



STATEMENT DS-460

BOOK REVIEW

A SUMMARY CRITIQUE: Care of the Soul

by Thomas Moore

Great confusion presently exists in American society over how to define words such as soul, mind, intellect, emotion, heart, love, and truth. Psychotherapist, philosopher, and theologian Thomas Moore has written a *New York Times* bestseller, *Care of the Soul*, that seems to add to this confusion, especially in regard to the word soul. As of this writing, the book has been on the bestseller list for 80 weeks.

"Serving the imagination," "nursing the imagination" — these are phrases that describe what Moore means by the "care of the soul" (p. xi). Moore contends, however, that "it is impossible to define precisely what the soul is. Definition is an intellectual enterprise anyway; the soul prefers to imagine.... Soul lies midway between understanding and unconsciousness...its instrument is neither the mind nor the body, but imagination" (p. xiii). Moore also believes that soul "is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance" (p. 5).

Moore applies these ideas and other similar thoughts to various aspects of everyday life such as family, childhood, love, power, work, money, and creativity, often using Greek mythology to make his points. When talking about fathers, for example, Moore cites Homer's *Odyssey*, which is about the Greek soldier Odysseus's long journey home to his family after the Trojan War. Moore suggests people should think of life as a long, wandering journey toward fatherly wisdom. "Education in history and literature, when done with sufficient depth, can make good fathers," he writes (p. 35). When talking about mothers, Moore cites the Greek myth of Persephone, the beloved daughter of the goddess Demeter, who was kidnapped by Hades (the Greek god of the underworld) while she was picking flowers. Moore asserts that a truly mature kind of motherhood allows children to take risks and does not try to shield them completely from all experiences of death.

Moore's analysis of parenthood is fine as far as it goes, but why use such a strange definition for the word soul? Why set up these debatable distinctions between soul and mind, and between intellect and imagination? Why can't "caring for the soul" include the use of our minds? Why does imagination have nothing to do with the intellect? The answers to these questions emerge as other parts of Moore's world view are examined.

Moore cites Renaissance thinkers, Plato, the Romantic poets, and psychologists such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and James Hillman as the primary sources for the point of view espoused in his book. Of all these, Hillman probably represents the biggest influence.

Hillman is the author of *Re-Visioning Psychology* (Harper & Row, 1975) and *The Dream and the Underworld* (Harper & Row, 1979). Hillman also did an interview book with Michael Ventura titled *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy — And the World's Getting Worse* (HarperCollins, 1992). Like Moore, Hillman is a leading proponent of what is often called psychological polytheism. This is the view that the human psyche, personality, or soul is fragmented into many different aspects and character traits, or "gods," and that this is ultimately good, not bad. Therefore, Hillman argues, we should never get stuck in only one aspect of our personalities, nor should we

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uphold only one ideal, such as love, as a literal truth. Psychological complexity "requires all the Gods," he says in *Re-Visioning Psychology*, because "our totality can only be adequately contained by a Pantheon" (p. 222). Thus there is really no one way to feel, think, believe, or live, and certainly no one way to God.

Moore adopts this viewpoint in *Care of the Soul*. At one point, he says there are "many different ways of being spiritual" (p. 242). At another point, he writes, "Often care of the soul means not taking sides when there is a conflict at a deep level. It may be necessary to stretch the heart wide enough to embrace contradiction and paradox" (p. 14). Both he and Hillman attack "fundamentalists" of all kinds — not just Christian or Islamic fundamentalists but scientific ones as well. Fundamentalists take everything too literally, Moore and Hillman say, and they stifle the imagination.

Psychological polytheism, however, is fundamentally flawed, both philosophically and biblically. In the first place, to say that there is no one way to feel, think, believe, or live and no one way to God is itself *one way*. The viewpoint is therefore self-contradictory and thus false. Such absolute pluralism is irrational, and since it is irrational, it opens the floodgates for everyone to believe and do anything they choose. If psychological polytheism is true, then no one has the right to blame anybody for anything. We shouldn't even blame fundamentalists!

Biblically, psychological polytheism is flawed because it contradicts the Bible's view of truth and love. The apostle Paul wrote, "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6). Moreover, Jesus Christ said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Faced with such clear definitions of truth and love, we should not be surprised when Moore writes, "Truth is not really a soul word; soul is after insight more than truth. Truth is a stopping point asking for commitment and defense. Insight is a fragment of awareness that invites further exploration" (p. 246). Moore's view of truth is not only unbiblical, it also seems to rely on the false distinctions between soul and mind, and between intellect and imagination (mentioned earlier). Although English translations of the Bible at times use the word soul in different ways, the word most often refers to the nonmaterial part of a human being, also known as the human spirit. Created in the image of God, the soul or spirit seems to have more than one aspect or function, including the mind or intellect, the feelings or emotions, and the heart, which is "man's entire mental and moral activity, both the rational and the emotional elements," and which includes "the reason and the will" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, pp. 206-7). Yet, Moore and Hillman have taken these biblical concepts and invented their own definitions and models for them. By questioning their definitions and models, we can reveal inconsistencies in their world views and moral beliefs and help prepare their readers' hearts for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Moore is basically a moral relativist. To him, there are few, if any, moral absolutes. Several times in his book, for instance, he strongly criticizes his patients and other people for having a moralistic attitude toward life.

There is only one paragraph in the entire book where Moore strays from this viewpoint. It comes early in the book (p. 16). In that paragraph, he introduces psychologist Carl Jung's concept of the shadow. In Jung's psychology of the human condition, there is the person we want to be and the person we don't want to be. The person we don't want to be is what Jung calls the shadow — an aspect of the human personality that often shows up in dreams, art, religion, and popular culture. According to Jungian psychology, sometimes the shadow truly is a negative aspect of our personality, but other times the shadow also contains positive traits that we should embrace rather than shun. For instance, many people in America today shun the intellectual, academic side of life in favor of their emotions. But by doing so they cut themselves off from an important, valuable aspect of life. In his books, Jung advises people to confront the shadow hidden within their personalities. If the shadow is truly negative, then people need to confront their evil tendencies so they can properly deal with them. If, however, the shadow is not negative, then people need to get rid of their false guilt and incorporate the positive aspects of the shadow into their lives.

Moore acknowledges, "Jung also believed there is an absolute shadow, not relative to our life choices and habits. In other words, there is evil in the world and in the human heart. If we don't recognize this, we have a naive attitude that can get us into trouble" (p. 16). Despite this admission about absolute evil, Moore never mentions it again in the rest of his book. In fact, he talks about the times when the shadow has only what he considers positive aspects to it. Consequently, Moore never really confronts the issue of absolute evil. I suspect that if he did confront it, he would have to give up the ideas he obtained from Hillman.

While discussing human spirituality, as well as dreams, stories, and pictures, Moore writes, "The intellect wants a summary reading — all well and good for the purposeful nature of the mind. But the soul craves depth of reflection, many layers of meaning, nuances without end, references and allusions and prefigurations" (p. 235). These

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comments are anti-intellectual. They also accept the false notion that any interpretation of dreams, stories, or a biblical passage that contains only one basic layer of meaning automatically lacks depth of reflection, nuances, and complexity.

Moore continues, "If we deprive sacred stories of their mystery, we are left with the brittle shell of fact, the literalism of single meaning....Fundamentalism tends to idealize and romanticize a story, winnowing out the darker elements of doubt, hopelessness, and emptiness. It protects us from the hard work of finding our own participation in meaning and developing our own subtle moral values" (p. 236). Therefore, Moore says, we shouldn't look to the Bible "for moral certainty, for miraculous proofs of faith, or for avoidance of doubt," we should look to the Bible "for insight" (p. 239). But why can't we look to the Bible for all of these things? Why can't we look to the Bible for both moral certainty *and* insight, for both miraculous proofs of faith *and* complex nuances?

Paul declares that "the mystery of Christ...has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:4-6). Apparently, Moore wouldn't like this passage because he likes mystery, and Paul says the mystery of Christ has now been *revealed*. Instead, Moore evidently wants to retain such mysteries not because he cares for the human soul but because he wants to avoid difficult critical thinking and hard moral questions. According to John 3:20, "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." By embracing mystery and doubt, Moore encourages his readers to avoid dealing with their own sinfulness.

Moore thus fails to truly confront the issue of evil and the sinfulness of humankind. Because of this, he also fails to confront the gospel of Jesus Christ. The first chapter in the Book of Mark tells us that Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news or gospel of God. Jesus told the people, "The kingdom (or reign) of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (v. 15). In chapter two, Jesus performed a miracle that showed that He "has authority on earth to forgive sins." Jesus later told His disciples that He "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Paul described the gospel for us in his Epistle to the Romans. He also said "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures," and that he appeared to many people, including Paul and the other apostles (1 Cor. 15:3-8). Paul then spoke of the resurrection of all believers, who will also inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). He wrote that Jesus Christ will hand over this kingdom to God the Father after Jesus "has destroyed all dominion, authority and power" (1 Cor. 15:24). Not surprisingly, Moore avoids mentioning such passages as these when he writes about Jesus. In fact, he seldom cites the New Testament documents at all! Other psychologists have a term for this — they call it *denial*.

Unlike Moore, the Bible does not make radical distinctions between soul, spirit, mind, intellect, feelings, emotions, imagination, truth, love, and the human heart. Although we can wholeheartedly agree with Thomas Moore's desire to avoid simplistic solutions to everyday psychological and spiritual problems — and we can applaud his approval of the benefits of art, beauty, and the imagination — we must reject his definitions, world view, and morality.

—Reviewed by Tom Snyder

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