

# YOUR GOD IS TOO SMALL

By

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## Unreal Gods

To many people conscience is almost all that they have by way of knowledge. This still small voice which makes them feel guilty and unhappy before, during or after wrong-doing, is God speaking to them. It is this which, to some extent at least, controls their conduct. It is this which impels them to shoulder the irksome duty and choose the harder path.

Conscience can be so easily perverted or morbidly developed in the sensitive person, and so easily ignored and silenced by the insensitive, that it make a very unsatisfactory god. For while it is probably true that every normal person has an embryo moral sense by which he can distinguish right from wrong, the development, non-development or perversion of that sense is largely a question of upbringing, training and propaganda.

Christ said that men must become "as little children" (i.e. repudiate all the sham, compromise and cynicism, of adulthood) before they could play their part in His Kingdom with simplicity and sincerity. We must leave behind "parental hangover" if we are to find a "big enough God. But to his modern hearers he will only seem to be in love with the past. His words may have beauty and dignity, but it a beauty and dignity of a past age; and his message often appears to be wholly irrelevant to the issues of today. His pressing, though inarticulate, need is not for the god of the ancient Hebrews, nor the God of the early Church, but the God of the Atomic age – the God of energy and Wisdom and Love *today*.

Christianity is a way of living, and no sense a performance acted for the benefit of the surrounding world. To "learn" implies growth; implies the making and correcting of mistakes; implies a steady upward progress towards an ideal. The "perfection" to which Christ commands men to progress is this ideal.

If we believe in God, we must naturally believe that He is Perfection. But we must not think that he cannot therefore be interested in anything less than perfection (If that were so, the human race would be in poor case!). God is truly Perfection, but He is no Perfectionist.

Throughout the ages heroic men and women have found in God their "refuge" as well as their "strength". It would be absurd to think that people of such spiritual stature were all under the influence of childish regression, and we are forced to look farther for the explanation.

It has been well said by several modern psychologists that it is not the outer storms and stresses of life that defeat and disrupt personality, but its inner conflicts and miseries. If a man is happy and stable at heart, he can normally cope, even with zest, with difficulties that lie outside his personality.

If God is God, He's big, and generous and magnificent, and I can't see that anybody can say they've made a 'corner' in God. There are doubtless many reasons for the degeneration of Christianity into churchliness, and the narrowing of the Gospel for all mankind into a set of approved beliefs. The tragedy is not difference of opinion, which will probably be with us till the Day of Judgment, but the outrageous folly and damnable sin of trying to regard God as the Party Leader of a particular point of view. Behind this inability to conceive God rightly is the tendency to to build up a mental picture of God from our knowledge and experience of man.

It is surely more sensible, as well as more fitting, for us human beings, to find out, as far as we can, the ways in which God works. We have to discover as far as we can, the limits he has set Himself for the purposes of this Great Experiment that we call life – and then do our best to align ourselves with the principles and cooperate with the purposes that we have certainly had no say in deciding, but which nevertheless in our highest moments we know are good. God has never been known to disappoint the man who sincerely wants to co-operate with His own purpose.

It must be freely admitted that, in this experimental world, to which God has given the risky privilege of free will, there are inevitable "ills and accidents". Moreover, the cumulative effect over the centuries of millions of individuals' chooses to please themselves

rather than the Designer of "the whole show" has infected the whole planet. Once we admit the possibility of free-will we can see that injustices and grievances are inevitable. We have to accept the Scheme of Things as it is, and if we must blame someone it is surely fairer to blame Man who has chosen wrongly and produced a world awry. Such people do not get the chance to admire and love and worship in wordless longing One who is overwhelmingly splendid and beautiful and lovable.

All this is very unattractive and unpleasant, but it is quite common among religious people. They do dare not defy and break away from their imaginary god with the perpetual frown and find the One who is the great Positive, who gives life, courage and joy, and wants their sons and daughter too stand on their own feet? They like everything cut and dried and even the Gospel is reduced to a formula; so that if you sigh on the dotted line, so to speak, you are all right for heaven! They prefer the letter to the spirit and definite commandments to vague principles.

### **God of the Elite**

It is characteristic of human beings to create and revere a "privileged class" There is, in fact, no provision for a "privileged class" in genuine Christian. "It will not be so among you," said Christ to his early followers, "all ye are brethren".

God is not a God of the dead, but of the living.

Man has rightly been defined as a "worshiping animal". If for some reason he has no God he will unquestioningly worship *something*. Common modern substitutes are the following: the State, success, efficiency, money, "glamour", power, even security. Nobody, of course, calls them "God"; but they have the influence and command, the devotion which should belong to the real God. It is only when a man finds God that he is able to see how his worshipping instinct has been distorted and mis-directed.

Some of the gods we have considered are nothing more than artificial; some of them are inadequate pin-hole glimpses of the true Light. There is no reason why we should be content with the pin-hole id a little determined thinking and a little sincere action will remove the shutters.

## **An adequate God**

If we use our minds and imaginations we cannot help seeing that if there is a Supreme Being He must be finitely vaster than our forefathers' conceptions. The more we know, the more science reveals to us, the wider grow the mental horizons and the more inadequate grow the old little gods.

In the face of this dilemma many abandon the idea of knowing God, and pin their hopes and apply their energies to the "progress" of the human race.

By "spiritual" values we mean the qualities of spirit, of personality, which are recognizable and assessable, but are incapable either of scientific weighing and measuring – and incapable of physical destruction. In the light of the probable ultimate fate of the planet and of the (far more impressive) threat to human life, we are driven to reconsider whether after all there is reality beyond the physical, measurable, reality. We can certainly see evidence of the universal destructibility of matter: perhaps it is after all true that "reality" lies in another realm altogether, and that its values are not unsubstantial after all.

The poets, artists and philosophers as well as a great many other undistinguished people, of many ages, have probably been more or less acutely conscious that the "spiritual" is of vastly greater importance than the material. To all of them, speaking broadly, this present physical life is the visible and tangible stage of battlefield of spiritual forces. Universal values, such as truth, goodness and beauty, were often considered to exist apart from, as well as being exhibited in, the life of this world. It makes the idea of God far more sensible and far more desirable. The nature of reality is spiritual and it is only quite temporarily and incidentally involved in matter. The physical world is most uncomfortably unreliable.

It must not be supposed that what we call spiritual (and which is at present invisible) is less "solid" than matter. It may well prove, since it is indestructible, to be in essence, *more* solid.

There is something unavoidably attractive about the good. However far from the ideal our practice may be, we have an automatic respect for such things as honesty, sincerity, faithfulness, incorruptibility, kindness, justice and respect for other people. Our feeling for goodness is a clue to the ultimate Reality. This recognition

of good, so deeply rooted and so universal, is another far from negligible pointer to Reality.

Both beauty and goodness in different ways exert an effect upon man which cannot be explained in terms of the world that we know and to this we may add his search for truth. Scientific research, philosophy and religion, all in their different ways, attest this reaching out of man to grasp more and more truth. Universal hunger for Truth is unlikely to be without an answer and fulfillment, however hard to find it may be.

Beauty, Goodness and Truth, wherever they occur, are certainly clues; but we cannot tell how far and how great is the Reality to which they are pointing.

Love toward God does not exist without love to fellow humanity. True love and self-sacrifice have always been the most deeply moving human characteristics. Those who truly love and those who give themselves for others are more nearly reflecting the character of God than anyone else.

Insincerity always feels uncomfortable in the presence of sincerity unreality in the presence of reality and selfishness in the presence of love. We may expect then that in the presence of a morally complete man, a good deal of spiritual discomfort will be spontaneously aroused, sometimes dully and sometimes acutely.

Thus there will be in conflict between the righteous and the conventionally religious. The former will be right up against false gods, self righteousness. "*quid pro quo*" religion, and particularly those who have divorced religious life from real living, and are now only "playing a part" instead living life on the human level.. He will call to all who will listen, to re-centre their lives on the real God, instead of things or on themselves. He will be imploring them to "look at life differently" – as he knows it really is – with God as the centre and all else derived from Him.

We want to satisfy our cravings for reality, we want to know the meaning of life and to have spiritual fundamentals upon which we may build a faith by which to live. We want, in short, to know God.

"You can't know" says Christ, "until you are willing to do". It is plain from the Gospel that Christ regarded the self-loving, self-regarding, self-seeking spirit as the direct antithesis of real living.

The moment one begins really to love, he finds oneself in touch with the life of God.

Christ said, there were really two main principles of living on which all true morality and wisdom might be said to depend. The first was to love God with the whole of a man's personality, and the second to love his fellow men as much and in the same way as he naturally loved himself. If these two principles were obeyed Christ said that a man would be in harmony with the Purpose of Life, which transcends time.

The expression of love for God did not lie in formal piety not in mystical contemplation, but in the obedience to what he believed to be the will of God, which very often meant, in fact, the succouring and service of other men. A man could not be "friends with" God on any other terms than complete obedience to Him, and that included being "friends with" his fellow men. The purpose of life would seem to be gradual winning of men to a willing loyalty to these two principles

The world will go on loving its own selected circle, despising, exploiting or hating those outside it unless their hearts were first attuned to God.

### **Life's Basic Principles**

To Christ the most serious sin was not the misdirection of love-energy, which might be due to ignorance or mere carelessness, but the deliberate refusal to allow it to flow out either to God or to the people. It was pride and self-righteousness and the exploitation of others which called forth His greatest anger, Self-love in fact He saw as the arch-enemy.

It was with the motive and attitude of the heart, i.e. the emotional centre, that He was concerned. It was this that He called on men to change, for it is plain that once the inner affections are aligned with God the outward expression of the life will look after itself.

Jesus Christ said:

Happy are those who relieve their spiritual poverty: they have already entered the kingdom of Reality.

Happy are those who long to be truly "good": they will willfully realize their ambition.

Happy are those who are ready to make allowances and to forgive: they will know the love of God.

Happy are those who are real in their thoughts and feelings: in the end they will see the ultimate reality.

Happy are those who help others to live together: they will be known to be doing God's work.

It is quite plain that Christ is setting up ideals of different quality from those commonly accepted. He is outlining the sort of human characteristics which may fairly be said to be co-operating with the purpose of Life. He is putting His finger upon the vital internal attitude. A great many people would probably realize that in following them men would become their real selves and not the greedy, competitive, self-loving characters that cause so many of the world's troubles. Christ is restoring the true order, which man can recognize as true. He is not imposing a set of arbitrary regulations.

Men are not isolated units and their every action in some degree affects other people. The multiplication of the effects of countless acts by millions of self-centred instead of God-centred, individuals may reasonably be thought to be destroying the world. The only way of being rescued from the vicious sin-suffering-death circle in which the world is involved is for men to re-centre their lives on God.

His plan of rescue (or salvation, a much misused word) had to begin with a tiny minority. They were to be the spearhead of good against evil.

Christ spoke, and acted, on the assumption that there is a power of evil operating in the world. He spoke quite plainly of this spirit as responsible for disease and insanity as well as being the unremitting enemy of those who want to follow the new, true order.

When a man sees not merely that his life is out of harmony with God's purpose, but realizes that that disharmony has injured and infected the lives of other people, he begins to feel a "sinner" in earnest. When the sense of the strength of goodness and love touches a man by something he reads or sees, or by an inner touch in his soul, he is really convicted of sin. He comes to know that the Nature of Life is Good and not Evil. He suddenly sees that the goodness and love he has despised as weakness are in reality incredibly strong.

Christ very rarely called men "sinners" and as far as we know never attempted deliberately to make them feel sinners, except in the case of the entrenched self-righteous.

If God Himself is both Truth and Love it would be logical to suppose that a deliberate refusal to recognize or harbour truth and love would result in an attitude that makes reconciliation with God impossible. Now if it is true that God is both Truth and Love it will readily be seen that the greatest sins will be unreality, hypocrisy, deceit, lying, or whatever else we choose to call sins against truth, and self-love, which makes fellowship with other people and their proper treatment impossible. Forgiveness must then consist in a restoration to Reality, i.e. Truth and love.

The bigger the concept of God the more the mind staggers at the thought, but once it is accepted as true it is not too much to say that the whole personality is reoriented. If the change-over is effected the relief and release are enormous, and energy formerly repressed is set free.

"Heaven" is not, so to speak, the reward for "being a good boy", but is the continuation and expansion of a quality of life which begins when a man's central confidence is transferred from himself to God.

"Whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die" would mean that death was a completely negligible experience to the man who had already begun to live life of eternal quality.

If a man opens his own personality to God, he will without any doubt receive something of the Spirit of God. The man's own self is purified and heightened, and he will be more "himself" than he was before.

It is fairly obvious that "faith" is the first requisite in making contact between this and the Permanent World.

"Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you". These famous words are an invitation to reach out for the Permanent and the Real.

The goal which was set before human beings was to work and pray – and if need be, suffer and die – was the building of a new Kingdom of God. This was to transcend every barrier of race and frontier and of time and space as well.

Christianity is a revelation of the true way of living, the way to know God, the way to live life of eternal quality.

If Christianity fails, it fails for the same reasons that Christ failed = and any condemnation rightly falls on the world which rejects both him and it.

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