

CHAPTER 6.

So much for viewing the cosmos. How much help is this in regard to one's everyday conduct? Not a lot. But the little help it does give is crucial, because a religion that does not have a vision of the Universe and of man's place in Nature is just a sect, and obviously so. It fails completely to provide a way of life for the individual as a member of society. The only vision of the Universe that is acceptable nowadays is that of science, which alone has revealed the scale of its size and the time during which it has evolved. So any religious view that the Universe was created by a benign Creator, must absorb all scientific thought into its vocabulary, just as St. Augustine absorbed Neo-Platonic thought into Christian theology, and probably set the intellectual tone of Christendom for the next thousand years. That is exactly what I have done in regard to science. In a "Reconciliation with Science and War", I assumed from the start that the truth of science had equal validity with the truth of religion. And that is the equivalent of absorbing the whole of science into the theology of the C.of E. Without this, in Christendom you are left with the "clap-happies" who ask the whole time, "What would Jesus have done?", the evangelicals who rely on Biblical truth which has been heavily criticised, and traditional church-going which is declining in numbers. About other religions, I can only say that it is unconvincing to say that your God created the heavens and the earth, unless you reconcile this with scientific truth; and dangerous to dodge this issue by preaching that all those outside your religion are inferior to all those within.

A classic example of the danger of calling others "inferior" was Hitler's view that Slavs were "unter-menschen". To start with, the German invasion of Russia in 1941 was unbelievably successful; General Guderian said that women came to the very battlefield with bread and butter and eggs, and refused to let him move on until he had eaten. They regarded the Germans as liberators; and Germany was presented on a plate with the chance to defeat Russia in the only possible way, namely by tearing Russia apart from within. Then along came Himmler with his Sicherheitsdienst, who with their cruelty saved the Bolshevik State, and made the ultimate defeat of the Wehrmacht in Russia possible. If Hitler had not regarded Slavs as "unter-menschen", the odds were surely in favour of his winning; there was no hope of Britain defeating Germany if Russia went down? I suspect the same remorseless logic applies to those religions which regard those outside their membership as "inferior"; you make so many enemies, that in effect you sign your own death-warrant.

But to return to everyday conduct, it is right that a breathtaking world view is not a lot of help in deciding how to behave. It may lift the spirits; but for most of the time one has to

follow convention. It is inconvenient always to be out of step with one's fellow-citizens. And you will not find in Jesus much helpful inspiration as regards conduct at which Nicodemus would have been adept; after all Jesus gave him short shrift! But from time to time, there is the opportunity to do something different, if only in the spirit in which things are done; and such opportunities should be seized with both hands. Nor is it much good on these occasions seeking inspiration from the Jesus of the Gospels, because he was hoping to re-establish the theocracy of ancient Israel, and nobody is going to succeed in doing that in the 21st century. Jesus was unique inasmuch as he was the culmination of Man's evolution, the first-fruits of them that slept as St. Paul called it in his antique Jewish idiom, and in the perfection of his conduct in displaying such grace and truth. He is a model for us all; and the best way we can imitate him is by giving as complete an expression of the spirit within ourselves, the spirit that lurks in the depths of the psyche, as we can; provided we recognise that the spirit which the Creator has vouchsafed to us may be very different from the spirit begotten in Jesus. We do not imitate Jesus by forgetting to have a haircut, cultivating a pasty face and melancholy expression, and making sure that our conduct lacks all vivacity and is full of "holy acts".

Furthermore in attempting to seize opportunities, it is essential only to attempt what we believe we can achieve. It is no good following the plans of distinguished bygone heroes. It has to be our own plan; and that means our view of the cosmos may help to form our vision of what is desirable, and what is possible for us. My contribution to advocacy was to master the technique of persuading men, whom I believed to be dishonest, to tell stupid obvious lies in the witness-box, of their own freewill. That was useful to me, because I was an advocate; but it would not be much use in an architect's office. But the shape of buildings undoubtedly affects the spiritual life of a nation, so what inspires architects is important too.

Nor is it any good simply giving expression to the spirit within ourselves, without reference to the situation in which one finds oneself. All conduct has to take account of where we are, and the situation we are in. Giving expression to the spirit within us has to be practised within a discipline imposed by circumstance. Again Jesus' life helps us little as to detailed behaviour; his Kingdom was not of this world. No-one nowadays is capable of going round healing the sick, as he did, even assuming that the stories about him are reasonably accurate. And one cannot ignore the fact that the experience of modern life strongly suggests that they are not accurate. Occasionally there is the opportunity to do something unique. For instance, if one saw the possibility of treating an "affair" as a symbolic reconciliation of England and Germany, would there be any excuse for pursuing personal happiness instead?

Islam is one of the three mono-theistic religions of the world. Where does Islam fit into all this? It was the Jews, to their eternal credit, who discovered the idea of the one righteous God. Not only that, He was merciful and loving too. Indeed righteousness and love are opposite sides of the same coin; the one without the other, ceases to be itself. Righteousness without love is meaningless Puritanism. Love without righteousness is amoral permissiveness. So far, I imagine, most Muslims would agree. But if Allah does not seek man's friendship, then it is meaningless to base human relations on an imitation of the Divine, as I did. Instead of the glorious variety of the Anglo-Saxon world, human relations are stereotyped by convention, and public opinion tends to become a mob shouting in unison. If my understanding is correct, then Islam simply does not fit into my picture of spiritual life.

Nor is there any agreement on the validity of suicide bombers. In the West, killing in war is not murder; and War on occasions may prevent the complete triumph of evil. So every society may consider it has to resort to war. So far, this is probably common ground. But must War always be to the death? Do we nowadays always insist on unconditional surrender? Not according to Emmerich de Vattel, if we have any sense. He lived from 1714-1767; and in his Law of Nations he insisted that regular war, as to its effects, is to be accounted just on both sides. Otherwise he argued, there is no possibility of a negotiated peace. It is tribal war to the finish, without any possibility of an armistice. So to avoid this, every peace treaty must be a compromise; and moderation must be the keynote, unless mankind wants to indulge in the blood-bath of total war, which solves little or nothing.

If proof is wanted that total war solves little or nothing, the Cold War following on the heels of the Second World War provides a reasonably good illustration. The slogan of "Unconditional Surrender", coined at the Casablanca conference in January 1943, effectively prevented the possibility of an overthrow of Hitler by the opposition within Germany, and the formation of a better German government. Indeed most of those who might have formed a better government were executed following the forlorn 1944 July plot against Hitler's life. Maybe this slogan "unconditional surrender" was the only thing the Allies could agree about; and they would have fallen out without it, as the Allies did in 1814 in the campaign against Napoleon. Maybe it was the lesser of two evils; but it was the end of the possibility of a negotiated peace with a better German government, and of any real peace in Europe for 46 years. If the Cold War proved anything, it was that it is time we returned to the moderation of Emmerich de Vattel.

But his concept of accounting war just on both sides extended only to regular warfare; not to irregular warfare, which has the nature of civil-war; and civil war is the most total and

brutal of any form of warfare. It is difficult to see how any quarter can be offered or given in such warfare; and it looks as if the suicide bomber condemns us to total war, unless the pen is mightier than the sword, and faith mightier than both. Although the suicide bomber may seem to give Islam a certain leverage now among those who would give anything for a quiet life; in the long term, unless disowned, he condemns Islam to be a barbaric religion willing to resort to civil war to realize its aims. And surely to resort to civil war, irresponsibly and without thought, means you are willing to countenance the risk of nuclear holocaust, in the event of other nations being drawn in? No Creator could possibly want the destruction of his creation; he must prefer, whether He be Jehovah or Allah or the Father of Jesus, the destruction of the party that so irresponsibly risks it. Once creation, or the cosmos, is seen as a whole, the most likely speculation is that any Creator, Christian or Muslim or Jewish, must prefer to see those who imperil his creation exterminated first; and equally if there is no creator, liberal opinion must want them exterminated too. This means that Islam must disown its suicide bombers, if there is to be any moderation. If Christianity and Islam are in rivalry, their differences must be fought out with the pen and with words; or society cannot contain both.

The priceless service science has rendered mankind is to enable us once again to view creation as a whole. We do not have to view it as scientists do; for that view is highly technical and academic. We can each view it in our own way; but we must now view it as a whole, or else get out of touch with modern thought. Suicide bombers do not view creation as a whole; indeed it is hardly possible to be more blinkered. And they will drag down any society that tolerates them.