

jhs

Gethsemani  
Trappist, Ky.

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Dear Dr Fromm:

I am about half way through the Sane Society which I received some time ago. I am reading it with the greatest interest and profit, and taking my time, for I believe it to be your very best book. I thank you for having written it and for having been so kind as to send me an inscribed copy.

Once again I would like to tell you how closely I agree with your main conclusions, that I have read so far, and especially with your admirable analysis of man in our present society. The long passage about the Chicago suburb, in the section on anonymous authority, made my blood run cold. In a way that sort of thing is more terrible than Nazism, because it is so much more insidious. It is certainly what we are up against-- everywhere. I am glad too that you are showing up the danger, so great now in America, of the psychiatrist becoming just another expert who helps industry to manipulate its employees.

I certainly agree with you that we ought to scrap the notion that mental health is merely a matter of adjustment to the existing society-- to be adjusted to a society that is insane is not to be healthy. The trouble is that those who are not adjusted to it, even for the right reasons, have a rather hard time too. The statement you make at the bottom of page 176 has my full agreement. As a priest and a man dedicated to God in a monastery, I am bound to say that I am deeply worried by the falsity, the superficiality and the fundamental irreverence of what is so often hailed, nowadays as a "return to God". People have resurrected a lot of "words about" God and a lot of concepts of religious things, but it sometimes seems to me that they- we- are not too anxious to find the Living God. At the foot of the mountain, we prefer our golden calf but we do not even have the honesty to invite a Moses to ascend for us into the smoke and communicate with God and receive His messages. I think, incidentally, that your page on idolatry (121) ~~is~~ is a most acute observation, along the lines that you have already indicated in your other books.

I also like very much your pages on work. In giving some lectures on art to my students last year I went into Eric Gill's thoughts on work, which are very similar to yours. I am sending you the mimeographed notes of which I have plenty, in the event that you might feel like glancing through them. I think you will find things to interest you here and there, and a further confirmation of the fact that we are trying to say much the same thing in our own different ways.

There are one or two points on which I disagree with you. It seems to me that your statements about the history of various religions are often rather sweeping and arbitrary. For instance it is by no means certain just what original Buddhism is-- ~~is~~ atheistic or theistic. Then in your note on page 55 you are certainly wrong in saying the original idea of Christ was the adoptianist one. After all, how about the Gospel of St John "In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was made flesh". You could easily find plenty of Christian thought that would substantiate your idea of the dignity of man. Most of the Fathers of the Church looked at the Incarnation in that light, and Duns Scotus, for instance, is always speaking of the Humanity of Christ as the "assumptus homo", the man who was taken up by God. This is far stronger than adoptianism, for it says that the Man Christ was not only "adopted" but the true Son of God -- "true God and true man." All our ideas on the dignity of man, all our "humanism" really flows from the right understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation and of the recapitulation of all in Christ

If you are interested in a good exposition of this idea, De Lubac's "Catholicism" brings it out very well in the first couple of chapters.

I have just finished giving some lectures on Ecclesiastes, comparing it in the end with Lao Tse. It was a fascinating study for me. The Pope, you may know, has come out rather strongly in favor of ~~psycho~~psychiatry and even (implicitly) of psychoanalysis, and in passing he recommended the Catholic psychiatrist to reread the sapiential books of the Bible for the light they throw on man's psychology. To my mind, Ecclesiastes is the best from this point of view, with its rejection of arbitrary, a priori and wishful rationalizations about life and its insistence upon a real adaptation to reality, much of which comes to us as unknown and unpredictable-- hence also the acceptance of risk and the avoidance of dogmatism and of extremes, the humility of faith, the recognition of our own limitations, the ability to cooperate with others in a common endeavour, etc.

Your book the Forgotten Language which I read last May or June also interested me very much.

~~Did you~~ Did you, by the way, receive No Man is an Island? I hope you did. Probably you would not be interested in all of it. For my part I think the last few chapters are the more important ones, together with the Prologue and the principles given in the first chapter. I should be interested in your reaction, in any case.

Once again, if you will permit a personal observation, it seems to me that your writing shows you to be one who has a very real sense of the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the Living God Who is defiled by the images and concepts which we so easily allow to become idols and projections. Your book would not be comprehensible without an implicitly religious foundation, without an implicitly monotheistic foundation.

My Superiors are considering letting me stop writing and go into a kind of retirement -- perhaps even in the woods, I don't know. If they do, they will probably desire me to sever the contacts I made as a writer, but nothing has been said about it so far and I trust I will be able to hear from you until something definite is said on the subject. But I would like to repeat that I have profited very much by reading your books and by our letters and want to express my gratitude. No matter what the future may bring, I would like to assure you that I will remain in spiritual contact with you by a continued sympathy and by my prayers. God bless you.

Very sincerely in Christ