

ANY SOLUTION POSSIBLE ?

CHAPTER 12.

It is only as one stares into the prospect of defeat, that one sees clearly whether it is worth while fighting. And contemplating the scholastic pedantry described in the last Chapter is staring at defeat all right. What hope has such absurd legalism of overcoming the evil in the world, and of helping to steer us all towards a decent, just society? And yet it is only as one stares into the prospect of a world without Christian churches, that one can see if it is worth while struggling to keep the C.of E. alive. Christianity claims that "Life" is to live in Christ; and those who live only in the world of Nature, or one might add in secular society, are in comparison dead. Well, the trouble is that forms of words which have a brilliant vivacity in their youth, and encapsulate genuine truth, have a habit of turning into meaningless clichés in old age. Hence the need, as I think the Old Testament prophets fully appreciated, to reiterate old truths in modern language with each generation. To suggest that the modern lawyer, who floods the Court with paper, in order to obfuscate the jury's decision, is not living in a spiritual world, or that the modern mountaineer, who no longer climbs for the pleasure of friendship in the hills, but pushes the standard to unbelievable heights in his thirst for adventure and achievement in his flirtation with death, is not living a spiritual life, is pathetically naïve. In comparison the average church-goer's spiritual life is non-existent. Yet of course he cannot admit it. It may be a dubious spirituality flirting too much with death; but it is an even more dubious spirituality putting drops of consecrated wine on rice-paper wafers. Some people would say it was playing the fool; whereas it is difficult to describe a ruthless strategy in Court, or pushing the thirst for adventure to extremes, in that way.

In the world in which Jesus lived, it may have been true that to live in him offered new life, and new hope to the downcast; because the Stoics of the Roman Empire were really without hope. But I think it is an over-simplification now. We now know that the world of the mind is unbelievably subtle. Jung has left us in no doubt about that. For example: in every profession, and in every serious situation in that profession, the need to make decisions calls forth an attitude of mind of its own, which is necessary in order to assess the situation in its true perspective, which in turn is the prelude to making any wise decision as to what to do. Very seldom does the attitude of mind of one profession illuminate another. Indeed Winston Churchill in his biography of the Duke of Marlborough, quoted with approval by Field Marshal Montgomery in his Memoirs, said that to adapt the plans of bygone heroes to new situations was the road to catastrophe! To take what Jesus said in the Sermon of the Mount, and without reflection regard it as a blue-print for action 2000 years later, in dramatically

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different social conditions, and in a dramatically different culture, is madness. You need to think out again, whether it is appropriate for the situation you are in. The Emperor Julian, on his Persian expedition, burned his boats in imitation of Alexander the Great. Unfortunately conditions had changed; and what was wisdom for Alexander was folly for Julian. It cost him his life, and irretrievable disaster for the expedition. Unless we are all going to be monks in monasteries, salvation as preached by Jesus is in danger of becoming irrelevant. It is utterly inappropriate as a guide to conduct in an honourable profession in the secular world today. One has to use one's own vision, and one's own judgement, and initiative if one has any.

Why I am so confident that my Theory of Consciousness has substantial truth in it? It is because it worked. It enabled me to master the technique of persuading witnesses whom I considered dishonest to tell stupid obvious lies, of their own freewill. This involved being able to read their minds to some extent. Some people would say this was telepathy; but I would say it was just ordinary cross-examination, just doing a professional job. Without verification like this, there is no means of knowing whether the speculations of a particular frame of mind are reality or fantasy. The frame of mind does not verify itself. It is no good saying, "It was so vivid, it must be real". Nor, "It is so logical, it must be true". It may be vivid and logical, and false! The only verification is proof by subsequent experience. For example, if someone says they experience vividly the presence of God, if God exists (as I believe He does), they may indeed be experiencing His presence; and the experience may be so vivid (as St. Paul's was on the road to Damascus) that they feel compelled to act upon it. But the vividness of the experience does not prove its reality, because no experience is self-verifying. Until proved true, in one's own mind at least, by subsequent events, one must always be prepared to admit one may be indulging in delightful day-dreams. Or again, the monumental theological structure of the Middle Ages, which proclaimed that God created the Universe, though wonderfully complete, logically self-consistent, and even beautiful, still collapsed. It collapsed because the foundation of fact, on which this monumental speculation had been made to rest, was found to be false by the work of Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton.

But what happens when events do bring verification? The thrill of verification makes it tempting to press on deeper and deeper into the particular attitude of mind, regardless of the consequences and possible penalties for so doing. For example; Bismarck's three wars, in which he continued political intercourse by other means, each bolder than the last, had an unhappy ending. The first was the Schleswig-Holstein affair in 1864; the second the Austro-Prussian war of 1866; the third the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. All of them were fought for limited political aims. All were effectively decided within weeks. And they achieved a united

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Germany under Prussian leadership. Unfortunately the indirect result was the creation of a war-party in Germany, which Bismarck could keep in check, but which the Kaiser could not control when Bismarck was gone; and we all know what happened next!

It is the same in small things, as in big. You see it in mountaineering. Not only does equipment improve, enabling harder climbs to be done more safely; but the climbs being done, both on our own crags and in the big ranges, are unbelievably harder than 50 years ago. And the chief reason is in the attitude of mind; no longer do people climb for the pure fun of it and the companionship, they climb for results. On our crags, a fall is accepted, in the fairly confident belief that the rope technique will render it harmless; on the greater ranges, climbers accept that if their luck runs out, they will not come back. So of course they are able to climb much harder things. Apart from the risk of losing your life, the only penalty for indulging in such a ruthless attitude is that you may not be able to retreat into a more balanced frame of mind, when you return to the valley. You get locked into the attitude, which you have chosen; and then slowly and imperceptibly you cease to be able to see things from other points of view.

But there is no need for this, because actually one is faced with a choice when events bring verification. In religion, if it is correct that Jesus saved mankind from being led down an Evolutionary cul-de-sac, everyone benefits from this. He did not do it for personal advancement. The sun shines on the just and the unjust. We all escaped tyranny, through the self-sacrifice of the men who died in the two World Wars: not just the deserving. So salvation benefits the righteous and unrighteous alike. Maybe the Leeds shoppers prefer the spirit of money and possessions to the spirit of Jesus; but they benefit from the spirit of Jesus being around in the visible form of churches. They can wistfully wish they could see the point in going to church, even while they do not do so. Their idolatry of money and possessions is not so compulsive. Take away the churches, leave them with their idolatry, and the outlook is more desolate. True life may still be in Christ, but a little brushes off onto other people,

Similarly with the sense of brotherhood or indwelling which the communion service is supposed to foster; a little brushes off onto other people. I once asked a friend why no-one had ever asked me what I meant by "indwelling"? Her reply was that few would know even if I explained, others like herself knew exactly what I meant; either way they would not ask! How hard it is to talk about a spiritual truth to the spiritually blind! But a little brushes off onto other people. Often after taking part in a communion service, where we celebrate the hope that the spirit of Christ will dwell in all of us, have I then taken part in a church council meeting where the clergyman in the chair has wangled to get his own way! Not everyone who

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should know the truth, appreciates it best. The old simplicities of the New Testament, I'm afraid have gone; only the memory of their enthusiasm remains.

Historically the best known attempt to run a community on Christian lines was the attempt by William Penn and the first Quaker settlers to run Pennsylvania along purely Quaker principles. It was called "The Holy Experiment", and was an attempt to bring at least a corner of the "Kingdom of Heaven" down to earth. Two recent articles in the Quaker Friend record how it was severely criticised by many at the time, from Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin downwards, for putting their own purity of conscience above proper administration of the country, so that others had to pay the price of their scruples. A respected Quaker in London told them they were unfit to govern; they accepted a public trust, which they acknowledged they could not discharge, and instead of protecting the people, prevented the people from protecting themselves. For a time there was an uneasy compromise, when a congenial non-Quaker was appointed the deputy governor, who was able to maintain law and order, hang the robbers, and do their dirty work for them. The C.of E. is in a similar position today. Unfit to govern, or even offer wise advice to the secular State, it has made itself irrelevant to ordinary life, as the man-in-the-street understands only too well. It is in danger of being swept away by any religion which does make itself relevant to ordinary life.

Yet I am still convinced of the need to marry the sacred and the secular. But the way to begin is to recreate the vision of a God-created Universe, which commands respect. Merely to prove there is no incompatibility between science and religion will not do, because it is seen as an attempt to shore up the discredited medieval system. The old patterns of thought are changing, just as the old relationships of pastoral care are changing, not least because there are not enough new clergy being ordained. Christ himself was against "the world" or mammon; but I do not believe that attitude is practicable in the modern world. If you tried to insist on it, you would have to reconcile yourself with empty pews, the disintegration of the C.of E. and with seeing Christianity being practised only in a few religious houses. It would be swept off the streets. The C.of E. is kept in funds by the generosity of those who work in the secular world; and if you tell them the whole time they are working for the "great harlot", their generosity will dry up! You have to accept that the truth of science has equal validity with the truth of religion, because science has changed the way we think.

So I am convinced the future development of religion is to marry the sacred to the secular; not in the sense of absorbing the sacred into the secular, but in Jesus' metaphor of yeast leavening the whole loaf. I see an indwelling between people, not as an over-precious intimacy between them, but as a disciplined willingness to co-operate based on the clearest

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perception of the others' thoughts and intentions. A clarity which stems from the thoughts of each taking place in the mind of the other, as well as in their own minds. How pathetic to claim to be a Christian unless you are competent in the world of affairs. Whatever your trade or profession, you want to be competent at it; and not claim to be Christian, as though that were an excuse for incompetence. The only benefit the Christian is likely to have in the world of affairs is in the degree of intimacy and mutual trust he has with others.

If science has taught us one profound lesson it is that Creation is a unity in itself. Everything in time evolves; even churches evolve whether they like it or not, and have no exemption. Only the truly spiritual is beyond space and time; lovers knowing each others' thoughts, the indwelling spirit of God; and even these things change. But the Bishop's authority, or lack of it, is based on the 39 Articles, legislation by Parliament and Tradition, and is very much in time. So it must evolve, or die. But marrying the sacred and the secular has nothing to do with the bishop's authority, or lack of it. It has to do with the integrity of a human life, and giving expression to the spirit within. And in an evolving world, you cannot any longer cling to certainties in the physical world, nor to shibboleths in the spiritual. Even clinging to other people is dangerous, because few people like to have to fulfil the hopes and dreams of others. Safer by far to make the inspiration for your conduct an indwelling with another. What was a far-fetched dream for me, may actually be the way to make Christ's Kingdom come alive in the secular world. This was the deficiency that gave Islam its tremendous ascendancy over Christianity, when they first met and clashed in the 7th century. Christianity was an other worldly religion; and Islam was not.

Islam marries the sacred and the secular, but not in a way that the West finds acceptable; and it is not hard to see why. Mohammed was correct in thinking that Jesus' salvation was inadequate to heal the ills of society; at least it has not done it in 2000 years. But alas many people would say that Mohammed's cure was worse than the disease. It is not easy to argue that the suicide bomber is in the forefront of evolution. It is easier to argue that, however dangerous he may be, he is the remnant of Islamic militancy, which as a regular military force was first checked at Constantinople in 718AD and at Poitiers in 732AD, and crushed by General Allenby's campaign in Palestine in 1918. To seek to destroy the society, of which you are a member, when you yourself are utterly incapable of running a decent just society which might replace the one you are destroying, is the negation of all coherent policy. It is a mistake, whatever your religion, to view the world's events through too small a prism; and the suicide bomber has tunnel vision, if anyone has. Whereas in the West, our imagination has produced the extraordinary flowering of our materialistic culture, which has

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knit together the entire globe in an unprecedented way. And if Jesus' salvation is taken a stage further by the interpenetration of minds, it promises still more.

In contrast, the strait jacket of Islam allows only one outlet for the imagination to express itself, when confronted with the spectre that the Koran and the interpretations put on it by the mullahs are inadequate to cope with the complexities of modern life; and that is the suicide bomber. Of course Muslims can use the imagination to express themselves in other ways, but none of these ways dispels the melancholy thought of being cut off from the living God by the deadening interpretations of the mullahs. These interpretations too cannot be set aside; they are like pronouncements of the Vatican that are declared to be infallible. Putting it another way, Islam rejects emphatically the Christian companionship with the Deity, whose spirit lurks in the depths of the psyche. If Jung is right that the spirit of God does lurk in the depths of the psyche, then the result is that the Muslim's conscious mind is cut off from all that is best within himself; and if you are cut off from what is best in yourself, naturally you are liable to end up wishing for death if things do not go according to plan. If your inmost being harbours such a wish, it follows that an unscrupulous mullah is able to manipulate this wish for his own sinister purposes. And I see an exact parallel with Hitler manipulating the collective unconscious of the German people in his Nuremberg speeches.

Islam, like Christianity, has dug itself into a hole, in which no accommodation with modern science seems superficially to be possible. Christianity can escape, but only I suspect with a drastic modification of the concept of the "Saviour". Whether Islam can escape, is not for me to say.