

Care of the Soul

I N T R O D U C T I O N

by Thomas Moore

The great malady of the twentieth century, implicated in all of our troubles and affecting us individually and socially, is "loss of soul." When soul is neglected, it doesn't just go away; it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning. Our temptation is to isolate these symptoms or to try to eradicate them one by one; but the root problem is that we have lost our wisdom about the soul, even our interest in it. We have today few specialists of the soul to advise us when we succumb to moods and emotional pain, or when as a nation we find ourselves confronting a host of threatening evils. But within our history we do have remarkable sources of insight from people who wrote explicitly about the nature and needs of the soul, and so we can look to the past for guidance in restoring this wisdom. In this book I will draw on that past wisdom, taking into account how we live now, to show that by caring for the soul we can find relief from our distress and discover deep satisfaction and pleasure.

It is impossible to define precisely what the soul is. Definition is an intellectual enterprise anyway; the soul prefers to imagine. We know intuitively that soul has to do with genuineness and depth, as when we say certain music has soul or a remarkable person is soulful. When you look closely at the image of soulfulness, you see that it is tied to life in all its particulars—good food, satisfying conversation, genuine friends, and experiences that stay in the memory and touch the heart. Soul is revealed in attachment, love, and community, as well as in retreat on behalf of inner communing and intimacy.

All of this leads to the heart of the book—care of the soul. Tradition teaches that soul lies midway between understanding and unconsciousness, and that its instrument is neither the mind nor the body, but imagination. I understand therapy as nothing more than bringing imagination to areas that are devoid of it, which then must express themselves by becoming symptomatic.

Fulfilling work, rewarding relationships, personal power, and relief from symptoms are all gifts of the soul. They are particularly elusive in our time because we don't believe in the soul and therefore give it no place in our hierarchy of values. We have come to know soul only in its complaints: when it stirs, disturbed by neglect and abuse, and causes us to feel its pain. It is commonplace for writers to point out that we live in a time of deep division, in which mind is separated from body and spirituality is at odds with materialism. But how do we get out of this split? We can't just "think" ourselves through it, because thinking itself is part of the problem. What we need is a way out of dualistic attitudes. We need a third possibility, and that third is soul.

In the fifteenth century, Marsilio Ficino put it as simply as possible. The mind, he said, tends to go off on its own so that it seems to have no relevance to the physical world. At the same time, the

INTRODUCTION

materialistic life can be so absorbing that we get caught in it and forget about spirituality. What we need, he said, is soul, in the middle, holding together mind and body, ideas and life, spirituality and the world.

What I am going to present in this book, then, is a program for bringing soul back into life. This is not a new idea. I am simply developing a very old idea in a way I hope will be intelligible and applicable to us in this particular crucial period in history. The idea of a soul-centered world goes back to the earliest days of our culture. It has been sketched out in every period of our history, in the writings of Plato, in the experiments of Renaissance theologians, in the letters and literature of the Romantic poets, and finally in Freud, who gave us a glimpse of a psychic underworld full of memory, fantasy, and emotion. Jung made explicit what was embryonic in Freud, speaking forthrightly for soul and reminding us that we have much to learn about it from our forebears. Most recently James Hillman, my mentor and colleague, and others in his circle—Robert Sardello, Rafael López-Pedraza, Patricia Berry, and Alfred Ziegler, for example—have presented a new approach to psychology that is mindful of this history and explicitly follows Ficino's advice to put soul at the very center of our lives.

This book will focus not just on the idea of soul, but on concrete ways we can foster soulfulness in our ordinary everyday lives. To describe this process, I have borrowed a key phrase from Christianity. For hundreds of years the parish priest received into his charge the souls of those who lived within the boundaries of his church. This responsibility, as well as the work he did tending the needs of his people, was known as *cura animarum*, the cure of souls. *Cure* meant "charge" as well as "care." If we take up this image and apply it to ourselves, we can imagine the responsibility we each have to our own soul. Just as the parish priest was available at life's crucial moments, not as a doctor or healer but simply to ac-

Introduction

company and tend the soul in times of birth, illness, marriage, crisis, and death, we can respond to our own soul as it winds its way through the maze of our life's unfolding. The role of the curate, as he was called, was to provide a religious context for the larger turning points in life and also to maintain the affectional ties of family, marriage, and community. We can be the curates or curators of our own souls, an idea that implies an inner priesthood and a personal religion. To undertake this restoration of soul means we have to make spirituality a more serious part of everyday life.

You can see already that care of the soul is quite different in scope from most modern notions of psychology and psychotherapy. It isn't about curing, fixing, changing, adjusting or making healthy, and it isn't about some idea of perfection or even improvement. It doesn't look to the future for an ideal, trouble-free existence. Rather, it remains patiently in the present, close to life as it presents itself day by day, and yet at the same time mindful of religion and spirituality.

Here is another major difference between care of the soul and psychotherapy in the usual sense: psychology is a secular science, while care of the soul is a sacred art. Although I am borrowing the terminology of Christianity, what I am proposing is not specifically Christian, nor is it tied to any particular religious tradition. It does, however, imply a religious sensibility and a recognition of our absolute need for a spiritual life.

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