

The Human Spirit

by Ernest O'Neill

The sermon explores the three elements of human nature--body, soul, and spirit--and emphasizes the importance of recognizing the spirit for true fulfillment in life.

Scripture: Genesis 2:7, Psalm 139:14, Ecclesiastes 12:7, John 4:24, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:11, 2 Corinthians 4:16, Galatians 5:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Human Nature", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Ernest O'Neill delves into the topic 'How Were You Made?' by exploring the three elements of human nature as described in the Bible. Contrary to the common belief of body and soul, the Bible reveals that humans are made up of body, breath (spirit), and soul. The neglect of the spiritual aspect leads to a shallow existence, described as 'hollow men' by T.S. Eliot, resulting in inner emptiness and a sense of something missing in life. O'Neill challenges the prevailing dichotomy of human nature and emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and nurturing the spirit within us for a more fulfilling life.

Transcript

How Were You Made?

One of the shortest explanations is given in the book that has the best historical and the sublimest spiritual claim to express reality. The Bible explains that our creator "formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul". This sentence is found in the first book of the Bible - Genesis - chapter 2, verse 7. It contradicts the view of most of us today because it states that we are made up of three different kinds of life, not just two!

Most of us think of ourselves as body and soul, inside and outside, mental and physical. But the creator made us with three elements - not two. He took earth and made our bodies, breathed into us his breath (Hebrew word 'ruah', meaning 'spirit'), and these two elements combined to produce a riving 'soul'. Today we all provide for the body with exercise, diet, clothes, and rest. We also provide for the soul (Greek word 'psuche') or the psychological part of us with education, entertainment, psychoanalysis, and group therapy. But even churches talk about the 'spirit' part of us as if it were synonymous with 'soul'. The result is that most human beings live on the level of either their bodies or their mental faculties. But they go no deeper than that. The result is the widespread dissatisfaction with personal life that characterizes modern society.

The Banalities of Dichotomy

This dual concept of human nature produces life that is dull, flat, and trite -- filled with the deadness that the poet, T.S. Eliot, describes-

"We are the hollow men

We are the stuffed men

Leaning together

Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!

Our dried voices, when

We whisper together

Are quiet and meaningless

As wind in dry grass

Or rats' feet over broken glass

In our dry cellar."

If everything can be attributed to the effects of the physical world on the mental and emotional or viceversa, then such a closed system leads inexorably to the limp, stuffed scarecrows that react but never act. The American psychologist, Skinner, shocked us all by saying we are merely predetermined robots that are controlled by our heredity and environment. When you consider that most of us spend at least four hours a day absorbing, imitating, and reacting to what we see on the TV screen, such a shallow view of human nature may seem justified. Many people today have a great sense of inner emptiness and meaninglessness. We often feel a piece of us is missing. We sense there must be more to life than this.

We are revulsed when we are treated as just physical and mental animals. When we feel restless and are advised to change our jobs, we suspect that the restlessness is caused by something deeper than boredom with work. Mood altering drugs that provide emotional 'ups or downs' seem to treat us as less than we are. Though job satisfaction and security together with interesting colleagues and vacations are appreciated, we still feel there is something more to us than mental and physical fulfillment.

Is There Anyone at Home?

Sometimes, indeed, as we react to yet another set of demands upon our time, we wonder if we are anything more than a punch-ball that is pummeled by people and circumstances. As we smile wanly to please yet another "significant other" in our lives we feel there must be more to being "me" than just the sum-total of my physical and mental responses. Frequently we find something within us desperately wanting its own time and its own space to do whatever it wants for a change. Usually, however, such inner urgings end up in social or professional disaster. Yet we still feel there is some part of us that is almost dead despite the fact that it should be alive and active. At times we look into others' glazed eyes as they probably look into ours and wonder "is there anyone at home?"

That's the part of us that the creator breathed into us when he infused his spirit or 'ruah'. That's 'you, yourself' - it's the very essence of you. Inside your physical and mental equipment (which you have in common with everyone else in the world) is the real 'you' - your spirit. As we'll see next time, this is the part of human nature that is ignored in our contemporary world. Yet without a real respect for it, a human being feels 'like a blob'. Let's begin then our "research into this problem of inner space".

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