

THE CHURCH MUST EVOLVE.

CHAPTER 13.

But it is not enough for the Church to acknowledge the legitimate claims of secular society; it has to acknowledge war as well. The willingness to go to war, or at least threaten war, is essential to the survival of any secular State. And to abolish the secular State at this point in history would reduce the civilized world to complete and utter chaos. If the Church is not willing to admit the reality of war, you might as well ask if it has anything left to say to the man-in-the-street to tempt him, to persuade him, to return and fill the pews once more? Or has it outlived its usefulness, having nothing more to give, and only offering an inner peace to the individual in a world in which he is defeated? If it is not possible to offer a Christian way of life, how are people expected to behave in a society in which we are compelled in practice to fit in with the pattern of life dictated by others? The answer is to create a vision of the Universe created by God; and this in turn will dictate the patterns of behaviour in society.

The two World Wars have dramatically changed the face of society; and the Church can hardly be unaffected. They killed belief in man and human progress, which seemed to be prevalent before 1914. They raised “conflict” to the pitch of professionalism, whether in sport, in business, or in war. Yet the two Wars were really one, with a twenty year armistice in between. And the victory of the Western Allies represents the triumph over the German attempt at world conquest. Even the Kaiser dreamed of attacking America, after conquering Europe; and the Axis in the Second World War most certainly had world conquest in view, and very nearly succeeded at least as far as Britain was concerned. What has the Church to say to the Secular World for delivering us all from tyranny, and the threat of death in a concentration camp? Or does it say it was sinful to fight Hitler; we should have turned the other cheek and practised the meek gospel of Christ, when the only Christian sect that emerged with credit from Hitler’s Germany was the Jehovah’s Witnesses? What has the Church to say to the thousands who died in the battles of the Somme and Passchendaele, and in the great victory in Normandy which the urbane Intelligence Summary at Headquarters described as a blood-bath big enough to satisfy even extravagant German tastes?

What does the Church reply to Winston Churchill, who proclaimed in one of his speeches that the few hundred Hurricane and Spitfire pilots, who fought the Battle of Britain, had by their bravery and morale saved Christian civilization for the world?

Does it say, “Thank you very much for delivering us all from tyranny. But only those who have Christ have the life, and those who do not have Christ, do not; and we are very sorry to tell you that as most of you did not have Christ, the kingdom of heaven is not for

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you”? To talk like that would be obscene. So does it say, “Thank you Secular World for saving us all from tyranny, and from the fear of concentration camps. You are no longer Mammon or the Great Harlot; you are our Saviour in the physical world, and have enabled us to return to preaching the Gospel. To you we owe our lives and freedom”? The truth is the Church has no idea what to say; and finds it convenient not to think about it. This is what most people do when faced with a problem utterly beyond them. They go on doing what they have always done with ever increasing zeal, because they cannot think of anything else to do.

The simple truth is that traditional Christianity has no answer; which is why the Church cannot find one. What is needed is a new, and entirely different attitude of mind, and a new interpretation of the Christian message. This is confirmed by the collapse of traditional Christianity across large swathes of the population since the War; people recognised that the C.of E. was irrelevant to what they regarded as the important decisions in life. There are left those who have experience of the numinous, and the charismatic churches, who are in danger of making the same mistake as Antigone made in the old Greek play. Yet there is nothing particularly heretical in suggesting that Christianity needs a re-interpretation. It has been re-interpreted before; four times actually, and is none the worse for it. St. Paul created a world religion out of what was, and would have remained, an obscure Jewish sect, between about AD 40-50. Augustine embraced Plato, and his successors Neo-Platonism, and gave Christianity a classical intellectual structure, and saved it from remaining the hated religion of an under-class. Thomas Aquinas, 1226-74, incorporated the newly discovered philosophy of Aristotle into the doctrine of the Catholic Church, and probably saved it from a rival pagan intellectual establishment which would have destroyed it. In doing so, of course he stifled science. Luther, Calvin and others, restored the Jewish idea of the human soul having direct access to God; but Luther sought to avoid rampant individualism, not by a return to Jewish ceremony which would have killed Protestantism stone dead, but by declaring that the “Word of God” was revealed in the clear words of Scripture. He promptly quarrelled with Zwingli about the correct interpretation of the simple words of the Eucharistic message, “This is my body”. But it was not a storm in a teacup; it was a search for the inner discipline necessary to bind the Protestant Church together. Now it needs to be reconciled with a just, secular state.

Mammon still exists of course. It contaminates the secular world with its political correctness and its screams of racism, as well as in the abuse of power; but it contaminates the churches too, by substituting for experience of the divine in religion and nature, the hocus-pocus of magical ritual. This provides a primitive superstition in the efficacy of indulgences which hardly differs from the worship of forest and river gods in antiquity.

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Let us try to make sense of the situation by looking at things through the eyes of the Creator. Moses grasped that God or Jehovah wanted the heart's devotion of men and women. Now it is appalling to be rejected by someone you love, and who loves you; infinitely worse than rejection by someone who has always declined much intimacy with you. This is the theme of Goethe's novel *Elective Affinities*; whatever other message the novel was intended to convey, it says that an affection which over-rides all conventional affection, if it cannot be consummated, ends in death. It is a waste of time trying to renounce it or sublimate it. You cannot do it. So He will have devised some spiritual mechanism whereby once he possesses the heart's devotion, He never loses it. Even if He has to lose, or see relegated to hell, whatever and wherever that place is, nine tenths of the human race, He will reluctantly accept that to lose the many who have never given Him their loyalty is a price worth paying, for the few who have given their loyalty. Human experience tells us the same; one loves a child long, long after the child rejects you, but there comes a time when you have to let the child go his or her own way. The price of treachery if persisted in, is hell; it has to be. God does not want to be surrounded by people who are liable to betray Him at any moment. And no-one is sent to hell, without warning. They only go there, because all their lives in this world they have eagerly sought it. Speaking of the choice of life both in this world and after death, Plato in his *Republic* puts into the mouth of Socrates the words, "Your genius will not be allotted to you, but you will choose it; and let him who draws the first lot have the first choice, and the life which he chooses shall be his destiny." So it looks as if we have all been agreed for a long time, that your destiny in the next world is determined by your choices in this. True the Good Book says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord"; but divine vengeance as I have observed is very slow in coming, unlike Caesar's vengeance.

There is always ample opportunity to avoid an eternity without God; the only problem the individual may find is that he cannot see the point of doing so. But then who has made him blind, except himself? I suppose usually men, like alcoholics, do not want to be saved from their addictions. But then if Jesus' cross does not persuade a man to repent, nothing else is going to. And the Bible is after all available for everyone to read. But it may all be much more merciful than that; one only has to remember how much most people are willing to do for their own children, with only a few shreds of gratitude in return. And one must always remember that nobody has any idea what will happen after death, which is just as well.

Suffice it to say that if we are not extinguished at death, an eternity with God has the potential of being heaven; an eternity without Him, even if one were allowed to indulge in all one's favourite occupations, would in the end be hell. So those who dismiss God as delusion,

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or who simply never bother their heads about Him, are consciously or unconsciously banking on being extinguished at death. Well, they may be lucky, or they may not.

If you can reproduce the Divine relationship between humans, and you must be able to do so if there is to be any community, you have the formula for human faithfulness too. And an in-dwelling in which an ever-growing integration swept all thoughts of boredom, or routine, or tedium from the mind does at least offer the mirage of lasting for an eternity. It is not a state of affairs that it is easy to create, or reproduce, as I know from bitter experience. It is what the whole of my book "Man's Relationship with God" is about, and there is no point in reproducing the text of that book here! These speculations stem from looking at life as a whole; from looking at things from God's point of view, as well as man's. You might say it is the cosmic outlook. And it is science that has enabled us to recover this facility.

It is the modern view of evolution that has enabled us to recapture the cosmic outlook. Einstein conceived Space as being more than the stage or background for physics, which it was in Newton's conception; Einstein saw Space as being a participant inasmuch as gravity, itself a physical property, is controlled by the curvature of Space. Now that we are conversant with the idea that Evolution is not a fixed plan, but is more like a river which flows round or overcomes every obstacle in its pursuit of greater consciousness; we can readily envisage the Divine Creator, not only transcending His creation, but actively participating in its Evolution. Even before 1914 science had taught us that Creation was a unity in itself; and Henry Drummond was preaching to the Free Church in Scotland that the laws of the spiritual world were either the same as, or parallel to, the laws of the physical world. It was one world, and it manifested the glory of the Creator. It is an idea that goes back to some of the most splendid poetry in the psalms, particularly psalms 8, 19, 108 and 119. But old truths need restating in the modern prose of each generation.

Since 1945, everyone has been saying the same thing; everyone talks globally now, business men, politicians, holiday makers. So for the Church to describe civilized life as two camps, the Christian life and Mammon, is unreal. They are far too intertwined. Of course sin is as rampant as ever; however it is on both sides of the Church doors. Outside it is mostly crime; inside it is mostly spiritual pride. Not much to choose between them, although crime is more inconvenient. But there is no good preaching a Gospel, unless it takes account of the fact that we are all now in the same boat. This is what one means by reconciling religion with society. And whether you like it or not, it is the Second World War and the technical progress which it accelerated that have given us all this global attitude of mind.

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It would have been far better if it had been possible to achieve this without the two wars. And I have read that if Hitler had really served his five-year sentence after the beer-hall putsch of 1923, not even he could have maintained control of the Nazi Party. And what we would have been “saved” if he had served it. In fact he only served six months in a comfortable flat in some schloss; and he did keep control. But times have moved on since then; and criminal barons can now maintain their criminal empires from prison. The crime of destroying civilization, as it existed in Europe before 1914, will have consequences for us all for hundreds of years. And one of those consequences is that religion has to be re-interpreted to accept the truth of science, and the truth of war.

But the official Church may not have much of a role to play in rebuilding society. To build a society that is of any use, you need morale; and the Church at the moment hasn't got any. If you want to improve society, you cannot afford to reject help from any person of integrity who offers help, and maybe help from people without much integrity. The important thing is to establish a camaraderie, an esprit de corps, so as to work together.

This is particularly so in our modern society, which has become so unbelievably complicated that few people are able to do their jobs competently. The complexity is partly due to science, and partly due to the breakdown of traditional patterns of behaviour, which has necessitated the introduction of so many Rules and Regulations to replace its discipline. This incompetence ranges from an inability to protect the prerogatives of the House of Commons, the Highest Court in the Land, from an overbearing executive, through an ignorance of history; to bank clerks who are incapable of lending to legitimate businesses because they are incapable of assessing risk; to school teachers who cannot teach because they are not given the means of enforcing discipline. The list is endless. New public Acts of Parliament and their associated Statutory Regulations would keep a lawyer reading for a whole year, without him bothering about his practice. It is a madhouse! And ironically just as religion needs to incorporate the vocabulary of science, so society needs to incorporate the discipline of religion. And what better way to do this than by a vision of a world created by God, which would make clear what behaviour was acceptable in society, and what was not.

The real conflict between science and religion is the conflict between the attitude of mind of the scientist and the attitude of mind of the clergy. The scientist investigates inorganic and organic matter, deliberately leaving out of account any spiritual content which it may have; and then as often as not claims it has not got any spiritual content anyway. And may indeed end up preposterously claiming that there is no spiritual world at all, and that we are all mechanical. But of course they cannot admit they are only claiming to prove,

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something which they assumed in the first place. Similarly the clergy cling to the Christianity of the Gospels, because it is the only thing they know; they are ignorant of science, and do not want their treasured possession to be taken from them. But of course they want to conceal their ignorance. Neither side bothers to learn about the archetypes in the unconscious, that Jung claimed to have discovered in his clinical experience; or ponders why the image of God seems to be so deeply written into the human soul, and on the dangers of repressing it. Indeed biology may be descending into an ecclesiastical bigotry with its militantly anti-religious stance, and its internecine quarrels. Neither side can bridge the gap, and one is faced with the irony of the pot calling the kettle black. It is so easy to get lost in a favourite frame of mind; and my opinion is that no conclusion is worth much, unless you consider what assumptions you make in your mind before you begin. Neither side seems capable of doing this.

But this inability to see the other's point of view simply underlines the need for a transcendent attitude of mind – such as comes from a vision of Nature and the Universe created by God. This time created on a basis of scientific fact, provided one recognises that **Complexity changes the Rules**; and recognizing as well, with political realism, that there will be occasions when war is the only expedient course of action.