

## Fulton John Sheen

Reprint of an article from the 1977 Word Book Encyclopedia

Sheen, Fulton John (1895- 1979), is one of the best-known spokesmen for the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in the world. His more than 50 books, along with his articles, have brought Catholic doctrine to millions of people around the world.

In 1950, he resigned as professor at the Catholic University of America to direct the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in the United States. This is an international mission aid society, which raises and distributes money for the support of Roman Catholic missionaries throughout the world. The year after his appointment to that post, he was named titular bishop of Cesariana. In 1966, he was named the bishop of the diocese of Rochester, N.Y., by Pope Paul VI. Bishop Sheen resigned from that position in 1969 and was named titular archbishop of Newport, Wales.

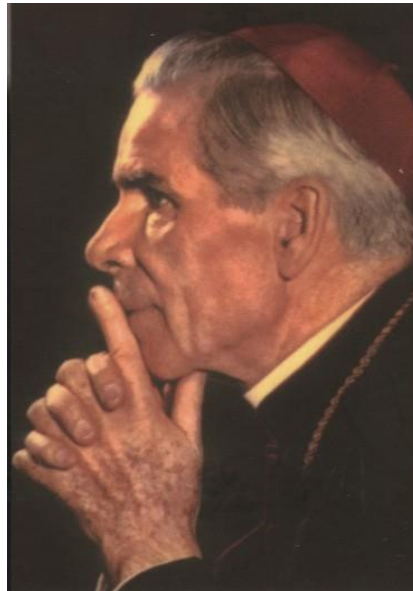
As early as the 1920's, he was a vigorous opponent of Communism in his writings and radio talks on "The Catholic Hour," a national program. During the 1950's, he became widely known as a television personality for his "Life is Worth Living" series.

Bishop Sheen was born in El Paso, Ill., and attended St. Paul Seminary. After his ordination in 1919, he studied philosophy at universities in the United States and Europe. In 1926, he began teaching at the Catholic University of America, and published his first book, *God and Intelligence in Modern Philosophy*. Bishop Sheen also wrote *Communism and the Conscience of the West* (1948), *Peace of Soul* (1949), *Life is Worth Living* (1953), and *The Priest is Not His Own* (1963).

Authored by: John Tracy Ellis

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fulton\\_J.\\_Sheen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fulton_J._Sheen)

<http://www.allendrake.com/elpasohistory/sheen/>



# A Catholic Catechism

*“Ye Shall Know the Truth”*

Abp. Fulton J. Sheen

[www.keepthefaitth.org](http://www.keepthefaitth.org)

## Lesson #1 :

CD 1, TRACK 1

## Philosophy of Life

*(The Anxiety of Life)*

(24:27)

*Peace be to you.*

This is **Bishop Fulton J. Sheen** talking, and this will be the beginning of over **24 hours of talking**. Women are accused of doing all the talking. This is to prove that men do their share.

I remember some years coming back from Europe, and the steward came out on the deck of the ship and he said, “*Are you Bishop Sheen who gave the mission sermon at St. Patrick’s Cathedral two years ago?*” I said, “*Yes*”. He said, “*That was a wonderful sermon. I enjoyed every minute of that hour and a half.*” I said, “*My good man, I never talked an hour and a half in my life.*” “*Well,*” he said, “*It seemed that long to me.*”

Now this will well be over that hour and a half. And we have had alternatives in making these discs. One alternative would be to write out everything that I was going to say to you and then read it to you. The other alternative would be to **study, to meditate**, and then to **talk out of the fullness of my heart without notes**. That is the way that I have chosen to do it.

Now the second method has many imperfections about it. There will be faults, there will be mistakes, I will miss a word here and there and I am absolutely sure that there will come a moment in your life and in listening to these records that you had wished that I had read it. You will be somewhat in the position that God must have been in when he made Adam. He looked at Adam and then said, “*I could do better than that,*” and then He made Eve. But we’ve chosen this method of the **open discourse** in order that we might commune and have **an encounter** one with another and the subject in general will be the **philosophy of life**. Now where begin?

### **Two ways people Waking up in the Morning**

Well, there are two ways of waking up in the morning. One is to say, “**Good morning, God,**” and the other is to say, “**Good God, morning!**” We are going to **start with the second**. We will start a long way back and people who wake up that way have an **anxiety about life**. I suppose their life might be characterized in two ways.

### **Characterized in two ways:**

**First** of all, to them it seems rather absurd and considerable literature is being produced today on the **absurdity of life**. I suppose one of the best expressions of that absurdity is a novel about a city on the other side of the river. And in this particular novel there were **two factories**. One factory was on **one side of the river** and the other factory was on the **other side of the river**. And the factory on one side of the river took great big stones and smashed and **ground them to**

*powder*. Then when the stones were reduced to powder they shipped the powder to the other side of the river where there was another factory that turned them into *great big boulders*. Then the boulders were **sent back** to the first factory and so the **routine continued**. This was to be a *literary expression* of the way **people today regard life**.

One finds this absurdity often too expressed in the writings of an existentialist who pictured three people in hell. Each one wanted to talk about himself, his own aches, his own pains, and the others were not interested. They were concerned only with their own aches and pains. And finally when the curtain goes down, the last line of the play is, ***“My neighbor is hell.”***

Now this is the way some people live and along with this sense of absurdity there is **also a drift**. Many minds are like ***Old Man River***, they just keep **floating along**, no goals, just a kind of an arrow without a target, a pilgrimage without a shrine, **journeys at sea without any kind of a port**.

Now what is the common conclusion of people who wake up and say this, ***“Good God, morning?”*** I think the **common characteristic** of them all is, **life has no meaning**, it is *without purpose, without goals, without destiny*.

I remember when I first went to Europe to study as a young priest. I was following courses during the summer at the Sorbonne in Paris, principally in order to learn French. And I dwelt in a boarding house that belonged to a certain woman who we will call Madame Citronne. I was there about a week and she came to me and said something, but it was all French to me. You get so angry in Paris because the dogs and the horses understand French and you don't. Well, there were three women schoolteachers that were living in the boarding house from Boston, and I asked them to act as interpreters. And this was the story that came out.

She said that after her marriage, her husband had left her, a daughter that was born to them became a moral wreck on the streets of Paris, and then she pulled out of her pocket a small vial of poison. She said, *“I do not believe in God. Sometimes the thought comes to me that there is a God and in case there be one I curse him. So I've decided simply because life has no meaning and is absurd to do away with it. I intend to take this tonight. Can you do anything for me?”*

Through the interpreter I said, *“I can't if you're going to take that stuff.”* So I asked her to postpone her suicide for nine days. I think it's the only case on record of a woman postponing her suicide for nine days. I never prayed before in my life as I prayed for that woman and on the ninth day the Good Lord gave her a Great Grace.

Some years later on the way to Lourdes I stopped off at the city of Docks, where I enjoyed the hospitality of Monsieur, Madame, a Mademoiselle Citronne. And I said to the village cur'e, *“Are the Citronnes good Catholics?”* *“Oh,”* he said, *“It's wonderful when people keep the faith all during their lives.”* He did not know the story. So it's possible to find **one's way out of this absurdity**.

But now let's come to a question which interests all psychiatrists and interests all of us. What is the **difference between a normal and an abnormal person?** The difference is this: A **normal** person always works toward a **goal or a purpose**. The **abnormal person looks for escape** mechanisms, excuses, rationalizations in order to **avoid discovering the meaning and purpose of life**. **That is the difference.**

The **normal person sets for himself a target**. For example, in this life a young man might want to be a doctor or a lawyer. But beyond that, there's something else. Suppose you ask, "What do you want to do after you become a doctor?" "Well, I want to marry." "And then?" "Raise children." "And then?" "Be happy." "And then?" "Make money. Give money to my children." "And then?" There comes a last, "and then". The **normal person knows what that "and then" is**.

The **abnormal person**, however, is locked up within the barrel of his own ego. He's like an egg. He's never been hatched. He **refuses to submit himself to a certain amount of divine incubation** in order to arrive at a different life than he has.

Now what are some of the **escapes of the abnormal person**, because that's the way he spends his time? If he wants to go, for example, from New York to Washington, he isn't concerned about Washington, he's concerned about **giving excuses** why he doesn't go to Washington.

Now just to mention a few of these **escape mechanisms of the abnormal person**:

(1) **Love of speed**. I believe that an excessive love of speed or, should I say, a love of excessive speed is due to a want of a goal or a purpose in life. Though they do not know where they are going, but they certainly are on their way and there may even be an unconscious or half-conscious desire to **end life because it is without purpose**.

(2) Another escape would be **sex**.

(3) **Throwing oneself into business** in an abnormal kind of way, in order to have the intensity of an experience, **atone for a want of goal or purpose**.

One of the very famous psychiatrists, Dr. (Carl) Jung, said that, "*After 25 years of experience of dealing with mental patients, I would say that at least one-third of my patients had no observable clinical neurosis, but all of them were suffering from a want of the meaning or purpose of life and not until they discover that will they ever be happy.*" In other words, the vast majority of people today are suffering from what might be called an **existential neurosis**, the anxiety and the problem of living, the answering of the question, 'what is it all about?' Where do I go from here? Now, how find it?

I know what you're thinking now. You are thinking, "*Now he's going to tell us to get down on our knees and pray to God.*" No, I'm not. I may say that a little later on, but I'm not going to tell you that now. And why? Because people who have an existential neurosis are too far away from that for the moment. **I'm offering two solutions**.

First, go out and **help your neighbor**. Those who suffer from an anxiety of life do so because they live only for themselves. Their mind, their heart, each has been dammed up and all of the scum of the river of life makes of the heart and mind a kind of a garbage heap. And the easiest way out of this **is to love people whom you see**. If we do not love those whom we see, how can we love God, whom we do not see? Visit the sick. Be kind to the poor. Help the healing of lepers. Find your neighbor, and the neighbor is someone in need. Once you do this, you begin to break out of the shell. You discover that your neighbor is not hell, as Sartre said, that your neighbor is part of yourself and is a creature of God.

Not very long ago there was a father brought to me his young son, a very self-wise, conceited, young delinquent who had given up his faith and was bitter with himself and everyone whom he met. The next day the boy ran away from home. He was away from home for a year. The boy came back as bad as ever. The father brought him to me and said, "What shall I do with him?" I said, "Send him to school, but not in the United States." So I recommended another school. Now do not write and ask me what that school was. I recommended a certain school to him and about a year later the boy came back to see me. He said, "Would you be willing to give me moral support for an enterprise that I have undertaken in Mexico?" He said, "There's a group of boys in the college where I am who have built a little school and we have gone all round the neighborhood and brought in the children to teach them Catechism. We have also brought in a doctor from the United States once a year, and for one month, to take care of all of the sick people in the neighborhood." And I said, "How did you become interested in this?" "Well," he said, "the boys went down there during the summer and I thought I would go down, too." And he **recovered his faith and his morals** and everything else **in his neighbor**. It is the poor, the indigent, the needy, the sick, fellow creatures of God **who give to us great strength**.

Some years ago there was an Indian who went into Tibet. He went in to do a little evangelizing of that non-Christian country and he took with him a Tibetan guide. In the course of the trip they got very cold crossing the foothills of the Himalayas and they sat down, exhausted, almost frozen. And this Indian, whose name was Singh, said, "I think I hear a man moaning down there in the abyss." And the Tibetan said, "Well, you are almost dead yourself; you can't help him." And Singh said, "Yes, I will help him." So he went down, dragged the man out from the abyss the best he could and carried him to the nearby village and came back **completely revived**, revived by that act of charity. And when he came back, he found his friend, who refused to aid the neighbor, frozen to death. So the first way to escape the anxiety of life **is to find your neighbor**.

**The second way is leave yourself open to experiences and encounters with the Divine**, which will come to you from without. I say leave yourself open. Your eye does not have light, your ear has no sound or harmony. The food of your stomach comes from without. Your mind has been taught. Your radio pulls in unseen waves from the outside. Therefore, allow this hole in your head, this hole in your heart, to *receive certain impulses* that *come from without* that will perfect you, no matter how far away you be, and what I'm talking about, they will still come.

I remember once inviting a woman <sup>(1)</sup> to see me who had just lost her 18 year old daughter who was very rebellious, had no faith whatever. And she said, "I want to talk about God." I said, "All right, I will talk about Him for five minutes and then you talk about Him or against Him for forty-five and then we will have a discussion." Well, I was talking about two minutes and she interrupted me. She stuck her finger under my nose and she said, "Listen, if God is good, why did He take my daughter?" I said, "In order that you might be here, learning something about the purpose and meaning of life." And that is what she learned and found it and discovered it.

So I am suggesting that you **will not just reason yourself** into the **meaning and purpose of life**. You will **act yourself** into the meaning and purpose of life *by breaking the shell of egotism and selfishness, by cleaning the window of the moral life* and allowing the sunshine to come in. You would not be seeking God if you had not already in some way found Him. **You are a king in exile, you have a kingdom**. I will tell you more about it later on.

God love you.

[1 The conversion of Clare Booth Luce](#)

## Discussion Questions:

### 1. In today's lesson on – **“Philosophy of Life”** **what stood out the most to you?**

#### History of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* originated with a recommendation made at the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985. In 1986 Pope John Paul II appointed a Commission of Cardinals and Bishops to develop a compendium of Catholic doctrine. In 1989 the Commission sent the text to all the Bishops of the world for consultation. In 1990 the Commission examined and evaluated over 24,000 amendments suggested by the world's bishops. The final draft is considerably different from the one that was circulated in 1989. In 1991 the Commission prepared the text for the Holy Father's official approval. On June 25, 1992 Pope John Paul II officially approved the definitive version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. On December 8, 1992 Pope John Paul II promulgated the Catechism with an apostolic constitution.

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/frequently-asked-questions-about-the-catechism-of-the-catholic-church.cfm>

## **CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

To view the context, please visit <https://www.kofc.org/en/catechism/index.html> or

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)

**39.** "In defending the ability of human reason to know God, the Church is expressing her confidence in the possibility of speaking about him to all men and with all men, and therefore of dialogue with other religions, with **PHILOSOPHY** and science, as well as with unbelievers and atheists. "

**68.** "By love, God has revealed himself and given himself to man. He has thus provided the definitive, superabundant answer to the questions that man asks himself about the meaning and purpose of his life. "

**294.** "The glory of God consists in the realization of this manifestation and communication of his goodness, for which the world was created. God made us 'to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace', [[Eph 1:5-6](#) .] for 'the glory of God is man fully alive; moreover man's life is the vision of God: if God's revelation through creation has already obtained life for all the beings that dwell on earth, how much more will the Word's manifestation of the Father obtain life for those who see God.' [St. Irenaeus, Adv. haeres. 4, 20, 7: PG 7/1, 1037.] The ultimate purpose of creation is that God 'who is the creator of all things may at last become 'all in all', thus simultaneously assuring his own glory and our beatitude.' [AG 2; cf. [1 Cor 15:28](#) .]"