

Thinking  
*Life*  
Through



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



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Cover image: The famous Catholic Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895 - 1979) is shown in a close-up portrait, New York, 1964. (Photo by Bachrach/Getty Images).

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DEDICATED IN FILIAL LOVE TO  
THE MOTHER OF JESUS  
WHO  
IN GIVING BIRTH TO THE  
DIVINE WORD  
BECAME THE PATRONESS OF THOSE  
WHO USE WORDS FOR THE SAKE OF  
THE WORD  
WHICH IS CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD  
SON OF THE LIVING GOD  
REDEEMER OF THE  
HUMAN RACE



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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 also described as one of the greatest Catholic philosophers of our age.



## CHAPTER ONE

# The Psychological Effects of the Hydrogen Bomb

The *physical* effects of atomic bombing are sufficiently well known. One hydrogen bomb exploded was 600 times more powerful than the first atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. Atomic experts now tell us that if there were an atomic war, New York would be blasted by the equivalent of eight atomic bombs, Washington and Chicago by four, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia by two each, and the next sixteen large cities by one bomb each. The casualties in twenty-five metropolitan areas are estimated at about thirty million. It is also stated that if the hydrogen bomb were wrapped in cobalt, it would be capable of destroying all plant, animal, and human life within an area of 1300 miles; forty such bombs would destroy all life on the planet. Two great warnings about such atomic explosions were sounded by Pius XII, the first on February 11, 1943, the second on Easter Sunday, 1954, when he said, "This means of destruction is capable of bringing a dangerous catastrophe to the entire planet."

By the *psychological* effects, we mean the effects such bombing would have upon our behavior, our character, and the reactions it would produce on our minds and hearts. In order to understand how it would affect us, we first have to consider the kind of people that would most likely be the victims of atomic explosion, for naturally not everyone would react in the same way.

There are generally three classes of people: the indifferent, the good, and the bad.

By the good people we mean those who obey the natural law, who seek perfect life and truth and love, which is God, or those who in the supernatural order try to live in intimate communion with God through the redemptive merits of Christ. At the other extreme are people who are apparently bad. By bad people we mean those who break the Commandments and who grievously sin through pride, covetousness, lust, anger, envy, gluttony, or sloth.

It is not easy for us to decide actually who are the good people and who are the bad people. We can see only faces; it is God Who judges hearts. It could very well be that people who appear good might actually want to be bad, but they do not have an opportunity or perhaps even a temptation. On the other hand, there may be some people who seem to be very bad but who really would like to be good, if only there were someone to give them a helping hand or the knowledge of the Good News of Redemption. In order to indicate the fallibility of our judgments, we put a mask of a good man in the hand of the bad man, and a mask of the bad man in the hand of the good man. Each and every person has a superficial self and a real self. The superficial self is what he thinks he is or the way he hopes to appear before men; the real self is that which he truly is. The explosion of a hydrogen

bomb will, as we will see later, destroy the superficial self and reveal the real self.

Between the good and evil, there is a vast area of minds and hearts who are indifferent. By indifferent we mean those who deny that there is any such thing as good or evil, or who have no philosophy of life and who accept no goal or purpose. Right and wrong to them are merely points of view. "Tolerance" is identified with an equal value to right and wrong, truth and error, virtue and vice. The indifferent generally boast that they are "open-minded"; they are willing to hear all sides, but refuse to accept any. Their minds are so "open" that ideas pass right through. It is to be remembered that the "open mind" is no more important than the open mouth. Unless the mouth shuts on something, the body is never nourished. Unless the mind shuts on truth, it is never at peace.

Given these three general categories of people, the question may now be asked: What happens to these different groups in an atomic war?

What happens to the indifferent? In a crisis such as atomic bombing, the field of indifference will narrow, inasmuch as catastrophe will force people to make decisions and to reveal their true selves favoring either goodness or badness. In hydrogen warfare the pragmatists, the skeptics, and those who believe in false tolerance will become fewer and fewer. Those, however, who still remain in the area of indifference and who refuse to admit any radical difference between truth and error very likely will become schizophrenics, or split personalities. During their lives they could never make up their mind about anything. Today, "a" is "b"; tomorrow, "a" is "c"; the day after tomorrow, "a" is "d." In a catastrophe they are obliged to make a decision. It is this being forced to do something which they

never had done in their lives which splits their personality and causes them to become panicky and go berserk.

A farmer once hired a tramp to sort potatoes. He instructed the tramp: "Put all the good potatoes in this pile, all the bad potatoes in that pile, and those that are partly usable, put in the middle." After a while the tramp came to the farmer, saying, "I am quitting this job. It's the making of decisions that drives me crazy." In an hour of affliction such as atomic warfare it will be precisely the making of a decision which will drive the indifferent crazy.

The general effect of hydrogen warfare will be polarization, diversification, separation, or the forcing to extremes or opposites. Polarization obliges persons to take off their masks. The superficial self disappears and evaporates; the real self appears in all of its vigor. Some will become brutalized; others socialized. Some will lose their sense of honor, and others will become ethically reinforced. Some will become avowed enemies of the law, and others will manifest the greatest spiritual and moral exaltation. Some will descend into the grossest forms of moral depravity; others will manifest the highest ideals of sanctity, heroism, and self-sacrifice. As a soldier in the heat of battle manifests either cowardice or heroism, so in an atomic explosion, civilization will split into poles and people will declare themselves either for good or for evil.

The great calamities of the past such as plagues and famines, wars and revolutions, reveal this inevitable division into poles of goodness and badness. The same may be expected in atomic warfare, for human nature has not changed from the beginning. Pitirim Sorokin in a study of polarization recalls how polarization was manifested in the plague that affected Athens in 430 B.C., as well as in a modern tragedy such as the explosion of ammunition and

TNT in Halifax on December 6, 1917, when thousands were killed and wounded.

Thucydides, who himself contracted the plague, with his usual accuracy as a trained historian, tells first of the polarization toward good and then toward evil during the Athenian plague.

Thucydides says that in spite of the enormous risk of contracting the disease, many continued to tend the sick and to perform heroically missions of charity.

This was especially the case with such as made any pretensions to goodness; honor made them unsparing of themselves and their attendance in their friends' houses, for even the members of the family were at last worn out by the moans of the dying and succumbed to the force of the disaster. Yet it was with those who had recovered from the disease that the sick and the dying found most compassion.

The author in his same book, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, next tells of the polarization toward evil:

As the disaster passed all bounds, men, not knowing what was to become of them, became utterly careless of everything, whether sacred or profane. Nor was this the only form of lawless extravagance which owed its origin to the plague. Men now cruelly ventured on what they had formerly done in a corner. They resolved to spend quickly and enjoy themselves, regarding their lives and riches as alike things of the day. Perseverance in what men called honor was popular with none, it was so uncertain whether they would be spared to attain the object; but it was settled that present enjoyment, and all

that contributed to it was both honorable and useful. Fear of gods or law of man—there was none to restrain them. As for the first, they judged it to be just the same whether they worshiped them or not; as they saw alike all perishing; for the last, no one was expected to live to be brought to trial for his offenses.

In modern times, we find crisis driving people to the poles of good and evil. A study of the Halifax explosion by S. H. Prince, entitled *Catastrophe and Social Change*, first describes the tendency to goodness:

Many fell to their knees in prayer. There was no bitterness, no complaint, only a great desire to help someone less fortunate. One observer said, "I have never seen such kindly feeling and such tender sympathy."

A private, with one of his eyes knocked out, continued working the entire day of the disaster. A chauffeur with a broken rib conveyed the wounded trip after trip to the hospital, only relinquishing the work when he collapsed. An unknown man was discovered at work amidst the ruins although his face was half blown off.

This is only one side of the picture. The other side is represented by depravity, demoralization, greed, and gross egotism.

Before the catastrophe few people thought that Halifax harbored any would-be ghouls or vultures. The disaster showed how many. Men clamored over the bodies of the dead to get beer in the shattered

breweries. Men . . . went into houses and shops and took whatever their thieving fingers could lay hold of. Then there were the nightly prowlers among the ruins, who rifled the pockets of the dead and dying, and snatched rings from icy fingers. A woman lying unconscious on the street had her fur coat snatched from her back. . . . Then there was the profiteering phase. Landlords raised rents upon people in no position to bear it. Plumbers refused to hold their union rules in abeyance and to work one minute beyond the regular eight hours unless they received their extra rates for overtime. Bricklayers assumed a dog-in-the-manger attitude and refused to allow the plasterers to help in the repairs of the chimneys. . . . Many squeezed the uttermost farthing out of the anguished, the homeless men, women, and children. Truckmen charged exorbitant prices for the transferring of goods and baggage. Merchants boosted prices. A small shopkeeper asked a little starving child thirty cents for a loaf of bread.

It may now be asked: Why is polarization a phenomenon of every great historical crisis, and therefore one that may be expected during the explosion of a hydrogen bomb? There are two reasons. The first reason is the word "crisis" which in Greek means judgment; every historical crisis is a rehearsal for the Last Judgment. Crisis does not create character; it reveals it. Woodsmen say that when a log is thrown into the fire, it reveals all the colors that went into it—the black of the night, the purple of the morning, the red of the sunset, the silver of the stars. In like manner, in time of crisis people reveal what is already in them: the deep love of virtue on the one hand, or their secret lusts on

the other. Sometimes when molten steel is poured out, a bubble will lurk within. The steel appears strong until it is put under stress and strain and then the hidden weakness reveals itself. So it is with character. Many are able to stand up fairly well during the uncritical moments of history, but when a crisis occurs, the burden of trial forces them to reveal their inherent weakness.

A crisis is always associated with suffering, and suffering reveals character. There is as much difference, however, between the sufferings of the good and those of the evil as there is between the cords with which the executioner pinions the condemned criminal and the bandages wherein a tender surgeon binds his patient. The effect of one is to kill; the effect of the other is to cure. Believers undergo many crosses but no curses. An atomic explosion would merely tear off our masks, and we would begin the great rehearsal for putting ourselves on the side of either the sheep or the goats on the Last Day.

The second reason for polarization is that modern man is living in the depths of his soul. Multiplied wars, depressions, and the insecurity of life have made him trust less the things that are external to him. As a result he has been driven inside himself and down into the very depths of his being; hence the great importance of psychiatry and psychoanalysis for the modern man, who is attempting to discover what is in the cellar of his existence.

In the depths of his soul, he wishes to sound the limits of all experience, but the limit of all experience is to be either for or against God; therefore in a crisis he will either confront God or he will affront Him. Either with enthusiasm and patience, he will seek to participate more in the life of God, or else he will revolt against Him in a final attempt to divinize himself; either the soul will seek with

virtuous impetuosity “the passionless passion and wild tranquility” which is the peace of God, or else it will be driven to an atheism in which men will not deny God but will challenge Him. The militant atheism of the twentieth century is an intense form of this polarization of evil, for the Communists know they can neither drive God from the Heavens nor empty the Throne of Him, so they seek to drive His ambassadors from the earth. All lesser hates will dissolve as men find a greater hate; but so do lesser loves fly to a greater love.

A hydrogen bomb is nothing but fire, and in this is like any other crisis, for a crisis is God's fire. What happens in the fire depends upon the material that goes into it; gold has its dross burned away; hay is consumed; wax melts; clay hardens. What will happen in an hour of calamity, such as a hydrogen bomb, will depend upon the moral stuff of which we are made. The fire that makes the good is also the fire that makes the evil; the fire that makes love is also the fire that makes hate. Everyone is already carrying within himself a heaven or a hell, as he stands in the wings of the stage awaiting the cue for the moment of crisis. The hydrogen bomb need never fall if men seek the goal of righteousness with the same zeal with which they seek uranium. But if it ever does fall, one thing is certain: goodness will not lose!