

## A PERSONAL RECORD.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### SALVATION.

Once you believe that God created the world and Man through the process of the evolution of Nature, it becomes rather more difficult than in the past to decide what Jesus saved us from. It was easy enough so long as people believed the Adam and Eve story; Adam let the side down, and Jesus came as the second Adam to put everything right, as a disturbed Cardinal Newman said. But if you believe that star-dust evolved into us, if you believe in Evolution to that extent, Adam and Eve have to be relegated to the children's world of fairy stories; and you must admit that Evolution has been a triumphant success so far. It could so easily have come to an end with bacterial life, but it didn't; life went on to evolve into mammals and Man. So it is much easier for us to think of Jesus taking us along the next step in Evolution's progress, than of his saving us from the fate of Evolution coming to a full-stop. He introduced the idea of an Incarnation into the world, first in himself, and next in anyone who believed in him. The idea had been around for a long time; in Jeremiah and Ezekiel we read of the spirit of God coming alive in men, in their hearts and in their lives. But Jesus gave the idea flesh and blood; and this is perhaps the best excuse for his using the gruesome symbolism of the corn and wine gods of antiquity, that to believe in him we must eat his flesh and drink his blood. We must not simply try to follow him, in a nature un-regenerated by any incarnation, because we would inevitably fail. We could say he saved us from a world without hope; but that is really to use a double-negative. Much better to express what he achieved in positive language. Actually it is the Church that has tried to bring Evolution to a halt, by telling us all for 2000 years that Jesus saved us from our sins, and atoned for us. In so doing it tried to bring Evolution to a halt, in one sublime moment of the son of God nailed to a cross. And in doing so, you could say, with some justification, it became responsible for all the Christian persecutions, and all the Wars of Religion that have taken place since Jesus died.

## A PERSONAL RECORD.

The Liturgy of the Prayer Book and the wording of the new Common Worship amply confirm this view. In the Prayer Book, the general confession of sins, which the worshippers are expected to repeat week after week, makes it clear that they are as hopelessly sunk in sin this week as they were last; no progress of any kind has been made, despite all their promises and good intentions. If ever there was a counsel of despair, this is it. Common Worship similarly prescribes that only authorized prayers of penitence should be used; and these perpetuate the same counsel of despair. The only exception is that the Collect for Easter Day expects the worshippers one day to reign with Christ; but how people steeped in sin could possibly be fit to reign over anybody is not anywhere explained. You could say that the Church has defaulted on its mission of enabling men to become whole. To an outsider this would appear strange, as the whole tenor of the Last Discourses in John's Gospel is that his disciples should carry on, from where he left off. And they could hardly do this, unless they displayed his courage and initiative. This is confirmed by his prophecy that in time their achievements would far exceed his, (see John Ch14 v12). This is today's experience, particularly in War, and in Science: that the achievements of the disciple frequently leave those of the master far behind. But the difficulty is to have the original thought and to put it into practice, the exploitation of the idea is then open to anybody thrilled by the original thought. The miracle is that Jesus had the perception to see this, when Greek culture was dying and Roman culture was limited to war, law and administration.

Another way of expressing the Church's abrogation of its duty to enable men to become whole, is to say it encouraged men to hide behind the sacrifice of Jesus; to say he atoned for their sins, that Jesus did all that was necessary, and they could shuffle out of any responsibility for putting the world to rights, because they were unworthy to take part in such a noble venture. Any excuse for being a coward is better than none, and saying that Jesus did it all makes it sound almost virtuous.

## A PERSONAL RECORD.

The description of Jesus as “the Saviour” is so universal, that it would be most unwise to seek to change it. Yet the idea of Evolution suggests that change is continuous; and one is bound to ask whether Jesus was the final totality, or was his Ministry simply another stage on the journey of Man having to deepen his relationship with his Creator, to live and find peace? I think it was both! Jesus introduced, not only the idea of Incarnation, but the reality of Incarnation. In that sense, what Jesus did was the final totality. It is not possible to introduce anything more fundamental than that. But with its introduction, the possibility of creating a new heaven and a new earth at once becomes a viable endeavour. I saw this from the start, it was my solution to the Romeo & Juliet dilemma. That I mismanaged the adventure, is neither here nor there. Others can try again. I am expendable. And that emphasises at least one thing, Jesus was and is the final totality, in one sense anyway.

Indeed when you consider the historical Jesus, with no organisation behind him, and only a few devoted followers with him, he could not have done more than he did. Or to use more guarded language, it is difficult to conceive how he could have done more. He could not have expelled Roman rule from Palestine, without either having an atomic bomb, or twelve legions of angels, at his disposal. And though I accept that the Greeks could have started an industrial revolution if they had wanted to, because they had all the basic knowledge necessary; they lacked any motive for doing so. They had slavery, so there was no need to invent machinery. So there was no atomic bomb, nor did Jesus know any science. And calling on twelve legions of angels, would have involved the Creator agreeing to break His own Rules, which the supreme Artist would never have done. No artist breaks his own rules!

So Jesus was limited in his day, in the same way that men are limited in our day. Jesus was helped by the expectation in his day that the end of the world was round the corner; and people were expecting him or someone very like him. Today too, we expect the end of the world, we expect to be volatilized in an

## A PERSONAL RECORD.

atomic war; but no-one has the faintest idea who is to save us from it. The Church with its fairy-stories clearly isn't. Besides, when she had supreme power in the Middle Ages, she misused it so abominably by burning dissidents at the stake, and allowing the Inquisition to inflict its unspeakable tortures, that no-one in his senses would trust her with power again.

So Jesus could not have done more. He showed the power given him by God, because I firmly believe that most of the stories of his healings are true. In that way he showed us his relationship with God. In other words, he showed us the Father. And he was true to his vocation to the absolute end, despite the appalling consequences to himself. But then there is nothing to prevent us doing the same, provided we have the courage and initiative to overcome our natural sloth and laziness. All we need is the willingness to explore the mental and spiritual worlds, to discover what healing is possible and what is not, provided that we have the gift of healing, which I have not. Then it might be possible for the Church to become a society, which men and women were thrilled to join, instead of being one generally despised. But a society having no power, beyond that of influencing public opinion. That would be a good beginning!

So if the Incarnation is to be more than an anodyne comforting us with the thought that Jesus did it all, and we need not do anything very much as we are all miserable sinners together, then it is simply a question of carrying on from where he left off. But what do we do, how do we carry on? No-one is going to tell you. You will just have to make up, what you are pleased to call, your mind. No-one is going to make up your mind for you. No-one is going to tell you what needs to be done, or how to set about doing it. You must decide! And if you reply that you have not the initiative to make such decisions, then I am sorry to have to tell you that you have the mentality of a slave, not that of a responsible person. Better to be a slave in the kingdom of heaven, than a slave to sin. But better to be an adult person, capable of shouldering responsibility.