

# THE GOD-WORLD-I TRIANGLE.

## CHAPTER 9.

### AN EVOLUTIONARY WHITSUN MEDITATION.

The message of the first Whit-Sunday was a joyous one: that God had set His Spirit free in the World, to come alive in the hearts and minds of any men or women, willing to welcome this Spirit. The Whitsun message now-a-days is the melancholy one, that nine-tenths of the population reject Church, and many of them hate Religion. What has gone wrong, because it is surely obvious that something is wrong?

It is easier to say, why things have gone wrong, rather than what has gone wrong. Firstly, they have gone wrong because the Church has pursued orthodoxy, rather than the truth. At the service when a new vicar is installed in his new parish, he is required to swear that he will only teach and preach official doctrine. So if there is any error in official doctrine, and there must be some because no-one is in possession of the whole truth, that error is perpetuated from one generation to another. And it inevitably gets worse as time goes by. Until we reach the present position, that the public sees clearly that what goes on in Church has little or no relevance for someone trying to lead a decent life in modern society.

It was the publication of Newton's Principia that set free scientific enquiry. Newton showed that, over the Universe, a simple mechanical description of Nature was a perfectly adequate one. He had great influence on the French encyclopaedists, who went too far and raised the bogey of a purely mechanical Universe, that allowed no room for human freewill; a view that Newton did not share. But does the Church ever take the trouble to defend the freedom of the will, or define its sphere of action: what it can do, and what it cannot do? Does the Church ever seek to defend the many stories of Jesus' healings? It could do this best by being able to reproduce them. But there was a long tradition of German theology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; and in the middle of that period, one David Friedrich Strauss proclaimed that all the healings of Jesus were legend: they never happened. He was execrated at the time. But I think everyone reluctantly came to accept his point of view. You have to, unless you can reproduce those healings, and show they were not miracles that defied "the laws of Nature", but healings that took place in an ennobled Nature. Albert Schweitzer summarised this in his Quest of the Historical Jesus, without I think expressing any view whether Strauss was right.

The Church seemed to lose the power to heal within about a generation. And the Church's present attempt to have a Healing Ministry is pathetic, amounting to saying a few unctuous prayers about it. Yet some of the Gospel healings are described in such graphic

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detail, that they ring true. The story of the man blind from birth, who gained his sight by washing in the pool of Siloam, is a good example, (John Chap. 9). Quite simply, is the Church bothered that it is so discredited? It is not good enough to assume that what is described in the Gospels is true. It may have been enough in a superstitious age. But it is certainly not enough in a scientific age. Science's healing miracles are there for all to see; nine tenths of the population ask where does one see the Church's healing miracles?

Secondly, things have gone wrong, because the Church has on occasions behaved vilely. Long ago, a Christian bishop burned one third of the wonderful library in Alexandria, because it was pagan learning, and later a Christian mob murdered Hypatia, the last mathematician there, encouraged rumour says by the Patriarch Cyril. It exalted ignorance as a virtue, and soon learned to punish deviation, in other words anyone with an independent mind. From there it graduated to the wholesale murder of the Albigenses, and the religious wars of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite its Founder's warning of a house divided against itself, the Church was apparently unable to see any incompatibility between all this, and Jesus being willing to suffer, and die on a cross.

The Church opposed the early hypotheses of science with fire, rather than argument. And when that was no longer permitted, it avoided trying to understand how science has changed the mental outlook of the modern world. For instance: we have had Darwin's massive evidence in favour of the idea that Nature has evolved, with us for 150 years now. But there is still no word in Church services, nor so far as I am aware in official doctrine, attempting to describe how Jesus fits into, or played a part in, an evolving Universe. The sad truth is that most clergy are too ignorant to have any views themselves. Yet the idea of evolution has radically changed the way we think of life and Nature, and world issues. The Church has reaped the reward of preaching about an unreal world, or a world that no longer exists. The World has simply made it irrelevant.

Yet Society needs Religion to nourish and keep alive the innate decency of many human beings, and prevent life degenerating into the free-for-all, envisaged by Hobbes in his Leviathan. And it helps if there is a hero, in whom we can all find inspiration. Better still, if there is a hero who leads us to the Almighty, the Creator of it all. So that in meeting Him, and in getting to know Him, one is prepared one day to face the awful mystery which is reality.

What went wrong – is probably deeply hidden in the collective unconscious of the Christian community. If it is in the unconscious, we will not be aware of it. Does that matter? And God, what does He think?