

A NEW CREATION.

CHAPTER 4.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Ideally, should the Church set out on a Crusade to persuade the man in the street that potentially the Incarnation includes him? I very much doubt it. Firstly, because there is no possibility of the present-day clergy doing this. They are obsessed with arm-waving, which is but a half-hearted attempt to indulge in the mysticism of Plotinus. And mystics have no idea how to run a civic community. Secondly, because the language of Incarnation is inappropriate in the world today. It would only be sensible to use such language in a society of completely self-effacing people; and nowadays almost everyone, so far from being self-effacing, is obsessively egotistical. Nobody wants to be normal; they want to be themselves, and different. The leaders of the Church had a golden opportunity, from Nicea in 325AD until the atomic bomb in 1945, to preach that the heart of the Gospel was that the Incarnation included us all potentially. And they threw it away, like Bethsaida and Capernaum in the time of Jesus. And it is too late to start talking in that kind of language now.

Jesus did not think much of the prospects of Bethsaida and Capernaum in the Day of Judgement. I think myself that it was an unduly harsh judgement of his, just as I think his opinion of lawyers was unduly harsh. How did it go now? Scribes, lawyers, hypocrites, you whitened sepulchres, you generation of vipers, how will you escape the damnation of hell? It may be that in a population of immortal people, the threat of the loss of immortality may be enough to preserve the coherence of a community, as I suggest in Chapter 35 of "Man's Relationship with God". But in this mortal world, you need a decision-making process that commands respect, which means it can be enforced, which means lawyers and a judge to reach any decision, and coercion to enforce it if need be. His opinion of lawyers shows him to have been an independently minded

A NEW CREATION.

Galilean carpenter, who like the mystics was wholly ignorant of the problems of running a civic community. And unless you want chaos – need I say more?

It is not really credible that the Creator wanted the social development of Man to reach its zenith in the clan system, where decisions were made by the chief, and whose history was that one clan regularly massacred another. There are some virtues in the Rule of Law, even if Jesus did not recognise many of them. The trouble with mysticism is that all coherent thought, and even human character, are burned up in an adoration of the Supreme Being; with the result in the world of affairs, unless they come to their senses, mystics are incoherent.

I think the most the Church should sensibly attempt is to recognise first, that if Jesus thought the Sermon on the Mount was a blue-print for a successful society in this world, he was mistaken. It is a completely unworkable basis for one. If he intended it as a blue-print for those who aspired to be saved and admitted into heaven, it suffered from the defect that it relied on more worldly men to maintain Law and Order, and so enable the elect who were destined for salvation to keep their lily-white hands clean. In other words it was the most contemptible cynicism imaginable. It is not credible that the Creator made a world which could only be kept going by those whom He intended to reject, in order that the elect, who were quite incapable of doing anything so practical as keeping the world going, should get into heaven on their backs, as it were; that the worthy should be rejected, and the layabouts get in.

The Sermon on the Mount is a wonderful dream about another world than this. Being a Jew, Jesus would not readily have admitted that the Romans were performing a valuable, if unimaginative, public service to the Jewish nation. They were maintaining Law and Order, and allowing him to dream. Jesus, after all, told Pilate at his trial that his Kingdom was not of this world. It may be the Sermon on the Mount is the immortal life that some of us try to live alongside our mortal lives. It may permeate the world in which we live and work and have our being, but it does not for one moment replace it. The Church should say so.

A NEW CREATION.

Everything in the Gospels points to Jesus thinking his Second Coming would be soon. Nothing in the Gospels suggests he had ever heard of Heraclitus, or that he embraced his rather crude views on Evolution, which were the best available at that time. Jesus would I think have been deeply shocked and disappointed to have been told by God that his Second Coming would be postponed for a minimum of 2000 years, and that a more practical political theory was required, than he, Jesus, was capable of conceiving.

On the night before his Passion, Jesus told his disciples that they would all desert him and flee. A National Service 2nd Lieutenant could have told him that nothing was more calculated to ensure that they did all desert him, but Jesus himself could not see it. Similarly it would not have helped if the Almighty had, the night before his Passion, told Jesus that his views on political theory were infantile. That awareness had to wait until after he had died.

So not only do I think that the language of Incarnation is inappropriate so far as the followers of Jesus are concerned, because it would be met with derision, but in the modern world it is better to avoid it as regards Jesus himself. After all, in the letters of St. Paul you do not find the language of Incarnation; he refers to, "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ". It was the worthy fathers at Nicaea who thought of it, and their thoughts are not intelligible to the average modern mind.

Secondly, the Church should recognise that Jesus did not come to save men from their sins, or atone for them. The moment you accept Evolution and Darwin, such views become untenable. He came to lead us out of a world where consciousness is limited to this mortal world, and lead us into a world where men could believe in immortality, either in the sense of a life after death, or in living an immortal life in this world even if death comes along inevitably in the end. Marcus Aurelius, one of the greatest of the Stoics, conceived this in the 2nd century AD, and Professor Whitehead in the 1920s, and no doubt many others in between. In Chapter 36 of "Man's Relationship with God", I set out this view

A NEW CREATION.

fully: of the necessity for the Creator to provide a Redeemer to lead us out of a limited world. But it is obvious that the disciples, right up to the Passion, had no idea what Jesus meant by rising again; still less the Jewish people. Their consciousness was limited to this mortal world. In the Old Testament, after death it was Shoel, or the pit, where no-one praised God. And nothing is more certain in the New Testament, than that Jesus convinced his disciples that he had risen from the dead. Though nowadays we wonder in what sense it is true?

So whilst I am sure that the crucial change necessary, if the Church is to avert terminal decline, is a recovery of the original Gospel, which in biblical language is that the Incarnation potentially includes all of us; it is not the appropriate language to use in modern times. I think the avenue most likely to lead to success is to attempt to recover of the ability to perform New Testament style healings. As I wrote in Religion Rewritten, these healings themselves are not the most important thing, though they would fill the pews. They are merely the road to something much bigger. What would Jesus have achieved, without his healings? “The whole world” would not have gone after him. Nicodemus would never have visited him by night, and said that the leaders knew he was a man come from God. Jesus would have been revered as a wise preacher; and the crucifixion would never have taken place. We would never have heard of him.

Jesus preached that the Incarnation potentially includes all of us, in the parable of the sower, in the metaphor of the vine in the last discourses, and in his insistence that he was The Way, The Truth, and the Life. He did not say that he would lead us along the next part of the Way. St.Paul too grasped that there was to be a new creation. But the clergy through the centuries have preached a different gospel, that Jesus saved us from our sins, and from the punishment we so richly deserved; but the Liturgy speaks no word about what we are to do when we have been saved. No word about using our own initiative.

Again, I remind the reader that the well-known healer Harry Edwards wrote that after 2000 years we are just beginning to have the knowledge and the

A NEW CREATION.

experience to appreciate that the Gospel healings should be taken literally. And it is well worth while exploring the enormous riches of the spiritual world, with discretion, to find out if this is true. (Earlier healers were Dorothy Kerens and the Revd. Cameron Peddie). And indulging half-heartedly in the mysticism of Plotinus will not find out if it is true. It is a blind alley. Much more courage is needed than that. Nothing else will see off Islamic terrorism. Nothing else will fill the churches with people, going probably for the wrong reasons. The modern world worships success. It wants results; and you need to give them results, even if the real reward, the Peace of God, passes their understanding.

Dr. Jung in his book “Answer to Job”, first published in 1954, concluded that the underlying reason for the Almighty’s appalling treatment of Job, ending with his thundering denunciation that “might was right”, was that ultimately the Almighty wanted to become Man. First in the incarnation of Jesus, and then in the incarnation of countless others. The introductory verses of John’s Gospel acknowledge this, as does St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians. But Dr. Jung wisely recognised that the collisions between these incarnated people would become intolerable without some over-riding discipline. And he mentions that uncomfortable saying of Jesus that anyone who believed in him would be able to do all that he had done, and greater things still because he was going to the Father. This surely provides the self-discipline necessary to keep all those, who think they are the sons and daughters of God, within the bounds of sanity and self-control? Without such a discipline, there would be nothing strong enough in their psyches to hold them back from all kinds of absurdity. My solution to the problem is to avoid the embarrassing language of “Incarnation” altogether.

So if this is the right approach, then anyone who claims to be a child of God, whether by predestination or adoption, must be able to say sincerely and truthfully that he, or she, has done something or at least attempted to do something, greater than Jesus ever did. If he, or she, cannot make that claim, then they had far better keep their mouths shut about Incarnation. They have not

A NEW CREATION.

made the grade. I once heard a clergyman preach that his turning the bread and wine into the very body and blood of Jesus, in a heavenly and spiritual manner as the 39 Articles say, had performed a greater miracle than all Christ's healing miracles put together. But that was just preposterous vanity!

And does not our poor country need to recover the idea of a disciplined, tolerant society, in which people are honest, do a hard day's work, and in which all social classes mix on terms of good humour? As it is, everything is at sixes and sevens. Our tolerance allows fanaticism to be preached; our sense of Justice has allowed the compensation culture to get out of hand; those in authority fiddle their expenses, and set an bad example to the rest of us; and so on. We most certainly need a new vision of Society: a society where not everything is priced in terms of money. What is money after all? Only commercial credit. Only financial confidence. And we need much more confidence than that! We need to have confidence in money, and in many other things as well.

My vision, that ideally the relationship between man and woman should be the same indwelling that is supposed to exist between God and the soul, has the merit that the same loyalty can embrace both the religious world, and one's secular efforts to do something in the world of affairs. The best that Augustine was able to conceive was that the City of God should sit beside the City of Rome, inspiring it, sustaining it, occasionally rebuking it, yet sympathetic to its struggle to contain the chaos in the world outside. But they were still two worlds. In my synthesis they are one world. That is the difference. Man's Relationship with God is an account of what I attempted.

As regards this New Creation, Jesus was man enough to realise that he could not provide the last word on every subject. So with great wisdom, the night before he died he envisaged that the achievements of his followers would one day far outstrip his. So we can rejoice that he saved the world. By his sacrifice, he led us out of the world of Nature's Evolution, and into the world of God's evolution of the Spirit. In other words into a new creation.

A NEW CREATION.

The clergy alas have done their utmost to keep us all in the old Evolution. But those of us with the confidence to ignore them, can set about building a decent, just society in England, and in the English speaking world. We can imitate Piers the Ploughman: he set off to do just that at the end of the medieval novel. And we can hope that in time it may extend to European countries too!

There are many obstacles to be overcome; the cowardice of the early fathers after Nicaea; the pride and arrogance of Hildebrand in the 11th century; the madness of the Counter Reformation and the Thirty Years War (of a house divided against itself), which must have aggravated the aggressiveness of the German people; the complacency of the clergy in the face of the challenge of science after our Glorious Revolution of 1688. These obstacles are all focussed in the timidity of spirit within all Christians today. How on earth dare one have the necessary courage to begin, without its spilling over into extravagant absurdity? Only with the utmost self-discipline is there any hope of success.

Julius Caesar wrote, I regret I cannot remember where, that the greatest penalty in not punishing wrongdoers was the discouragement of the law-abiding, because they will say, "What is the point of continuing to be law-abiding if crime pays?" I felt our eyes met, over the chasm that separated us.

If it takes 300 hundred years to create a naval tradition, I suggest it takes 500 or 700 years to create a tradition in a civilian society that its members should be law-abiding. I reckon this tradition began in England when Edward I wisely acknowledged the privileges that Parliament had won from the Executive, and did not try to revoke them. This tradition may have reached its zenith in the inter-war years, but is now crumbling under the attack from all sides of the forces of self-interest. Surely someone should suggest that our native Christianity offers a solution, when no-one else seems able to suggest a way of halting the triumph of Mammon?

But those, who go to church for the comforts of myth and fantasy, violently oppose any suggestion that an Indwelling with Jesus, which the

A NEW CREATION.

communion service is supposed to foster, actually means we should do something about the evils in society. This would prevent them leading their own private lives. It would allow God to break into their domestic convenience, and that is unthinkable. They include both laity and clergy; and they would oppose to their dying day the idea that the truth of Creation is midway between the archaic man's world of spirits and modern man's scientific world. Thank goodness we have left the world of superstition and magic behind! But Science on the other hand is speechless in the face of creation, incoherent in talking about chance and providence, deluded in its denial of evil, which one meets every day in the Law Courts. And the story of Jesus healing the woman who was bent double for 18 years, in the synagogue and on the Sabbath, makes more sense if one regards him as freeing her from an evil spirit, rather than curing in a moment all traces of arthritis that had progressively crippled her for so long. It is easier for us to believe that science is ignorant of the world of the spirit, than that it is hopelessly mistaken about the world it has studied in such minute detail. Science is valid, but only in limited conditions. I find it comparatively easy to think that Jesus was a master craftsman in the world of the spirit, but was ignorant of science and for example the mathematics of infinite series. It is harder for me to think that science has proved all his healings were legend, as Albert Schweitzer came to believe. It would be nice to think the Church held the balance between these conflicting worlds. But she has a long way to go, to win back the reputation of being the repository of truth.

Today, when the Internet provides nearly instant communication around the world, it is becoming increasingly difficult to impose a system of belief and conduct on a whole society or nation. It may even be impossible. Whatever penalties governments try to impose on its citizens who listen to the subversive culture of others, it is now so easy to do so, that a government's efforts are likely to fail. The converse surely is that in any society the spiritual relationship of the bulk of its citizens to the One, creates the spirit of the times, or the

A NEW CREATION.

Zeitgeist, of the society. And to take the extreme case of a society most of whose members have no relationship with the One, their attitude of mind will tend to be entirely parochial, and there will be no future for that society at all.

By the One, I include God, the central order of the Universe, the world of Nature provided it includes Man, the brotherhood of man, the Rule of Law so long as one is prepared to fight for what is right; even global warming, (though I distrust the official propaganda). In this spiritual world there is little room for Christians to have much influence, unless they are superbly good at their chosen trade or profession, or lead manifestly better lives than those round about them. And if they happen to think they are part of the Incarnation, the best thing they can do is to forget it, and get on with doing something useful. They can console themselves with being the leaven of society, in Jesus' metaphor.

It follows that Christianity is only going to have a revival, if its members show that they are outstanding. That means having the courage of Jesus, in a very different environment. That means reviving New Testament style healings, not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. And if Christians demonstrate that they have not the courage to attempt this, I fear they may find that the God, whom they claim to worship, will desert them, at least for the time being.

Where one must not criticise Jesus is in his claim to have had a close communion with God, and a clear understanding of what God had in store for him. The legitimacy of our inspiration depends on the legitimacy of his. If the Transfiguration happened, as I believe it did, it happened six days after Jesus had asked his disciples whom they thought he was? So six days after Peter had confessed that he believed Jesus was "The Christ", Jesus took three disciples up a mountain to demonstrate to them that he was indeed the Christ. That must have taken tremendous courage: the sort of courage that Columbus showed when his ship passed the point of no return, and he had to continue sailing West, because his food and water would not have lasted if he had turned back. And what greeted Jesus on his return to the valley, after this tremendous experience?

A NEW CREATION.

An unseemly squabble due to his disciples' failure to heal an epileptic. No wonder he felt weary.

Even if the Transfiguration was only a vision in their imaginations, rather than a truthful window into another world, it was still pretty good proof that he was the Christ. And frankly it does not matter which it was. If you can create a vision in the imaginations of three sober men, you probably can give them a truthful window into another world. And the scene that follows in Mark's Gospel, where they are all arguing over the disciples' failure to heal the epileptic, is as graphic and down to earth as you could wish. That was not invented, and gives credence to the transfiguration story that went before. It does more; it gives us a window into another world, into the Majesty of Jesus. To be able to see in one's mind's eye the Majesty of Jesus is a priceless vision to have. It is worth following him to the edge of the known world, in order to have it! And if one ever does have it, it is worth going back into the known world to do something about its deplorable condition.

Of course Jesus had his blind spots. We all have our own shadow, as Jung called it. Even God has His shadow. To achieve his magnificent purposes, great suffering is involved on the part of Mankind, and as the crucifixion showed on God's part too. That you learn through suffering is a universal rule. So it was inevitable that Jesus did not see the many practical difficulties in bringing his kingdom of heaven down to earth, difficulties that lesser men see with crystal clarity. But that is no excuse for lesser men to put their own careers and wishes before the welfare of the Church, and so reduce its stature until it is ignored and despised, and a candidate for terminal decline. Surely to attempt to do something about this deplorable state of affairs, it is worth-while risking one's own life, not only in this world but in the next too? Even if one made a mess of things, and a fairly good mess of one's own life, I cannot help thinking that Jesus would commend one's courage for trying.