

CHAPTER 15.

Christ set out on his Ministry, convinced that his vocation was to save the world; there was no doubt about it. The kingdom of heaven was at hand; and the cohesion of his kingdom depended on each subject's loyalty and devotion towards himself. He was very much concerned with the affairs of this world. His ministry of healing was for men and women here and now; and it was the greater part of his Ministry. Men were only angered and misunderstood him, because his kingdom of love was here and now: not in a world after death. They wanted to manipulate him, just as so many people want to manipulate God, for their own ends.

What he did not do was give guidance on political matters; he left Caesar's affairs to Caesar, and the tenor of his guidance on social matters was not to offer resistance to violence. He left behind no political philosophy; and indeed he may have had none. But when he did not come back as soon as expected, the consequence of the failure of his followers to cope with the problems of secular power, and think out a political philosophy, was that Christian states fell down like ninepins before Islam, and were never reconquered. Nor has the Church to this day evolved a political philosophy; despite the shame of the 4<sup>th</sup> Crusade in the Middle Ages which attacked and sacked a Christian city, instead of the infidels, despite the near annihilation of civilization in two world wars, our political philosophy is still Locke, Hume, John Stewart Mill. So when sections of the Church try to interest themselves in liberation theology, the probability is they do not know what they are talking about, or that they are not talking as churchmen. Christianity is firmly on the spiritual side of life.

The Church teaches that in Jesus, God became man. It is a wonderful myth, and probably a truthful one. If it is true, then another metaphor is to say that in Jesus immortality dawned, in either a literal or metaphorical sense. I keep an open mind which it was. But

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suppose it was only in a poetic sense. In science and in the law one often considers the hypothetical case. In a scientific problem all sorts of hypotheses are considered; and choosing the correct one is often as much a matter of inspiration as of inductive reasoning. In planning a prosecution, one has to consider all the possible stories open to the accused, in preparing one's cross-examination. Let us then dismiss out of hand the suggestion that Christ had to be crucified; and regard this doctrine as the device of those who want to brand everyone as evil as Annas and Ciaphas. After all the sheep were scattered when the shepherd was smitten; they did not turn traitor. So let us keep an open mind; and regard Christ in the flesh as mortal man, however much he was incarnate God in spirit. If then he had not been crucified, he would have grown old, and died in his bed. Did he realize this? Or did he think he was immortal here and now, in this world; although this was only an illusion? He never reached an age to find out in fact which it was.

Much therefore depends on what Christ thought of himself and of his vocation. If he thought he was immortal, and could found an everlasting Kingdom, very much as the Jehovah's Witnesses think that the 1000 year rule of Christ is about to begin, then it makes sense that he condemned Bethsaida and Capernaum for not repenting when they saw his mighty works. They were throwing away a priceless opportunity. They were throwing away not only their own future and the future of the Jewish nation, they were letting down the whole of humanity, born and unborn. Jesus was offering them the one perfect life, he was offering them immortality in either a literal or metaphorical sense; and all Bethsaida and Capernaum could do was turn it down. And his kingdom being spiritual would have posed no threat to Rome. But then on our supposition that he was going to die anyway, this belief of his was an illusion. Maybe it was a comforting illusion; but an illusion it remained. If he thought he was immortal, but was labouring under an illusion, then one has little option but to prefer one's own judgement to his. Only a knave says, "Let illusion be my truth". If he was

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mortal in his flesh, and immortal only in spirit, then a political philosophy was required after he died, and his Church began to acquire power. He was unwise to give no guidance. Did Bethsaida and Capernaum sense that he was over-reaching himself; or were they motivated more by self-interest?

Suppose he knew he was going to die, and that his only choice was whether to die on a cross, or comfortably in his bed. He may have preferred to die on a cross, because it manifested better his Father's glory. Maybe so; but that does not alter the fact that had his choice been different, he would have grown old like everyone else. How would old age have changed him? As ill health took its hold, would his mind have slowed and become more senile? More importantly, as Christ pondered which choice to make, was he influenced by the thought of growing old? Did he think he could remain a King in this world for ever? If he envisaged himself growing old and senile, why did he leave behind no political philosophy, or did he think his kingdom would never have to cope with the problems of power? Strange thought, when all his own temptations had been about the abuse of power. Or did his vocation so obsess him, that he never stopped to think? Even if it obsessed him, it need not obsess us; and we can pause for thought.

If he thought he was immortal in this world, unless and until he was murdered, then it makes sense that he left behind no political philosophy. He himself did not need one; and if he would always be here, neither did his followers. If he thought he would probably be murdered, but his followers would take up the mantle, as Elisha had Elijah's, of his immortality, then it makes sense that he left behind no political philosophy. His disciples would have no more need of it than he had. But if he foresaw his own crucifixion, and also that his disciples would fail to pick up his mantle, would soon be unable to heal the sick, unable to make the lame walk, or do any mighty acts of power, then he was unwise not to have given guidance. He was the prisoner of his own phrase, "Take no thought for the

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morrow". If moreover he realized he would grow old and die, if his life were not cut short first, then what did he think his followers would do after he was gone? In fact they preached the resurrection; it was the only thing they could do. They preached a kingdom after death; and naturally very soon lost the ability to do much in this world – except talk, point out heresy, and persecute!

If on the other hand, Christ thought he was immortal, and was correct in that belief, then it follows that we can be immortal in this world too! St.Paul was wrong in saying that flesh and blood could not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. And before we all dismiss this as fantasy, let us remember that some molecular-biologists or genetic-engineers are already scouring DNA for the genes that control the process of aging, with a view to doubling the length of a man's life. It is only a small step from there, to wanting to lengthen the span to 1000 years, for men to live as long as trees as Isaiah predicted. I think they will find the genes that govern aging, but keep an open mind about their ability to lengthen man's life. Maybe; maybe not. When one considers the foolish predictions that this, that, or the other was impossible, it is wiser to keep an open mind. Which means that it is a distinct possibility that man may become immortal in this world in the comparatively near future. More likely that he will not; but he may. An unnerving thought for those who repeat week after week that they are miserable sinners. To an impartial eye, they would appear to be missing as big an opportunity as Bethsaida or Capernaum. And it does not require much imagination to see the result of scientists producing near-immortality, and the Church being unable to do so; most people would say that the Church was ripe for the waste paper basket.

It all depends on Christ's thought: whether he thought he was mortal or immortal, in what sense, and whether he was correct in what he thought or believed. Besides, what Father would allow his son to be deluded about his own manhood? What Father would expect us to follow a deluded hero? If He was content for Christ to be deluded about the nature of his

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manhood, will He not be ready to allow us to be deluded too? And the transfiguration? Was God playing with those present? Allowing them to dream? Or was it reality? And the resurrection; was that an illusion? Why should we believe the evidence of our own eyes, if God is not a god of truth, but one who allows the imagination to fantasize too much? But if Christ was immortal in every sense, then one should follow him through thick and thin.

But to go back a little in the argument; if he deliberately chose death on the cross, then we are not guilty of it. Annas and Ciaphas are; Pilate is guilty of weakness in the face of mob violence. But no-one else is guilty. Or did Jesus say to himself that we are all so evil, that he had no choice but the cross? Then we are only guilty of being part of creation! Which means, no-one is guilty. Instead we needed to evolve, if my original hypothesis was wrong.

If Christ had to die, because we are all evil, then it makes more sense to regard his death as a necessary part of evolution, which is just about the message that Grunwald's picture of the crucifixion conveys. In the picture, God the Father stands by the cross with a smug smile on his face; and he points to the cross with a crooked finger as though to show his indifference or even contempt for the agony of Christ. On a more humane view, Christ came into a world of darkness as the everlasting light; in rather the same way as Man replaced the ghastly world of Dinosaurs with the wonderful world of thought, of language, and of tools. What a tremendous leap forward that was; but it was not enough.

Viewed in evolutionary terms, Christ's condemnation of the cities of Bethsaida and Capernaum was unreal, in the sense that they had no real choice: only a choice which creation dictated could be decided only one way. In evolutionary perspective, Adam and Eve is the most delightful story; but we know from countless fossil remains how old the earth is, and that man has evolved from primitive species and primitive man, to his present sophistication. There was no FALL, save insofar as every man has his own fall. Arcadia is a myth; and if the Garden of Eden exists, it is in front of us, and not behind us. Christ was

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ignorant of all this, because he was ignorant of science. But we are not ignorant of it; and it would be the most shameful intellectual dishonesty to forget that star-dust evolved into us, and to bury our hearts and minds once more in the myths of antiquity. No doubt Jesus was the light of eternity; and the world since he lived has been an utterly different place from the darkness and superstition that preceded it. But plainly his light is not enough; we have had two world wars, and are beginning another, and Jesus' pacifism in today's world is madness. It would deliver us into an unspeakable slavery, which we only escaped in 1940 by the skin of our teeth. No sensible person could expect such a narrow escape again. He may be the way, the truth, and the life. But he did not lead us the whole way; and was modest enough to admit that his followers would achieve greater things than he did. So what is the next step?

In the legend of Arthur, Sir Percival fails to ask the all-important question, "Who serves the Grail?" To which the answer is, "We all do". His failure is said in the story to lead to all the dissension and warfare between men. In modern idiom, an indwelling with God is not enough for community life. You need a comradeship between men as well. Every soldier knows that courage in battle stems from loyalty to one's comrades: whether he has been involved in battle or not. It does not stem from fear of authority or the desire to be a hero. At a superficial level, an indwelling between men is the very fabric of society, manifesting itself as honest dealing between man and man. What about the relationship of man to God?

Surely the next step is to link an indwelling between people to an indwelling with the Divine? And this is something which in my experience does not exist at the moment. There may be a lot of talk about it; but I expect there was a lot of talk about the indwelling spirit of God in Jeremiah's day, and yet not very much of it in evidence. My attempt to recreate the same relationship may have been inept; but surely I was at least on the right lines? At any rate in my opinion some such synthesis is the next step forward; and of course it will be different for everybody. If one follows Christ through thick and thin, one does not follow him blindly,

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accepting literally the truth of everything he said, even if he spoke in metaphor rather than with legislative precision. You attempt the thing which you think he would most dearly have wished you to attempt, irrespective of success or failure. And it is different for everybody.

For me it was the idea that immortality could so infuse human relationships as to achieve perfection; with the remote possibility that it would result in a literal immortality, and the much greater possibility that through a clear beholding, and the ability to read each others thoughts, a man and a woman might be able to transcend the atrocity of War. But the spirit of immortality is a poor qualification for solving the everyday problems of life. So she was right; as I came to recognize eventually.

There is generally a limit to the extent two people are willing to surrender to each other. When this is so, it is better to admit it, rather than go further and fail to live up to one's professed enthusiasms. The psalmist talks about, "The King's daughter, all glorious within". That is infinitely better than deception and manipulation within.

But if two people did manage to surrender to each other completely, probably they would change each other so completely that it would be beyond knowledge for them to know what the result would be. Yet I hoped it would be a union of such harmony, integrity, truth and generosity as would enable human character to grow to its full stature. In other words, recreate Adam and Eve before the Fall; although historically they only existed in the imagination of one of the greatest storytellers of all time.