



I have spoken and written before about Bishop Fulton Sheen. This article will present some more of Bishop Sheen's tremendously insightful and clear teachings on our current times. I was not familiar with Bishop Sheen until I was well into adulthood. So I thought I would first present a very brief biography of him for others who might not be familiar with him.

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen was an American bishop. He was born in 1895 and died in 1979 at the age of 84, shortly after meeting Pope St John Paul II on John Paul's first visit to the U.S. as pope. Pope John Paul embraced Bishop Sheen and as he did, he said to him: you have been a loyal son of the Church. Fulton Sheen was born in El Paso, IL – about 3 hours northeast of where I grew up. His dad was, amongst other things, a farmer and Fulton spent time working on the family farm in his younger years. His family would later move about 30 miles west to Peoria, a bigger town of about 100,000 people. His baptismal name was Peter John Sheen but somehow he came to be called by his mother's maiden name, Fulton, and it stuck with him throughout the rest of his life. Most people did not even know his given name was something other than Fulton.

Fulton was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Peoria (IL) in 1919. He had a sharp intellect and excelled in academics. He went on to get a doctorate in philosophy and taught at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. for a number of years. His classes were packed. An old Msgr we had at Holy Apostles Seminary said that people were standing in the hallways to try and listen to (then) Fr Sheen's lectures. Bishop Sheen was a deep thinker, an excellent philosopher and theologian, and he had clear, at times even prophetic, insights into modern man, modern times, and modern problems. Perhaps most of all, though, he was a great teacher of the faith. What undoubtedly made him well known and recognized throughout the country was his half-hour television show called "Life is Worth Living," which ran from 1951 to 1957. A guy by the name of Milton Berle was one of the big stars of television at that time. Berle was so popular that other TV personalities did not want their own show on at the same time as Berle. Bishop Sheen was put on opposite Berle and, according to several authors, Bishop Sheen's show supplanted Milton Berle as the number one ranked TV show. In any event, his show was surprisingly well watched and well liked.

Bishop Sheen also wrote numerous books, over 70 I believe it was. His TV show was before my time and I had never even heard of Bishop Sheen, even as an adult. It was through his writings, many years after his death, that I first came to know him. I was working out east at the time and I was on the phone with my dad one night. I heard my mom in the background say: tell'em about Bishop Sheen. My dad went on to tell me about him and that his cause for canonization had been opened. He sent me my first Bishop Sheen book and after that I sought out more of his writings as well as his audio and video recordings.

Those who despise the true faith might scoff at him or even grind their teeth. It would be a mistake to do so. Those who consider themselves high-level theologians or philosophers might turn up their nose at Bishop Sheen. That would also be a mistake. His insights into modernity are downright penetrating.

During the Easter season, the second reading for Mass has been from the Book of Revelation where our Lord is reminding us of His second coming, the end of this world as we know it, the final judgement, the Resurrection, and the creation of a new world for those who use this life to become like Him, a world that will never be corrupted, a world of perfect peace and absolute bliss. This will be preceded, though, by a time of great trial and tribulation when evil will be unleashed. Bishop Sheen saw a progression to this state in our own times. The following is an excerpt from one of his radio broadcasts delivered in 1947 on this very topic. And now – Bishop Sheen:

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Why is it that so few realize the seriousness of our present crisis? Partly because men do not want to believe their own times are wicked, partly because it involves too much self-accusation and principally because they have no standards outside of themselves by which to measure their times. If there is no fixed concept of justice how shall men know it is violated? Only those who live by faith really know what is happening in the world. The great masses without faith are unconscious of the destructive processes going on. The very day Sodom was destroyed, Scripture describes the sun as bright. In the midst of seeming prosperity, world-unity, the decree to the angels goes forth but the masses go on their sordid routines.

We are definitely at the end of a non-religious era of civilization, which regarded religion as an addendum to life, a pious extra, a morale-builder for the individual but of no social relevance, an ambulance that took care of the wrecks of the social order until science reached a point where there would be no more wrecks; which called on God only as a defender of national ideals. The new era into which we are entering is what might be called the religious phase of human history. But do not misunderstand; by religious we do not mean that men will turn to God, but rather that the indifference to the Absolute which characterized the liberal phase of civilization will be succeeded by a passion for an absolute. From now on the struggle will be not for the colonies and national rights, but for the souls of men.

The anti-Christ will not be so called, otherwise he would have no followers. In Sacred Scripture he is described as an angel fallen from heaven, and as “the Prince of this world” whose business it is to tell us that there is no other world. His logic is simple: if there is no heaven there is no hell; if there is no hell, then there is no sin; if there is no sin, then there is no judge, and if there is no judgement then evil is good and good is evil. But above all these descriptions, our Lord tells us that He will be so much like Himself that he would deceive even the elect.

How will he come in this new age to win followers to his religion? He will come disguised as the Great Humanitarian; he will talk peace, prosperity and plenty not as means to lead us to God, but as ends in themselves. He will write books on the new idea of God to suit the way people live; induce faith in astrology so as to make not the will but the stars responsible for sins; he will explain guilt away psychologically as repressed sex, make men shrink in shame if their fellowmen say they are not broadminded and liberal; he will be so broadminded as to identify tolerance with indifference to right and wrong, truth and error; he will spread the lie that men will never be better until they make society better and thus have selfishness to provide fuel for the next revolution; he will foster science but only to have armament makers use one marvel of science to destroy another; he will foster more divorces under the disguise that another partner is “vital”; he will increase love for love and decrease love for persons; he will invoke religion to destroy religion; he will even speak of Christ and say that he was the greatest man who ever lived; his mission, he will say, will be to liberate men from the servitudes of superstition and Fascism which he will never define. But in the midst of all his seeming love for humanity, his glib talk of freedom and equality, he will have one great secret which he will tell no one – He will not believe in God. And because his religion will be brotherhood without the fatherhood of God, he will deceive even the elect. He will set up a counter church which will be the ape of the Church because he, the devil, is the ape of God. It will be the mystical body of the anti-Christ that will, in all its externals, resemble the Church as the mystical body of Christ. In desperate need for God, he will induce modern man, in his loneliness and frustration, to hunger more and more for membership in his community that will give man enlargement of purpose, without any need of personal amendment and without the admission of personal guilt. These are days in which the devil has been given a particularly long rope.

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Bishop Sheen, however, was no defeatist. He emphasized that the Church has endured other trials and will endure this one as well; he knew, taught and preached that the victory belongs to our Lord alone and that those who oppose Him are simply kicking the goad. Our Lord’s true followers will be few in number in the end but that will only magnify the glory of God. Will I be one of them?

*God bless you, Fr Kuhn.*