

THE NEW MAN AN INTERPRETATION OF SOME PARABLES AND MIRACLES OF CHRIST

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Chapter One

THE LANGUAGE OF PARABLES

PART ONE

ALL sacred writings contain an outer and an inner meaning. Behind the literal words lies another range of meaning, another form of knowledge. According to an old-age tradition, Man once was in touch with this inner knowledge and inner meaning. There are many stories in the Old Testament which convey another knowledge, a meaning quite different from the literal sense of the words. The story of the Ark, the story of Pharaoh's butler and baker, the story of the Tower of Babel, the story of Jacob and Esau and the mess of pottage, and many others, contain an inner psychological meaning far removed from their literal level of meaning. And in the Gospels the parable is used in a similar way.

Many parables are used in the Gospels. As they stand, taken in the literal meaning of the words, they refer apparently to vineyards, to householders, to stewards, to spendthrift sons, to oil, to water and to wine, to seeds and sowers and soil, and many other things. This is their literal level of meaning. The language of parables is difficult to understand just as is, in general, the language of all sacred writings. Taken on the level of literal understanding, both the Old and New Testaments are full not only of contradictions but of cruel and repulsive meaning.

The question arises: Why are these so-called *sacred* writings cast in misleading form? Why is not what is meant explained clearly? If the story of Jacob's supplanting of Esau, or, again, of the Tower of Babel, or of the Ark constructed in three stories riding on the flood, is not literally true but has a quite different inner meaning, why is it all not made evident? Why again should *parables* be used in the Gospels? Why not say directly what is meant? And if a person thinking in this way were to ask why the story of Creation in Genesis, which clearly cannot be taken literally, means something else, something quite different from what the literal words mean, he might very well conclude that the so-called sacred writings are nothing but a kind of fraud deliberately perpetrated on Mankind. If all these stories, allegories, myths, comparisons and parables in Sacred Scripture mean something else, why can it not be stated clearly what they mean from the starting-point so that everyone can understand? Why veil everything? Why all this mystery, this obscurity?

The idea behind all sacred writing is to convey a higher meaning than the literal words contain, the truth of which must be seen by Man *internally*. This higher, concealed, inner, or esoteric, meaning, cast in the words and sense-images of ordinary usage, can only be grasped by the understanding, and it is exactly here that the first difficulty lies in conveying higher meaning to Man. A person's literal level of understanding is not necessarily equal to grasping psychological meaning. To understand literally is one thing: to understand psychologically is another. Let us take some examples. The commandment says: "Thou shalt not kill." This is literal. But the psychological meaning is: "Thou shalt not murder in thy heart." The first meaning is literal: the second meaning is psychological, and is actually given in Leviticus. Again the commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is literal, but the psychological meaning, which is more than this, refers to mixing different doctrines, different teachings. That is why it is often

said that people went whoring after other gods, and so on. Again, the literal meaning of the commandment: "Thou shalt not steal" is obvious, but the psychological meaning is far deeper. To steal, psychologically, means to think that you do everything from yourself, by your own powers, not realizing that you do not know who you are or how you think or feel, or how you even move. It is, as it were, taking everything for granted and ascribing everything to yourself. It refers to an attitude. But if a man were told this directly, he would not understand. So the meaning is veiled, because if it were expressed in literal form no one would believe it, and everyone would think it mere nonsense. The idea would not be understood—and worse still, it would be taken as ridiculous. Higher knowledge, higher meaning, if it falls on the ordinary level of understanding, will either seem nonsense, or it will be wrongly understood. It will then become useless, and worse. Higher meaning can only be given to those who are close to grasping it rightly. This is one reason why all sacred writings—that is, writings that are designed to convey more than the literal sense of the words—must be concealed, as it were, by an outer wrapping. It is not a question of misleading people, but a question of preventing this higher meaning from falling in the wrong place, on lower meaning, and thereby having its finer significance destroyed. People sometimes imagine they can understand anything, once they are told it. But this is quite wrong. The development of the understanding, the seeing of differences, is a long process. Everyone knows that little children cannot be taught about life directly because their understanding is small. Again, it is realized that there are subjects in ordinary life that cannot be understood save by long preparation, such as certain branches of the sciences. It is not enough to be merely told what they are about.

The object of all *sacred* writings is to convey higher meaning and higher knowledge in terms of ordinary knowledge as a starting-point. The parables have an ordinary meaning. The object of the *parables* is to give a man higher meaning in terms of lower meaning in such a way that he can either think for himself or not. The parable is an instrument devised for this purpose. It can fall on a man literally, or it can make him think for himself. It invites him to think for himself. A man first understands on his ordinary, matter-of-fact or natural level. To lift the understanding, whatever is taught must first fall on this level to some extent, to form a starting-point. A man must get hold of what he is taught, to begin with, in a natural way. But the parable has meaning beyond its literal or natural sense. It is deliberately designed to fall first on the ordinary level of the mind and yet *to work in the mind* in the direction of lifting the natural level of comprehension to another level of meaning. From this point of view, a parable is a *transforming* instrument in regard to meaning. As we shall see later the parable is also a connecting medium between a lower and a higher level in development of the understanding.

PART TWO

THE Gospels speak mainly of a possible inner evolution called "re-birth." This is their *central* idea. Let us begin by taking inner evolution as meaning a development of the understanding. The Gospels teach that a man living on this earth is capable of undergoing a definite inner evolution if he comes in contact with definite teaching on this subject. For that reason, Christ said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (John xiv, 6). This inner evolution is psychological. To become a more *understanding* person is a psychological development. It lies in the realm of the thoughts, the feelings, the actions, and, in short, the *understanding*. *A man is his understanding*. If you wish to see what a man *is*, and not what he is *like*, look at the level of his understanding. The Gospels speak, then, of a real psychology based on the teaching that Man on earth is capable of a definite inner evolution in understanding.

The Gospels are from beginning to end all about this possible self–evolution. They are psychological documents. They are about the psychology of this possible inner development—that is, about what a man must think, feel, and do in order to reach a new level of understanding. The Gospels are not about the affairs of life, save indirectly, but about this central idea—namely, that Man internally is a seed capable of a definite growth. Man is compared with a *seed* capable of a definite evolution. As he is, Man is incomplete, unfinished. A man can bring about his own evolution, his own completion, *individually*. If he does not wish to do this he need not. He is then called *grass*—that is, burned up as useless. This is the teaching of the Gospels. But this teaching can be given neither directly nor by external compulsion. A man must begin to *understand for himself* before he can receive it. You cannot make anyone understand by force, by law. But why cannot this teaching be given directly? We come again to the question: "Why cannot higher meaning be given in plain terms? Why all this obscurity? Why these fairy–stories? Why these parables, and so on?" Everyone has an outer side that has been developed by his contact with life and an inner side which remains vague, uncertain, undeveloped. Teaching about re–birth and *inner evolution* must not fall only on the outer side of a man—the life–developed side. Some people reach a stage where they realize that life does not satisfy them, where they genuinely begin to look in other directions and seek different aims, before they can *hear* any teaching of an order similar to that of the Gospels. The outer side of a man is organized by life and its demands, and is according to his position and capacities. In a sense, it is artificial: it is acquired. But it is only the inner, *unorganized* side of a man which can *evolve* as does a seed by its own growth, *from itself*. For that reason the teaching of inner evolution must be so formed that it does not fall solely on the outer side of a man. It must fall there first, but be capable of penetrating more deeply and awakening the man himself—the inner, unorganized man. A man evolves internally through his deeper reflection, not through his outer life–controlled side. He evolves through the spirit of his individual understanding and by inner consent to what he sees as truth. The psychological meaning of the relatively fragmentary teaching recorded in the Gospels refers to this deeper, inner side of everyone. Once one can comprehend that a man can evolve only through a growth in his own individual, and so inner, understanding, one can see that if a true teaching about the meaning of inner evolution falls solely on the outer side of a man it will be useless or will even appear to him as so much nonsense. It may, in fact, be destroyed by falling on the wrong place in him—on his business–side, his worldly side. He will then trample it underfoot. This is the meaning of Christ's remark: "Neither cast your pearls before swine, lest haply they trample them under their feet..." (Matt, vii, 6). "Under" means the outer life–side of a man, the lowest side of a man's understanding, the side which only believes in what his senses show him, the side of the mind which touches the "earth" as do the feet. This side cannot receive the teaching of inner evolution because it is turned outwards and not inwards. This side therefore cannot understand about re–birth.

A man has one birth, naturally. All esoteric teaching says that he is capable of a second birth. But this re–birth or second birth belongs to the *man in himself*, the private, secret man, the internal man, not to the man as he seems to be in life and thinks himself to be, the successful man, the pretended man. All the latter belongs to the outer man, what the man appears to be, not what the man is inwardly. It is the inward man that is the side of re–birth.

In the psychological teaching of the Gospels, a man is not taken as what he appears to be, but as what he most deeply *is*. This is one reason why Christ attacked the Pharisees. For they were *appearances*. They appeared to be good, just, religious, and so on. In attacking the Pharisees, he was attacking that side of a man that pretends, that keeps up appearances for the sake of outer merit, fear, praise, the man who in himself is perhaps even rotten. The Pharisee, psychologically understood, is the outer side of a

man who pretends to be good, virtuous, and so on. It is that side of yourself. This is the Pharisee in every man and this is the psychological meaning of Pharisee. Everything said in the Gospels, whether represented in the form of parable, miracle or discourse, has a *psychological* meaning, apart from the literal sense of the words. Therefore the psychological meaning of the *Pharisees* refers, not to certain people who lived long ago, but to oneself now—to *the Pharisee in oneself*, to the insincere person in oneself, who, of course, cannot receive any real and genuine psychological teaching without turning it into an occasion for merit, praise and award. Later on we will study the meaning of the *Pharisee in oneself* more fully.