

## A SPIRITUAL WORLD.

### CHAPTER 7.

The idea of spirit possession is dangerous, I admit; but then religion is dangerous, and always has been. Dangerous to the individual because he or she may go barmy; dangerous to society, because rival protagonists may resort to war. Consider the calculating cynicism of Cardinal Richelieu in championing the Protestant cause in Germany in the Thirty Years War, which he did for the benefit of France in the world of power politics. Fortunately it benefited us too; because if Protestantism had been extinguished on the continent, our turn in Britain would have come next. And with it, the ability to read the scriptures in the vernacular, and in the light of one's own intelligence, would have been extinguished; and the Inquisition and Wallenstein's troops who plundered catholic and protestant alike, between them, would have reduced Europe to the black night of the soul. Of course a religious sect, like any other dangerous animal, when attacked has to defend itself. Persecution, if sufficiently ruthless, almost always works. The persecution of the Albigenes for being Arians, that is for thinking Jesus slightly inferior to the Father, by Pope Innocent III was successful, because they were all exterminated. It was the first genocide of a fellow Christian people; and a singular departure from the meek gospel of Christ. Today Christianity is being persecuted by the intolerant secularism that is stalking across Europe, by the denial of jobs, the withholding of funds and local authority grants for projects, and a partial prohibition on evangelising. Of course religion is dangerous; and the cushy time the C.of E. clergy have had the last few hundred years is likely to be at an end. Today, no-one respects sanctuary, in the way Alaric the Goth did in his sack of Rome in Augustine's time; but then he was a Christian gentleman, and nowadays both terms are despised.

I would not have thought that the idea of spirit possession was any more dangerous than fervent traditional belief. Maybe more dangerous than traditional C.of E. church-going,

## A SPIRITUAL WORLD.

but then nowadays that has tended to become a supine mimicking of political correctness. Until recently the C.of E. with its timeless ceremonies and sublime Liturgy gave support and authority to the living traditions that made England what it is, or at least was. But nowadays to say, “We don’t behave like that here” is “Racist”! Lord Chancellor Thurlow, who was no great intellectual, was able to say, “I prefer the many English robbers, to the many French thieves”; but now even that would be “Racist”. And I think the effect of political correctness is to destroy the living traditions of a society, so that it becomes ashamed of itself, at least in bourgeois circles where fashion is god. It does this in the name of a “Just society”; but actually it destroys all society, which depends on honest dealing between man and man. And a prescribed code of behaviour is no substitute. This was one of the things Jesus railed against most vehemently, the replacement of spontaneous behaviour by the incredible complexity of the Jewish interpretation of the Mosaic Law. He said that unless a man’s righteousness exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees they would not get into his heaven. So we have seen it all before; and there is always a battle between legal conformity and the freedom of the spirit. And there always will be. The trouble with the C.of E. is that its clergy absolutely refuse to teach men and women to be good citizens, because Jesus had no time for secular society; his was a gospel of personal salvation, in contrast to the Old Testament where the claims of society were more in evidence. They should remember that St. Paul preached that to live by the Spirit was life, whereas to live by the Law was death. But they seem unwilling or unable to adapt what St.Paul was saying to modern society, or modern thought. But Nature abhors a vacuum; so something must take the place of the old traditions, and probably is doing so already. There is a self-confidence abroad, which may be unwarranted by any corresponding experience; but which may be present even in the thug’s vicious response to the slightest rebuke. If so, I suggest it is a form of spirit possession; I mean possession by a very unpleasant spirit.

## A SPIRITUAL WORLD.

So in saying religion in future must be about spirit possession, I am not being a prophet; I am only describing the prevalent trend in our society today. Jesus would, I think, have approved of my description. He accepted society, and its laws, as they were; and adapted them for his own purposes. The last supper, which he inaugurated into a ceremony, has such a striking parallel with the rituals of the corn and wine gods of antiquity, that I think Jesus must have intended it. After all, if John's Gospel is accurate, his symbolism revolted many of his followers, so that they followed him no longer. And indeed the genesis of the idea goes back to tribal warfare in stone-age society: that you ate your enemy to take on his strength. This must have been a spiritual concept; they were not dieticians in those days. Then when things became a little more sophisticated, you ate your god to take on his strength. Until we come to the wine and corn gods, who were sometimes sacrificed symbolically in a sheaf of corn, and sometimes literally. A man was seized and made the incarnation of the god for a year; during that year he was feasted and sexually exploited, and at the end of it he was literally ploughed into the ground, so that his blood might fertilize it. The renewed fertility of the earth symbolized the resurrection of the god; and then another wretch was seized as the god's incarnation, and he too had his year's pleasure, before paying the price. The idea that the pascal lamb must be slain, so that his blood might expiate the sins of the world for all time, is remarkably close; and Christian belief is that the pascal lamb too had a resurrection. Whether you think that Christian ceremony has its roots in revolting tribal custom, or whether you think that the Creator was slowly encouraging men's religious ideas to evolve towards the sublime truth of the Creator's purposes, is a matter for you, the individual, to decide. But Jesus did not waste time denouncing idolatries of the past; he adapted what was available for his own purposes.

Kathryn says in *Wuthering Heights*, "I am Heathcliff"; and we all understand what she meant. She did not mean that she was physically the same as Heathcliff; she meant

## A SPIRITUAL WORLD.

something much more subtle, and I think she was right that an indwelling spirit does modify the ordinary rules of human identity. A man or woman really is the dominant spirit within them. If Jesus was God, it was inasmuch as he was filled with the spirit of the Creator, as no man was before, or has been since. Similarly we should be manifestations of the Spirit within us, no matter what, or who, that spirit is. That doesn't mean you can run around doing what you like; Augustine's dangerous aphorism was, "Love God, and do what you like", which is different. Nor does it mean that you can despise those who are law-abiding; my view is that those who refuse to be law-abiding should be sent to prison for longer and longer terms, until eventually they learn, or cease to grace society with their presence. Nor does it mean you can be discourteous to other people, and justify it by saying you are expressing yourself. People without manners should simply be shunned. You don't mix with them, particularly not with the politically correct. But unless a man gives expression to the spirit within himself, he is just a cipher, obeying rules which he does not understand. And someone who lives by the Rule-book will always be outmanoeuvred by someone who doesn't!

What it is essential to remember about Jesus, is that he was a man. He could only effectively give expression to the Spirit within himself, if he devoted himself to that single-mindedly. He could not possibly at the same time have got involved with the secular world. And during the last week of his life, Passion week, his nerves and emotions must have been stretched to breaking point. From the raising of Lazarus onwards, he must have considered that arrest and crucifixion were inevitable, despite brief moments of popularity. Some Greeks wanted to meet him during that week; but he replied in effect that he was preoccupied with more important things. One must remember that one curse towards his tormentors, would have half-spoiled his Ministry and ruined the example of his Passion. The prologue to John's Gospel speaks of our seeing his grace and truth; and we are so used to those majestic words being read every Christmas day, that we tend to think it was all effortless. After all, was he

## A SPIRITUAL WORLD.

not God, as the Creeds recite? It only seemed easy, because of his incredible self-discipline. And I can well understand the relief with which he said it was all finished, as he was dying. It was not easy to live his life; it must have been unbelievably hard. Whether you think he saved the world, or whether you think he was deluded, it makes no difference. He could not possibly have got involved with the secular world, as well as coping with his Ministry, and enduring his Passion.

But we have to, unless we too have a vocation to heal the sick, make the lame walk, and the blind see, which is unlikely. Not many people do have this vocation; certainly not many clergymen. And anyway, someone has to keep the secular world going, or society will disintegrate into chaos. Certainly we still need the inspiration of self-sacrifice; but we need organizing ability too. And it is difficult to maintain an integrity in the secular world. Even if one is determined to do it, it is best not to talk about it too much; better to attempt to achieve a just result when it is possible, and accept there will be occasions when it just is not possible. Those who attempt to achieve a just result on every occasion, only make fools of themselves; and demonstrate that they have no understanding of the way the world works. There is a certain merit in having the humility to admit one has been out-manoeuvred and defrauded. And it is not every day that innocence is on the scaffold. So was Jesus' sacrifice worth it all? Or has the Almighty created a world in which his own Spirit is unwelcome? It sometimes looks like it. But I do not think he has. I was a schoolboy in the Second World War; and if there is one secular event which I am sure was right it was Winston Churchill's defiance of, and determination to fight, Hitler. Yet without the alliance with Russia, there was no hope of defeating the Wehrmacht. It had its guts torn out in Russia; and without Stalin, Russia would probably have crumpled as it did in 1917. The German army's offensive power was finally broken in the titanic tank battle in the Kursk-Orel salient in the summer of 1943. And without that battle, would we ever have got ashore in Normandy, or won the great victory at Falaise?

## A SPIRITUAL WORLD.

In some mysterious way, for right to triumph, it needs the cooperation of evil; I do not understand why, but I know that those who think right is sufficient by itself seriously misunderstand the laws of creation. So my view is that the Almighty knew very well what he was doing, although His ways are higher than my ways, and are beyond my understanding.

If the first lesson the Church must learn to avoid terminal decline, is to come to terms with the secular world, which is not all “mammon”; the second lesson it needs to learn is to come to terms with science, and in particular modern psychology. For me that means Jung, who is poor at making himself understood, but whom I much admire. And no doubt a lot of work has been done since his day. But unless you want to imitate medieval monks drawing pictures of flowers, not from life, but from other books of pictures of flowers, you cannot shut your eyes and ears to the experience of modern knowledge. Not even when it seems to discredit your most precious held opinions and prejudices. Aristotle was right; you cannot turn your back on experience, whether it is the experience of getting results from a scientific experiment, or the imaginative experience of the Creator talking to you. If you do, you cut yourself off from all community; which is exactly the predicament of the C.of E. today.

Psychological Types was Jung’s first substantial book, written in about 1920 at the end of his daring and perilous descent into the unconscious. I read it about 50 years ago; essentially it is a book of classification, and I was much taken by his remark that a theory of thought was a seven-sealed book. When considering why the big transformations overtaking mankind were never brought about by intellect, Jung wrote, “the all-important laws of mental development are still a book with seven seals”. Well, my theory of consciousness turns over the first pages. Other works of his, I read more recently; and the two abiding impressions left on me are his view that the largely unconscious Psyche is vastly bigger than the self, or ego, which is like a cork floating on the surface of the water. Secondly his view that in any society, there is a collective unconscious. If people say there is no such thing as “society”,

## A SPIRITUAL WORLD.

they do not know what they are talking about. Human beings always instinctively respond to one another; and a group spirit emerges, even if it is only the spirit of panic.

Under certain conditions materials resonate; atoms vibrate in sympathy with their neighbours, and even electrons do giving rise to super-conductivity. Human beings do the same. Now that the living traditions of England have vanished, it is impossible to tell which people among a group at a meeting have a hidden agenda; you only know instinctively what it is expedient to say, because it will achieve its objective. And you equally know instinctively that to say more will fail, not because it isn't true; but because it is contrary to the spirit of the meeting. The collective unconscious of any gathering is very real; and one is dimly aware of it, sufficiently so to thread one's way through its labyrinthine network. Do not let the reader think that by writing of "spirit possession", I am anxious to return to New Testament style exorcism; I am not, though there may have been something in it. Nor do I like Machiavelli, although there are a few gems to be found even in him. For instance, he says there are three attitudes of mind in a Prince; the first sees problems of its own volition and understands them, and that is "excellent". The second sees problems, and understands them when explained to him, and that also is "excellent". The third can neither see, nor understand when they are explained, and that is "useless"!

What has this to do with the ministry of Jesus, and the religion which he inaugurated? Not very much; but it has a great deal to do with coping with professional life in England today. We still need, and always will, the inspiration of self-sacrifice; but for society to continue we need organizing ability as well. You cannot run a society on self-sacrifice. Not even the Army wants to be full of heroes; it wants to recruit predominantly good family men, who have a lot to lose. And it is important to realize that Jesus was a man; which meant that he could not do everything, and that the strain on him in doing what he did must have been almost overwhelming. Is it not better to marvel that he never was false to his nature, even

## A SPIRITUAL WORLD.

when stumbling under the cross at the end of his physical strength; than analyse with overmuch scholarship what he said in a very different social environment. He was true to the spirit within him right to the absolute end. And so he is an inspiration to us, who have to thread our way through the labyrinthine convolutions of committee meetings and Court proceedings, not only with integrity but with some of the subtlety of Machiavelli.

The significance of Jesus' life is not so much that he laid down a moral code in the Sermon on the Mount, nor that he expiated the sins of the world by dying on the cross. The significance is that he allowed himself to be filled with the spirit of God, whether it came to him by birth or baptism, and allowed it to guide his actions, wherever it led, and despite the appalling consequences to himself in the end. So we, if we have any imagination, can allow ourselves to be inspired by his example; and do the same, filled with whatever spirit the Creator gives us for a companion. It may be the spirit of Jesus, it may be his own spirit, the spirit of the Creator, it may be the spirit of a woman, it may be the spirit of Justice; it may be several of these. Christianity is about spirit possession; and until you have grasped this, you haven't even begun to imitate Jesus. With our insane cult of the multicultural society, which breaks down the living traditions of any country that embraces it, being true to the spirit within oneself is as good a way of "seeing off" political correctness as any other. Imitating Jesus does not necessarily mean ending up on a metaphorical cross; it means playing a part in society with integrity, whatever that part is.

Jesus is relevant to our conduct in the secular world, even if the teaching of his Church is blandly irrelevant to someone striving to be effective with integrity in it. As regards how you should behave in the Romeo and Juliet situation, I think the Greek Oracle might have been more help.