

STARTING FROM SCRATCH.

CHAPTER 6.

Armed with this invaluable intellectual tool, a theory of consciousness, it may be possible to start from scratch, and consider what religion is all about, and whether one can be confident that some or all of it is true. Narrow minded lawyers say that one should not speculate; but one has to start somewhere, and as Lord Justice Ormrod said one day in the Court of Appeal, “All inferences are speculation, but some speculations are more likely than others”. So when one is sitting in one’s room, gazing at the pattern on the wallpaper, wondering about the incredible complexity of its molecular and atomic structure, or gazing out of the window at the sun or the stars in their billions of galaxies and innumerable numbers, most of which one cannot see, to think that all this was brought into being by a benign Creator is speculation. But some people would say that it was a more likely speculation than some of the other suggestions that have been proposed in recent years.

So too, when one reflects on the size and complexity of the universe, and on the fact that mortal man can neither create a tree, nor a plant, nor a flower, still less the simplest relationship with another human being, to think that this Divine Creator must be infinitely greater than mere man is speculation. But some people would say that, if He exists at all, then it is a speculation so likely to be true as to verge on certainty. And conversely, what He thinks of mortal man is speculation; but the idea that He regards those who deny his existence with amused contempt is also a speculation that verges on certainty. The Infinite, which is so great that nothing you can add to Him, or even imagine adding to Him, will increase Him at all; and nothing which you can imagine subtracting from Him will diminish Him at all, is unlikely to be bothered by the opinions of a man who is nought, or zero, in comparison.

If God exists, then the only significance that a man can find, is in a life lived in cooperation with Him, which presupposes a relationship with Him. And if God does not

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exist, then man's life is like the flight of a sparrow through a lighted hall, which once out into the dark again is lost in death. It has no significance at all, save in the ever fleeing moment; and once those moments have gone, none at all, save for the evil legacy that it leaves behind. One view of evil is that men resort to it, to gain a significance which they cannot see themselves obtaining in any other way. The good that men do lives on only in the memories of those who are grateful for it; but the evil that men do lives after them for a long, long time, and that gives some men a gratifying sense of power. As Shakespeare said:-

“The evil that men do lives after them;

“The good is oft interred with their bones”.

Logically evil should not remove their sense of insignificance, when compared with creation; but it does, because it blinds men to their insignificance, so that they are able to regard themselves as at the centre of their own little world. And they like that!

“Take no thought for the morrow”, insofar as it encourages us all to lose ourselves in the ever-fleeing moment, is about the worst advice anyone could give. It encourages short-sighted decisions that blight our own future, and the future of society. It does so because a man, who is not in control of himself and his own fate to some extent, is unlikely to do society much good either. As far as I know it was again the Greeks who first sought to limit contingency or the influence of luck in human life, so as to repel the dread thought that man was just a pawn in the hands of Fate; and for the Greeks, fate was more powerful than the gods. So Plato was able to arrive at the conclusion that the philosopher led the perfect life, because he was the man who was least exposed to the vicissitudes of fortune. But alas these delightful speculations by the most intelligent of men were swept away, firstly by Alexander the Great who brilliantly put into practice everything that Clausewitz preached 2000 years later; and secondly by Jesus who provided a life so glorious that the speculative philosopher's life seems a feeble obscurity in comparison. And one of the hardest sayings of Jesus was that

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he spoke in parables so “that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins be forgiven them”. It was a lecture on the perverseness of human blindness; that is spiritual blindness.

It prompts the question who is it who really does see? A theory of consciousness does I believe help to answer that question today. When I first put pen to paper, to describe my spiritual adventure of trying to reconcile the sacred and the secular, the spiritual in this world and the eternal, God with self and with the other, I found I needed such a theory. And there being none is existence, I needed to create one. But Jesus did not need a theory of consciousness; anymore than Alexander the Great needed to read Clausewitz. Their genius was that they both knew without being taught. Alexander knew about War; and Jesus knew about Peace, which was better. In a sense each complemented the other. One sees this if one reads the Sermon on the Mount and takes all its propositions literally; it is utterly inconsistent with the Rule of Law, and a humane, disciplined, well-ordered society, as indeed are many of his parables. But then he had something much more important to impart than did Lord Mansfield, great judge though he was. The chief difference between War and the Rule of Law, is that in War there are no Rules: if you make Rules you lose; whereas in Law there is nothing but rules. Otherwise they have much in common. They both involve fighting; they both involve force; in both it is unwise to insist on unconditional surrender, unless there is no alternative. Both are absolutely necessary for civilized society to survive. But Peace does not involve force; indeed it is its antithesis.

So what was it he sought to achieve? Not, I think, simply to die like a felon on a cross. Prince Egmont, when he realized he had been betrayed by the Duke of Alva, and that death was inevitable, may have walked through the streets head erect, like a soldier, to his execution. But Jesus was not a soldier, and to start with he had not been betrayed by anybody. He set out on his Ministry of his own freewill. So what was it he hoped to achieve? A young

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man, probably past the peak of his physical strength, but as fully conscious of his powers of character as he would ever have been, he sought to save the world. But how did he hope to do this? Lots of men have sought to save the world; I expect most of the better Roman Emperors saw it as their vocation; and I expect most of them were right to think it. So there must be many ways of trying to save the world; and probably each generation's way is different. But if the Gospels are anything like accurate, only Jesus was correct in thinking he had the Divine Writ to do it. In a sense this made his task harder. He could not just be a cipher doing the Will of God; he had to be himself. So he had to do the Will of God, as he conceived it. He had to give an example of how to live; but he could not just give an example of how to be a philosopher, or a theologian, or a healer. He had to attempt to achieve something; he was not condemned to death from the first. If later he set his face towards Jerusalem and death, it was because the path he had chosen led that way. It was the path which he chose; it was not death which he chose. So where did the path lead? Where would the path have led, if he had not been cut short by murder? He called it the Kingdom of Heaven, which he constantly said was "at hand", if only people had had the wits to grasp it. The perfect society! Was it a realizable dream; or was it fantasy? Probably it does not matter. He was a young man; he must have thought it was realizable, or he would not have attempted to bring it into being. If not realizable in his lifetime, then most certainly in others'. His harsh condemnation of Bethsaida and Capernaum only makes sense if he believed they had rejected a priceless opportunity; not the opportunity of a lifetime, but the opportunity of all creation. And the enthusiasm with which he preached his Gospel must have been infectious. The only thing that would have unnerved him would have been the thought that no-one understood, and no-one would dare to follow his example once he was gone.

But our situation is different. We cannot return to the theocracy of ancient Israel; and we have to accept society as we find it; and see what we can achieve in the present social

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conditions. So my partial answer to the question, who it is who really does see, is that anyone who is able to view things with a perfectly relaxed consciousness has the opportunity to see clearly. But he does not necessarily do so, because in my opinion to see things in true proportion is the very highest intellectual achievement. To have the ability to relax the mind completely, gives us all the opportunity to think things through clearly, but does not necessarily mean that we do so. We are not in the position of Jesus, believing we can see our vocation with crystal clarity. Most of us are so fuddled by the amount of knowledge and technology, that we have lost sight of the vision that the world is wonderful, and was created. Science and techne so far from cutting down contingency, have half destroyed the will to cope with it; and so people are devastated by bad luck. For instance, a married couple finding they cannot have children may end up on the verge of a nervous breakdown, instead of just accepting it. Could Jung be right that the Spirit of God does lurk in the depths of the Psyche, and if you are wise you will come to terms with him sooner, or if you are Augustine later?

Whether I have understood Jung aright, or not, Christianity is about Spirit Possession. The prayer of Humble Access in the Communion Service makes this absolutely clear; it ends with the pious hope that Christ will ever more dwell in us, and we in him. Lest there should be any doubt that a spiritual union is contemplated, the 39 Articles say with blistering clarity that for Transubstantiation there is no authority in Holy Writ, it is contrary to the plain words of Scripture, and has been the source of many errors. You could not have it much plainer than that; it is a spiritual union that is envisaged, not a physical one in any sense. Equally you can have spirit possession between ordinary mortals; it more often takes the form of a man's obsession with a woman, but you can have a woman obsessed with a man. If God exists outside the imagination, it would be surprising if you could not replicate with others any relationship which you think or believe you have with Him. If you find that this is not possible, then you are stuck in a monastery, whether it is one of the more traditional

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establishments, or simply a prison-house in your own mind. Any relationship which you have with anybody, it must be possible to replicate with others; or life in any sort of community becomes impossible. Christianity is about Spirit Possession.

It is better to be possessed by a good spirit, than a bad spirit; but better to be possessed by a bad spirit, than by none at all. One of the few passages in the Bible's least attractive book, Revelation, that strikes a chord with me is the message to the Church at Laodicea; they are condemned for being neither hot nor cold, but only lukewarm. They had no spirit. Goethe called his spirit his "Daemon", though I think nowadays it would cause less misunderstanding to call it his creative power. Eckermann in his conversations with Goethe speaks of that secret problematic power, which all men feel, which no philosopher explains, and over which the religious help themselves with consoling words. I suspect the words came from Goethe himself. Goethe held the view that no man, not even the unique and majestic spirit of Jesus, could fully manifest the Creator; and unless Jesus was immortal here and now, unless and until he was murdered, there seems to me to be a good deal to be said for Goethe's view. But that hypothesis raises so many questions, (although I think it is a very tenable hypothesis that Jesus believed he was immortal, and sought to share that immortality with us), that any consideration of it is better left to later chapters. Suffice it to say, that he was probably the most perfect manifestation we are ever likely to get; so far beyond what most of us can hope to achieve, that the priests have turned him into a god, which relieves us all of any serious duty to attempt to imitate him, because we would not succeed. But if Christianity is about spirit possession, then of course we must imitate him; although the spirit vouchsafed to us may be very different from his.