

A NEW CREATION.

CHAPTER 1.

CAN JESUS BE CRITICISED?

The Quicunque Vult, a piece of convoluted and unreal learning, which should be read at Morning Prayer on major Feast days, says in terms that Jesus was perfect Man and perfect God. So Jesus was not a god walking around in human clothes; he was a Man. And the common experience of Mankind is that one makes mistakes, and experiences failure and suffering. Socrates is on record as saying, “A life without criticism is unworthy of being lived by men”. So far as Jesus acted as a man, it is perfectly legitimate then to criticise him. So far as he was God, a bit unwise? But what a poor specimen of humanity he must have been, if he could not stand criticism. And this is standard C.of E. doctrine!

Alas the Quicunque Vult is drafted in such convoluted and archaic language, that to the modern mind, only familiar with science, it is gibberish. It demonstrates perfectly how it is that the C.of E. is regarded with nostalgic affection and contempt by the bulk of the population. Yet if one goes to Jesus himself and his conversation with Nicodemus, he regarded “a new birth” as the beginning of religion; and he would have denounced the assertion that to obtain salvation a man must believe everything in the Quicunque Vult. He would have said that to become aware of God, and of the need to form a relationship with Him, was the beginning of salvation. And there are plenty of texts, both in the Old Testament and the New, that the spirit of God is to be found inside oneself - in one’s soul. In other words this relationship with God is to be an “Indwelling”. To use the language of modern psychology, the Spirit of God lurks in the depths of the psyche and you ignore Him at your peril. To become aware of this is “a second birth”; and as any insistence on subscribing to codes of belief threatens any indwelling, it verges on blasphemy! So the Quicunque Vult is outdated learning at best, and its assertion that a man needs to believe all its propositions to reach salvation is just rank impertinence. Yet the C.of E. dare not say so.

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Going back to Jesus, he preached that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. He never described it in abstract terms, but always used parables about it to illustrate what he meant. But one must remember that Jesus' knowledge of the natural world was severely limited. It is naive for us to try to steep ourselves in the culture of his time. Better to accept that he knew nothing of Evolution as we know it; and that it is highly unlikely he had heard of Heraclitus and of his rather crude views on evolution, which were the best available at that time. And if he thought that Man was dogged by original sin, he cannot have realized that Adam & Eve were not responsible; the Creator himself had made us that way. Nor did he know that we are descended from a cousin of Pithecanthropos, who unfortunately left behind no fossil remains. Fossils were simply not known.

So Jesus got many things wrong. Knowing nothing of Evolution; he had no idea that death is a necessary part of the development of all species in Nature; nor can he have realized that in his desire to bring Immortality into the world, he was seeking to bring Evolution to a halt! If Mathew's Gospel is reliable, his instruction to the seventy disciples he sent out in pairs, included "raising the dead", although it is not claimed they had any success. He himself claimed to have raised three people from death; and twice he claimed that if anyone believed in him they would never see death. That too would be bring Evolution to a halt. And for 2000 years the Church has steeped itself without question in this world of ignorance. It too knows next to nothing of Evolution; and some clergy find it hard to accept that Evolution's progress over billions of years necessarily modifies some aspects of Jesus' Gospel.

Many people have said we ought all to lead an immortal life, as well as a mortal one, from Marcus Aurelius in the 2nd century to Professor Whitehead the Cambridge mathematician and philosopher of the 1920s. But for them it was in a poetic sense: they meant we must behave now so as not to disgrace our immortality hereafter. Jesus pretty clearly meant it literally, as did Isaiah. Those who heard him thought so (see John Ch.8); they told him he was mad!

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The significant thing about Jesus' teaching is that it was fundamental to him that a private individual salvation was not enough. It had to be a social one, a Kingdom. So with us; if Jesus fulfilled Evolution, it was only as an individual. And similarly, you cannot expect Evolution to stop with an individual salvation; Evolution will inevitably try to fulfil itself in society as well. And maybe not stop there! It is speculation of course, but maybe Evolution will seek to continue its progress in men and women who have perfected Evolution as individuals, as Jesus did, to create a perfect society. Stone houses may be better than timber houses; but you do not try to build a timber house out of rotten wood. Nature is more likely to try to evolve the perfect society from people who have reached Evolution's perfection as individuals, than from people who have not. If that is so, it does not really matter whether people are mortal or immortal. It might be easier and better for Evolution, if they were immortal. If so, it would not bring Evolution to a halt that there was once a sublime moment when the Son of Man was nailed to a cross. Nor would it bring Evolution to a halt if Jesus was correct in thinking that he was immortal, and that anyone who believed in him would become immortal too. They would only have perfected Evolution as individuals. Like Jesus, Evolution would inevitably want to develop a perfect society, if it could. Or is it nearer the Truth to say, God is the creative force; Evolution just the blind process driving us all on? As Stephen Hawking asked in his more modest days, "Who put life into the equations" of science?

All this is speculation. But it surely helps us to understand why it is that men, who are ignorant about Evolution, who seem incapable of speaking in any language but their own, should have reduced the Church of England to a society that represents an unreal world, or a world that no longer exists. It is the price you pay if you neglect the duty to translate your treasured truths into a language intelligible to everyone around you. There is no merit in simply abandoning the beauty of the Authorized Version; it is the ideas that must be readily intelligible.