



## The Secular Mind

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According to noted Harvard research psychiatrist Robert Coles, the steady march of science and technology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has resulted in a corresponding rise in individualism and erosion of spirituality. Coles believes that the replacement of religion by science has been, and will continue to be, a driving force in Western culture. In a wide-ranging meditation that includes conversations with Paul Tillich, William Carlos Williams, Anna Freud, Catholic socialist Dorothy Day, and novelist/philosopher Walker Percy, Coles explores the inner conflict between the realms of the sacred and the secular in *The Secular Mind*. He traces the rise of secularism through the works of Saint Augustine, Blaise Pascal, Soren Kierkegaard, and Charles Darwin, along with an in-depth analysis of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

In describing contemporary spirituality, Coles notes that psychoanalysis became one of the most powerful tools in the search for inner truth, because it seemed to bridge the gap between the sacred and the secular in many religions; and indeed for many it became a sort of religion in itself. In the last chapter, "Where We Are Headed," Coles asks whether new discoveries in the inner workings of the human brain will ultimately forego the need for a spiritual side to human existence. When "mind" becomes "matter," of what use will be religion in a society so completely dominated by a materialistic world view? Coles is confident that the need for a sense of "otherness" to address the mysteries of life will never completely disappear; there will always be a need for different pathways to truth.

This is a penetrating and thought-provoking book, but general readers not familiar with the persons interviewed or the works discussed will find this a challenging read.

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