

ARE WE ALL EQUAL?

CHAPTER 2.

It is not a modern madness to proclaim that everyone is equal; Cromwell's Levellers said much the same thing, and Cromwell and Henry Ireton had a good deal of difficulty with them. But a moment's quiet observation surely suggests that it simply is not true. And if the modern gospel then becomes, "Everyone ought to be equal", then surely a moment's quiet reflection suggests that this is simply not possible. But I fear that the modern Levellers, or in Scotland the modern Cameronians, in their ranting rhetoric shout down anyone who says that his experience of people is different. The Church is partly to blame. It preaches that man is made in the image of God, which is probably correct. But it goes on to preach that we are all equal in the sight of God, which does not follow at all. Indeed if a god who resorts to evil becomes a devil, then a man made in the image of God who resorts to evil, becomes a man made in the image of a devil, a creature with whom we are all very familiar. If Man is created in the image of God, then it follows that men are terribly unequal; a conclusion with which Robert Burns would readily have agreed. He was as great a student of human nature as Jesus, and as regards women a great deal more knowledgeable. And in his poem "A man's a man for a' that", he proclaimed that the honest man was above them all; and that means that men are all unequal. Carl Gustav Jung would also, I think, have agreed. It is a modern myth, which is palpably false; and is utterly different from the idea that all men should be treated equally before the Law, in order to have a just society.

Not only are men unequal, but Jesus was one of those men who are so incomparably grander than any of their contemporaries, that they and we tend to elevate him into a God, probably also correctly. Godhead is an incomprehensible concept, and probably Jesus had it. But that does not make men who resort to evil his equals. It makes them his inferiors. Jesus' superiority was so unique, that many people feel the need to make the risen Jesus their daily companion, whether this is merely a sublime fantasy in their imaginations, or a spiritual truth

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which none of us can understand. But if there is any truth in this concept of the risen Christ being man's companion, then it means that contact with the spirits of the dead, telepathy, and the capacity to be inspired by other people who are either in this world or the next, are all perfectly respectable social and particularly professional accomplishments. It is common experience that a man wrapped up in himself can achieve next to nothing! It is selflessness that inspires others to help you and cooperate with you; self-centredness leaves others unmoved. And to achieve anything significant in this world, a man must believe in his destiny, his vocation, his God, or even in his passion for a woman. This world is a spiritual world; and if a man denies himself any contact with spiritual reality outside himself, he condemns himself to be a nonentity. And to make "money the measure of all things", which is about the most debased spiritual concept there is, is a poor substitute for the more esoteric manifestations of spiritual reality.

John the Baptist had many fine qualities, as Cranmer suitably recognises in his Collect; yet he was described as least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus by contrast was larger than life, claiming that anyone who believed in him would never hunger or thirst anymore; he had a flamboyance which reflected or expressed the Divine prodigality or generosity: a richness, which is but dimly reflected in the tarnished piety of the C.of E. clergy today.

The Church of England has the most wonderful churches, an incomparable Liturgy, a fine tradition of freedom of conscience and inclusiveness; and yet the opinion of these statisticians, who poke their noses into everything, is that falling church attendance shows it to be in terminal decline. At the same time yet another survey showed that 71.1% of the public would like to think of themselves as Christian, but of them barely 10% ever come to church. One does not need to be an intellectual to see that something is wrong; yet I have never heard a clergyman admit that he himself might be part of the problem. But in the robust tradition in which I was educated, "There are no bad regiments, only bad officers". And if

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that is right, then whatever the complex reasons for this falling off in popularity, there is only one body to saddle with the responsibility for the present fiasco. And until they admit it, they are like salt which has lost its savour; and we all know what happens to that.

It is not easy to admit that your time has passed. Fabius Cunctator, the saviour of Rome, bitterly opposed the war-winning strategy of the younger Scipio, of invading Africa and defeating Hannibal there. Yet Scipio was right; and Fabius was wrong. If there is one thing lack of imagination cannot stand, it is having its limitations exposed. So no-one need think that the clergy would behave differently.

When you consider the inter-stellar spaces, and the almost boundless imagination of the person who created them, if they were created, and if they do exist and are not simply a dream or myth to which we all pay lip-service like the Victorian “aether”; the touchiness of mortal man in regard to any criticism of his egotistical vanities is as comic as it is absurd. Men are not equal; some men are incomparable in a crisis, and others utterly hopeless. And it is worth remembering that Charles Darwin’s cousin, Sir Francis Galton, did research on the marks candidates obtained in examination results, and found the same distribution curve for mental qualities, as you find for physical qualities and molecular velocities. He reckoned you could describe 250 men per million as “eminent”, and the same percentage as “idiots”; the great mass of mankind being mediocre. Whilst you could describe barely one man per million as “illustrious”.

So much for man’s equality, in any shape or form. Yet it is hard to know how to avoid being shouted down by those who want to drag us all down to the same common denominator. But I would think it was worth a try.