

EVIL:

TAKING POSSESSION OF THE HUMAN SOUL

By Isaac Reherst

IN A luxurious hotel in Washington, where diplomats and foreign government officials are hobnobbing in the spacious lobby downstairs, a gentle man wearing a light brown suit is talking quietly in an upstairs room about the devil.

He is convinced that Satan, or the devil, or an active evil spirit — call it what you like, he says — this active demon is abroad in the world, doing battle within the human soul, taking possession of it whenever it can be victorious, and propelling it to evil.

People should be aware, he says. They should be on their guard. If they are not careful, they may be damned.

So should nations, especially powerful nations. They too can be possessed by the devil. If they are not careful, if they become too self-righteous in the way they wield power, they too can be damned.

This man's viewpoint is by no means new. It has been around at least as long as the Bible.

In the modern world, evangelistic preachers shout it every Sunday in street-corner churches throughout the land. And in more "primitive" societies, probably more people subscribe to the existence of a devil, complete with horns, tail and pitchfork, than not.

But this man — 47 years old, pleasant smile, rounded pink face, blond hair going gray, controlled soft voice — is neither evangelist nor preacher nor primitive. He is a New England doctor, a psychiatrist, whose mind has been molded to scientific thinking at some of America's finest universities.

And within the last five years, thanks to a book he wrote on getting your head together, he has become spiritual mentor to millions of educated middle-class people.

His name is M. Scott Peck, and his earlier book, "The Road Less Traveled," has sold 434,000 copies

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DR. M. SCOTT PECK

and last month appeared on the *New York Times* best-seller list. Now he has written a new book, "People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil" (Simon and Shuster, \$14.95).

Dr. Peck is the first to proclaim that while his earlier work was a "nice book," this new one is disturbing, downright dangerous.

The ideas in "The Road Less Traveled" have been discussed by professors, journalists and housewives over the telephone and at coffee klatches: the difference between falling in love and loving; the notion that laziness and cowardice are the source of our miseries.

Critics, even fellow psychiatrists,

have hailed it as the self-help book that doesn't oversimplify, that teaches the way to be happy not through looking out just for No. 1 but by seeking spiritual growth.

Here in Baltimore, in some of the most prominent churches, it is being used — chapter by chapter, every week — as a text for seminars on getting a handle on managing your life.

But of his new book, Dr. Peck says, "It has potential for harm. It will cause some readers pain. Worse, some may misuse its information to harm others."

In both his books, he says, he is building bridges between psychotherapy and religion. But while his first one was general and pleasant — as he put it, "an attempt to tell laymen what psychotherapy is all about" — this one is specific and disturbing. It takes a look at the dark underside of the human soul.

"Over the years," he explains, "in my practice I've had a number of experiences with people who have gone beyond being ordinary sinners — which we all are — to where the sinning seems to be irrevocable, to where they are uncorrectable as people, to where they become more and more fixed in their destructiveness.

"This book grew out of a terrible sense of frustration and helplessness of how to combat or help or heal the damage that these people do.

"I've come to the conclusion that the disease they're suffering from is that they're evil. In our profession there's a reluctance to call them that. But I don't see how we're going to be able to heal a disease that we're not willing to study or name."

He faults both psychotherapists and clergymen for their unwillingness to accept the existence of evil as an active force in the world.

In 1960, he says, a confidential poll taken among Roman Catholic priests showed that 80 percent of them did not believe in evil, and See EVIL, B4, Col. 1