

MIRACLES.

CHAPTER 10.

Modern science leaves the door wide open for acts which transcend Nature. Sir Dampier Whetham, himself a distinguished physicist who did research on colloids, in his great History of Science records how the early Church learned to hate science and pagan learning, and when it got a bit of power persecuted them. But now that science is in the ascendant, and the Church is in decline, it is science that offers the best hope of rediscovering that mind and faith can influence matter.

However to begin with, the Church was against science. The ability to heal the sick seems to have deserted the Church after about a generation, according to tradition. But this did not lead to any healthy curiosity in the world outside themselves so far as we know. Even in the time of Aurelius, Christians were inward looking, lacking any civic public spirit, and unwilling to do anything to support the Empire, which provided them with a reasonably law-abiding framework in which to live. After Christianity became the official religion, the early church began the process of hastening on the Dark Ages, which it alone was able to survive. All interest in science and useful learning was discouraged; as St. Ambrose said, "To discuss the nature and position of the earth does not help us in our hope for the life to come?" A Christian bishop destroyed part of the library of Alexandria, one of the wonders of the ancient world, because it was pagan learning; and the last classical mathematician was murdered by a Christian mob. Whilst on the one hand Christianity, making a virtue of mercy, will have softened the harshness and cruelty of Rome, and given men something to hope for; whereas the Stoics were really without hope. On the other hand Christianity's obsession with sin, salvation and damnation, and Christ's second coming and judgement, replaced the Greek's bright enthusiasm for life and the stern Roman discipline rooted in family and state. The spirit

MIRACLES.

of the slave was raised up; society was cast down. As Gibbon records, Christianity was on the whole a subversive influence, and a principal factor in the decline and fall of Rome.

And even today, if one goes to church, the same orgy of sin, repentance and forgiveness, reminds one of the 17th century puritans who vied with each other in confessing their sins, many of which they had never committed. No lasting joy or self-confidence could emerge from such a grotto of obsequiousness. And since it is done every week, the conclusion must be that it has been in vain, since the condition this week is the same as last, if not worse. The unspoken assumption is that to take part in the secular world is evil, so that the vast majority of the congregation are forced to commit sin every day of the week; but the trouble is, that this assumes that Jesus was steeped in sin every day he worked in the carpenter's shop in Nazareth, which is not quite what people want to believe. The irony is that this incredible search for sin in every act and motive keeps clergy and laity alike trapped in a matrix of evil. It incidentally safeguards the clergy's jobs, by giving them the appearance of authority; it keeps the laity apparently in subjection by the need for forgiveness. But few seriously believe in it; and it disregards entirely that it disarms the laity in the face of the enemy – evil; and disables them from being effective in the secular world. No-one in this claustrophobic fellowship could conceivably work a “miracle” of healing; and that means that the clergy have to neglect their primary duty to heal the sick in body and mind. But that does not prevent the sale of indulgences; the issuing of blank cheques to heaven, unsupported by capital assets in the form of acts which transcend Nature, which would carry the hallmark of authority.

Now that things have come in full circle, we find that Science is God's gift to man, just as Jesus was. Science deals only in probabilities, not with certainties; though Whitehead and Bertrand Russell in their Principles of Mathematics sought to find in parts of mathematics, notably in the theory of numbers, certain sure truths which did not depend on

MIRACLES.

experience. Generally however science deals only with probabilities. But Whitehead himself taught that the Laws of Nature, which scientists deduce or induce from their experiments, are relations between the mental concepts they have in their minds: not relations between the realities of Nature itself. And modern physics admits that the regularities of science may be put into it by our methods of observation and experiment. So in pure science, the concept of substance vanishes, and changing energy states takes its place; and we are left with waves in the quantum theory, and curvature in relativity. Not much of a foundation, on which to build a practical rule by which to live.

But out of this bleakness, modern physics rediscovers that the realities of the world of experience are complete organisms, in which the nature of the whole influences the character of the parts; which means that where mental states and thoughts are part of the organism, they enter into the whole and into the parts as well. In ordinary language, where there is thought, it extends to the ends of one's fingers and toes, as we all know. The carpenter using a chisel, the pianist playing the piano, knows that much of his skill is in his fingers. So of course thought influences matter; it is a characteristic of thought to do so. And the door is wide open for thought to stimulate acts, which transcend Nature as normally experienced.

If science is God's gift to man, it suggests that Christ's second coming in clouds and glory is unlikely to happen, in my lifetime at any rate. When you consider the marvels of the Voyager satellites, it would be foolish to predict that man will not achieve more than he has already. When you consider the marvels that the satellites reveal, it would be foolish to think that the Almighty could not arrange a second coming, if he wanted to. But the likelihood is that He will not. And when viewed historically, the obsession of early Christians with the second coming reduced them to a crowd of selfish, self-centred people. In secular perspective, it was as immoral as Nero fiddling while Rome burned; it amounted to their saying the Empire could perish, provided they had a seat at the celestial banquet.

MIRACLES.

The Day of Judgement held no terrors for Jesus, he thought he was going to be the judge; and he may have been right. He was right about his resurrection, so far as we can tell. He was hopelessly wrong about the timing of his second coming, and possibly about its manner. Nor should the Day of Judgement hold any terrors for the man in whom God's spirit dwells. God wants men to be strong and confident, provided they do not want to be separate from himself. There may be a need to be born again, before a man can believe with any confidence that the spirit of God dwells in himself; and that means abject penitence once. But after that, it is to be hoped that a man will keep clear of sin; if not at once, then by fairly continuous progress. Christ did not indulge in an orgy of repentance; and we should be like him. He said he had not committed sin; and we should be able to say that in our present condition, we do not either.

Nor should we be too quick to criticise those Jews who gave up following Jesus because they found the concept of eating his flesh and drinking his blood revolting. It has overtones of tribal savagery, in which you ate your enemy's flesh to take on his strength. His use of this gruesome symbolism can only mean, in my opinion, that he wanted people to say, "Christ is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, spirit of my spirit"; such a close intimacy, that it is impertinent for other people to lecture him about it. No clergyman is bone of my bone etc..at least I sincerely hope not. And for a clergyman to lecture me on a relationship, which is far more intimate than any friendship between us, would be impudent. Just as it would be impudent for me to lecture him! This surely is what Jesus meant? He did not want us to be cannibals.

Jesus must have healed many people; the record of his having done so, and of his having spoken about it, is so repetitive that it is impossible to dismiss it all as hero-worship. Besides there have been healers in every age and in every society; there is no reason why he should not have been one, and a very successful one. No-one is ever likely to understand how

MIRACLES.

he healed; but then from my reading, no healer ever does understand how he himself heals. Nor does anyone know why light of a certain wavelength looks red to most people; nor have we any idea whether it looks as reddish to Smith as it does to Jones. Newton said he did not know what gravity was, and doubted if anyone would ever know, because he regarded force at a distance as absurd. Nor have we any idea why an act of will should set the limbs in motion, but it does. If mental states are part of the organism pervading it to its extremity, then it is understandable that it should be so, even if we do not understand why. And that may be as far as we can take it.

Christ may have been right that faith like a grain of mustard seed can remove a tree or a mountain; but the probability is he was using an extravagant metaphor. Nevertheless it raises the question why we seem incapable of repeating his healings, if they really happened? Especially when he seems to have thought we should do better than him? If “healing” can take place at all, it is a gift. Why so few people in the Church with this gift? There are perhaps 40,000 registered healers in this country; some of them gifted, some of them charlatans, no doubt. Why so little talent in the Church? Perhaps they would misuse it, as the Church misused its power so often in the past.

If a man believes the spirit of Healing dwells in himself, how long will this spirit remain, or how long will the belief last, if he does not try to share it with others? In other words, if a man realizes he has this spirit, there is a compulsion to use it, and dedicate his life to using it for others. Not many people want to dedicate themselves like that. It would be difficult to use it, and lead an ordinary life. But I do not think the most pressing change needed in the Church is to try to recover Jesus’ ability to heal, though it would give an added authority to those much in need of it. The most pressing need is to make the Gospel of Christ embrace the secular world, and to get rid of the idea that anyone pursuing a secular vocation is serving “mammon”, which is a false accusation. Get rid too of the insincere penitence for

MIRACLES.

sins never committed, or only committed because one is too dead-tired to fulfil all the public duties and family duties that make conflicting calls on one's energy. I see no other way for Church men and women to become once again confident and competent as they go about their daily affairs, freed from the debilitating demands of a dying Church which is harnessed to an unreal world, or a world which no longer exists. This leads on to the idea of trying to recreate between humans a replica of the relationship or indwelling that is supposed to exist between God and the soul. This is the entire theme of my book: *Man's Relationship with God* published by the Edwin Mellen Press. Anyone interested in going further, should read it.