so beautiful, then what must be Beauty! He intended them to be bridges to cross over to Him. After enjoying the good things of life, you were to say: "If the spark of human love is so bright, then what must be the Flame!"

Unfortunately, many become so enamored of the gifts the great Giver of Life has dropped on the roadway of life that they build their cities around the gift, and forget the Giver; and when the gifts, out of loyalty to their Maker, fail to give them perfect happiness, they rebel against God and become cynical and disillusioned.

Change your entire point of view! Life is not a mockery. Disappointments are merely markers on the road of life, saying: "Perfect happiness is not here." Every disillusionment, every blasted earthly hope, every frustrated carnal desire, points to God. You can come to God not only by being good, but, if you only knew it, by a succession of disgusts.

The very sense of loss you feel in this world is in itself a proof that once you were possessed, and possessed by God.

Though your *passions* may have been satisfied, *you* were never satisfied because while your passions can find satisfaction in this world, you cannot. If at the present time your vices have left you, do not think that you have left your vices.

Start with your own insufficiency and begin a search for perfection. Begin with your own emptiness and seek Him who can fill it. But you must be aware of your loneliness and want and disappointment before you can want Him to supply it. "Seek, and you shall find." (*Matthew 7:7*)

Look at your heart! It tells the story of why you were made. It is not perfect in shape and contour, like a Valentine heart. There seems to be a small piece missing out of the side of every human heart. That may be to symbolize a piece that was torn out of the Heart of Christ which embraced all humanity on the Cross.

I think the real meaning is, that when God made your human heart, He found it so good and so lovable that He kept a small sample of it in heaven. He sent the rest of it into this world to enjoy His gifts, and to use them as stepping stones back to Him, but to be ever mindful that you can never love anything in this world with your whole heart because you have not a whole heart with which to love. In order to love anyone with your whole heart, in order to be really peaceful, in order to be really whole-hearted, you must go back again to God to recover the piece He has been keeping for you from all eternity!