

THE GOD WHO SPEAKS

By

BURNETT HILLMAN STREETER

An abridgement

by Roger Hicks

GROSVENOR BOOKS

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The God Who Speaks was first delivered as the Warburton Lectures, 1933–35, and subsequently revised.

The book, published by Macmillan, has long been out of print.

This abridgement is entirely in the words of B. H. Streeter himself.

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Introduction

BY ROGER HICKS

The search for meaning and purpose for life goes on. There is a passion for justice, a hatred of war, a desire to respect the dignified rights of each man and a determination not to go along with the false, even if the right path is not clearly seen.

Deep in their hearts, most people want to know if they are wanted and if they can be of service in playing an effective part in righting what is wrong in our civilisation and in shaping a worthwhile future.

Once men turned to God for an answer but to many today that seems unintelligent, irrelevant and a child-like clinging to the past.

But what if there is a timeless God who both wants and can speak to man and enlist his intellect and his whole being in the unfinished task of creation?

What if that which God expects of man is more than a self-centred personal salvation but a selfless revolt against the status quo?

The God Who Speaks shows with lucidity and logic how God has, throughout history, made His Will for society known through speaking to man and directing the action he should take.

This book is as fresh and relevant as when it was first written. Streeter, with his immense scholarship, made the discovery that God could speak to him personally, often about great, as well as seemingly trivial matters. He wrote :

“For one who has had this experience, there is no longer any questions of believing or not believing. It is the clearest reality, as exact as any scientific idea.”

*From the Dictionary of National Biography (Volume 1931-40)*¹

STREETER, BURNETT HILLMAN (1874-1937), divine, was born at Croydon 17 November 1874 . . .

Streeter's academic career was brilliant, with a first class in classical moderations (1895), literae humaniores (1897) and theology (1898), and a series of theological prizes and scholarships. It was his work at this time which laid the foundation of his studies in the New Testament, but he himself would probably have regarded the philosophy of religion as his main interest, viewing the various fields into which his inquiring mind was led as all subsidiary to the one central theme of the interpretation and presentation of religion in the modern world. The background of this was his intense concern and care for people. Although never of strong physique he rowed for his college as an undergraduate, and throughout his life retained an interest both in rowing and in undergraduates which was very closely linked in his mind with his academic work. His numerous writings were in almost every case conceived and written with the student world in view.

It was this pastoral and human interest which led Streeter to be ordained in 1899, despite the fact that his faith had always something of the character of a quest. He was more than once attacked as a modernist, especially after his contribution to *Foundations* in 1912, but the obvious sincerity of his religion and its practical applicability to human problems were a sufficient answer, and the attacks were never pressed far. He was, indeed, a regular speaker and a most popular figure at Student Christian Movement conferences. This same interest in human movements of thought and the search for a vital answer to the problems of life led him to undertake lengthy visits abroad. He made two long tours in China and Japan, lecturing both there and in India, and he visited the United States of America several times. In his closing years, after he had become provost of Queen's and a scholar with a world-wide reputation, he joined, with Mrs. Streeter, in the work of the movement founded by Dr. Frank N. D. Buchman, widely known as the Oxford Group, and it was as he was returning by air from

¹ By permission of the Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Switzerland, where he had spent a long convalescence with some of its members, that his aeroplane crashed into a mountain near Basle in a fog, and he and his wife were killed, on 10 September 1937.

Streeter was one of the most distinguished New Testament scholars of his day, and a man beloved and respected by many generations of Oxford undergraduates, but apart from his Oxford life, few honours came his way, although he was a member for nearly fifteen years (1922-1937) of the Archbishop's Commission on Doctrine in the Church of England, and was also appointed to a canonry in Hereford Cathedral, which he held from 1915 to 1934 . . .

Probably Streeter's best work was that on the New Testament, which attracted world-wide attention. He came into the front rank of scholars with his essay in the *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem* (1911), and this was followed in 1924 by *The Four Gospels: a Study of Origins* which has become a standard and authoritative treatment of the problems of New Testament criticism . . .

Streeter's total literary output was considerable and its influence was very great among theological students and in university circles generally. But apart from the solid scholarship of *The Four Gospels* the main secret of that influence lay in his own personality with its great sincerity and its attractiveness to students of every type.

L. W. GRENSTED

*Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of
the Christian Religion, Oxford, 1930-50*

Prologue

ONCE UPON A TIME, the story goes, a country mouse was entangled by a town mouse in an argument to prove that there is no God. "But, dash it all," said the country mouse, "there must be a sort of a something." Quite apart from the Bible, great thinkers like Aristotle reached the belief in a great Unseen Reality to which could be given the name God.

The existence and character of God cannot be determined by the kind of reasoning by which we establish a historical fact or a scientific hypothesis. As fishes in the ocean, so are we in that all-embracing Reality in which "we live, and move, and have our being"; and life is an adjustment to that environment. This adjustment must begin long before our power of conscious reflection on it; and it must extend to depths of the personality which are commonly beyond the reach of such reflection. And only in proportion as there is in the seeker after truth a growing adjustment of the whole personality to that all-embracing ocean of Reality is his intellectual interpretation of it likely to be on right lines. Thus, if there is any reason at all for supposing that the "not-ourselves" is one "which makes for righteousness", it necessarily follows that the meaning of life will evade the search of anyone who, like Pontius Pilate, asks the question, What is truth? without the intention or the courage to face the moral demands of the immediate situation in the light of such truth as he already has. A sincere attempt to do the will of God will be a preliminary condition of "knowing of the teaching whether it is true". The way to a knowledge of God will be through a re-orientation of purpose and desire, and a constant re-dedication of the self to the highest that it knows.

If that be so, we should expect to find that, at a certain point of spiritual development, the personality will become sufficiently sensitive to the influence of the Divine to reach an awareness of God's will which may find expression through a voice within. It is a historical fact that the hearing of such a voice on certain

occasions by certain individuals, for example the prophets of the Old Testament, has made epochs in human history. With more ordinary men and women, on more ordinary occasions, a similar awareness may express itself in the urge of conscience or the conviction of divine guidance in the affairs of daily life.

Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

It is the aim of these lectures to show reason for the belief that, provided always certain conditions are fulfilled, this voice within ought to be regarded as an authentic communication from the Divine—dimmed, no doubt, and at times distorted by limitations in the mental and moral development of the individual and his age. The evidence for this contention is made progressively clearer by a historical study of that unique development of religion of which the Bible is our record, if this be taken in connection with, and illuminated by, certain phenomena exhibited in the lives of religious men through all the ages and in the present day.

The greatest need of mankind today—socially and individually—is a true sense of direction. Our world is like an Atlantic liner deprived of rudder, compass, sextant, charts, and wireless tackle, yet compelled to go full steam ahead. There is magnificence, comfort, pulsating power; but whither are we going? Does that depend solely on the accident of circumstance and the ever-changing balance of conflicting interests and ambitions? Or is there available for man, if he so will, guidance on his dark and dangerous course from some Wisdom higher than his own?

A study which may point the way to an answer to that question is one of more than academic interest.

I

God's plan

RELIGION will not again be potent in the life of Europe until the belief is revitalised that God has a purpose and a plan – not only for the world, but for every individual in it, and for the minutest details in the life of every individual.

The weakening in modern times of the belief that God has a plan is largely the result of a decline in the belief that God exists at all. This in turn has been due in the main to three things: the idea that Science can explain the Universe without the hypothesis of an intelligent creator; the greater urgency for the general mind of the problem of pain (in itself a sign of moral advance); and the acquiescence of the churches in a literal interpretation of traditional myths and symbols – especially in regard to the conception of a future life.

The idea that God has a plan, for the working out of which a man may become the willing instrument, comes to one like a flash of lightning in the dark. It gives an explanation of the chaos. There are, it is said, two thousand million inhabitants of this globe; so long as every one of these goes ahead on his or her own plan, or without any considered plan at all, is it surprising that the result is conflict and confusion? Rather, is it not remarkable that things are not worse confounded than they are? To account for the existing degree of order, progress, and good without postulating some guiding power, is a harder thing than to explain the disharmony and evil on the contrary hypothesis. For theism the great difficulty is the problem of evil, for atheism it is the problem of good.

FALLACIES OF THE IMAGINATION

Granted, however, that God has a purpose or plan for the world, it must be a plan for a world of free individual souls. That means that it requires the right response on the side of man. Such response demands, I suggest, two things: imagination and will. I stress

imagination; for the belief that God has a plan for which no individual life, and nothing which affects that life, is insignificant, demands not only intelligence but an intelligent use of the imagination.

To affirm that God exists, what is this but to say that we believe that the Universe is not the product of blind chance but is controlled by purpose? It is a contradiction in terms to say that God exists but has no plan. And to say that His plan can only contemplate the big outline and not also minor detail, is to reduce His intelligence to the scale of ours. It follows from the very nature of God, if there be a God at all, that He differs from man precisely in the fact that He can give attention to everything, everywhere, always, and all at once.

All thought or language which man can use of God must be inadequate, we can think and speak of Him only in metaphor. But that does not mean that we should speak as if the divine intelligence has less precision, and the divine purpose less intensity, than ours. On the contrary, we ought to select those metaphors which are least inadequate, that is, those which suggest the fullest and most concrete meaning. That is why we ought to speak of God as "personal". We cannot ascribe to Him personality with the limitations that belong to it in human experience; but to speak of God as "impersonal" is to picture His activity as if it were a purposeless energy like an electric current or were like the purblind life-force in a plant or the sub-rational consciousness of an animal.

The carrying out of a plan or purpose depends on detail as much as on general design; it is only human limitations which so often make it impossible to attend to both. God, then, must have a plan — not only for the Universe or for this planet, but also for each nation, each city, every business, every family, every individual. It is not necessarily a static and wholly inelastic plan, as the classical doctrine of Predestination would suggest; it may well be one which, like the plan of a general staff, is not only capable of, but is designed for, modification as the course of the battle develops. But we must affirm that the Divine Intelligence cannot be content with something less full of purpose and precision than what a human general or statesman would call a "plan".

FREEDOM

Once we realise this, it becomes self-evident that the only sensible course for the individual is to ask what is God's plan for him, and then endeavour to carry out that plan. For if we can discern anything of God's plan for us, common sense demands that we give ourselves entirely to it.

At first sight the suggestion that a man should make a complete surrender – I would prefer the word dedication – of his will to God, sounds like an invitation to throw away that essential freedom and spontaneity which constitutes the fine essence of human personality. But this is yet another fallacy of the imagination. Admittedly, to make a complete surrender of one's will to any fellow human being is a renunciation of liberty; but God is not another human being. He is the all-pervading Reality; "in Him", as Paul says, "we live, and move, and have our being". And it is the testimony of great souls in the past, and present, who have tried the way of surrendering their will to Him that His "service is perfect freedom"¹ and that "in His will is our peace".

In life as actually experienced examples may be found of a self-surrender which is at the same time the highest form of self-realisation. The members of an orchestra renounce nothing of their liberty when they take the lead from the conductor. Indeed, the greater the conductor the higher is the degree of spontaneity evoked by him; and the more completely each performer surrenders himself to the conductor's lead, the more completely does he realise, and know that he is realising, his own individual potentialities and powers. Hence the ovation sometimes given by an orchestra to its leader at the end of a great piece greatly rendered.

God being God, and His plan being my highest good, it is not slavery but liberty to conform my will to His.

HOW KNOW THE PLAN?

At this point someone will say, how am I to know God's plan? There is no need, I would reply, to know the whole of God's plan. All I need to know is His plan for *me*. Nor do I need to

¹ Cf. Augustine's *Deus, quem nosse vivere, cui servire regnare est.*

know the details of that plan for my whole future, or even for a year ahead. It is enough to know it day by day. Christ taught us to pray day by day for bread; why should it be otherwise with spiritual needs? It was not an infant in the intellectual or religious life who wrote the words :

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

But, it will be asked, how am I to know even this much? All of us, surely, have such knowledge in the negative sense. We all know at least one thing in our lives which is *not* right; and what is meant by wrong, or sin, except thought or action which is contrary to God's will, that is, to God's plan for us. Until and unless he has straightened out that wrong, it is profitless to ask what may be the next item in God's plan for him. If, however, we are ready to conform to God's plan in this one respect in which we know it; if we are ready to confess and to make restitution for the wrong of which we are aware, then experience shows that the "still small voice" of "the Beyond that is within" will tell us the next thing that God wishes us to do. It may be to right some other wrong; it may be to do some positive piece of service; it may be a "happy thought" in regard to some work or project; it may be an untried approach in some personal relationship; it may be a flash of insight into new truth. But so long as we decline to obey God where we do know His will, so long as we refuse to take the first step, it is unreasonable to expect God to show us the next. Nor, if He did, would it do us any good.

God's plan assuredly aims at harmony, not chaos; and in human affairs self-centredness, dishonesty, rancour, and the like inevitably produce chaos. Knowledge of God's plan must, therefore, be ethically conditioned. Thus there is an inner coherence between the conception of God's plan and the two convictions – that conscience is "the voice of God", and that certain intuitions, which come to the individual with an imperative quality, may be interpreted as "divine guidance". Certainly, no individual can claim infallibility either for the dictates of his own conscience or for his own conviction of guidance; to do that would be to dis-

regard, not only the frailty of human nature and its capacity for self-deception, but also the limitation of the individual mind by the social environment in which it has been formed. Nevertheless, without some such communication – however limited by human infirmities – between the human and the divine, it is hard to see how God could direct and educate a world of free and conscious souls.

But for such direction and education something more is requisite. There must be some standard of reference, some criterion of value, whereby to check the vagaries of individual conscience or intuition, and also to provide a stimulus to progress sufficient to overcome the relativity of the moral insight of the individual, even at his best, to that of his time and race. It would seem, then, that it must also be part of God's plan to "raise up" from time to time individuals of exceptional insight, whose words or actions may serve to provide more ordinary persons both with a criterion of value and a stimulus to progress.

Set as we are "in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our natures we cannot always stand upright", mere knowledge of God's plan is not enough. We lack the will to act upon that knowledge, we lack the power. Here, too, the prophet has a vision: human nature can and will – by God's gracious touch – be changed.

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: (Ezek. xxxvi. 26).

There is an organic interrelation between belief in a Divine Plan and the conceptions of conscience, guidance, inspiration, and what theologians call "grace".

Congruous with these conceptions – forming, indeed, a climax to them – is a belief about which something will be said in a later lecture. I mean the belief that the Divine Plan has involved a supreme self-revelation at an appointed moment in history – that once in time God was in man made manifest.¹

¹ Some of the philosophical questions involved in this conception are discussed in my Essay "Finality in Religion" in *Adventure*, ed. by B. H. Streeter. (Macmillan, 1927.)

There remains to consider the necessary interrelation between the idea of God's Plan and the view we entertain as to the nature and function of prayer.

The Lord's Prayer should be interpreted, not as a fixed form of words, but rather as an outline indicating a series of mental attitudes in which God should be approached by man. Man, it teaches, should begin by lifting up the heart and mind to God in adoration: "Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name". From a heart so uplifted there will naturally flow the desire that God's kingdom should come, that the will of such a Being – God's plan, I have called it – should be realised on earth. Then follows, in trustful mood, the mention before our heavenly Father of the individual's material and spiritual needs: bread, forgiveness, deliverance from trial and hurt.

It would seem, then, to accord well with Christ's teaching that, whenever possible, we should begin the day by attuning the soul to the contemplation of the Divine (by some act of aspiration, or by the reading of scripture or other noble words) and should then, before offering any petitions of personal needs, wait in silence – listening, if haply the inner voice should bring some guidance, some indication of the part in God's plan which the worshipper may be called upon to play that day. Often to those who listen so there comes a thought or word, clear and definite, pointing to action. But if no such come, it matters little. The mind has been attuned to the Divine, and therefore is the more likely to react aright to the situations, unexpected and unforeseen, which every day brings forth.

Thus saith the Lord

CREATIVE VISION

WHENCE CAME TO MAN the apprehension of a God who plans a Universe, yet without whom "not one sparrow falleth to the ground" – a God towards whom the lifting up of the heart taught us in the Lord's Prayer is the natural human approach? Such an apprehension is supra-rational; that is, it springs, not from unreason, but from an intuition which soars beyond and above anything that the intellect by any purely analytic operation can discern. It came, and comes, in a mode akin rather to the artist's vision than to the scientist's demonstration.

Yet there is resemblance as well as distinction between the way of science and the way of art. In science the flash of discovery, the first glimpse of an hypothesis, has close analogies to what in art and religion we speak of as inspiration. The advance of science demands something more and other than the power of accurate observation, acute analysis, and logical demonstration; there must be also the synthetic imagination which leaps out to meet the facts observed with the creative insight which can detect in their multiplicity or confusion meaning and coherence. Some scientists possess, others lack, this faculty; the great discoverer, like the poet, is not made but born. Where science differs from art is in the importance it attaches to the testing of that which imagination has discerned. Elaborate verification may be required to prove a hypothesis right; but it is creative vision that provides the theory which reasoning has to test.¹ Religion also, inasmuch as it issues in action, is continually putting its hypothesis to the test of experiment.

¹ The function, and the psychological conditions, of the flash of inspiration in science are elaborated, with illustrations from the circumstances of his own more notable discoveries, by the great mathematician H. Poincaré in *Science et méthode* (English translation by F. Maitland). (Nelson.) See also Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life*, ch. iii (Constable.)

O, taste and see that the Lord is good :
 Blessed is the man that trusteth in him (Ps. xxxiv. 8).

But here the things to be done are not selected for the sake of verifying the hypothesis, but because they are held to be right.

PROPHETS AND SEERS

In the field of religion the creative vision appears most conspicuously in a class of persons to whom is given the name Prophet.

Two features – initiative in the name of the Lord, and the emphatic association of the divine will with the demand for righteousness – are found in combination in the more famous prophets, Moses and Elijah.

Elijah (c. 870 B.C.) was the forerunner of the prophets whose works survive in writing. The main significance of his career is that he awakened (or re-awakened) his people to the imperative "Thou shalt have none other gods but me". The stand made by Elijah for the principle that Jehovah will not tolerate any rival worship marks a turning-point in the history of religion, or – to phrase it in a way which I suggest is truer – in the unfolding of God's plan to men.

And, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice (1 Kings xix. 9–12).

In this tremendous scene are brought together, and then assessed, the titanic forces of Nature and the voice within. Both are of God; but God speaks to man, not in the tornado, the earthquake, or in the lightning-flash, but by the still small voice. And that voice bids to act.

AMOS TO ISAIAH

The work of Elijah prepared the way for the great advance by Amos and his younger contemporary Hosea (c. 760–745 B.C.), and of Isaiah and Micah who followed later in the same century.

The response of Micah sums up the message of his three great predecessors :

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah vi. 8).

The originality of the reform movement inaugurated by Amos and Hosea becomes even more clear when we realise that they anticipated by some two hundred years the outbreak of a world-wide protest against the futilities and immoralities of what men then called religion. Confucius in China, the Buddha in India, Xenophanes in Ionia, simultaneously voice this protest each in his own characteristic way; but they agree in doing this, not in the name of religion, but of reason. In China, in India, and in the Greek world it was by philosophy that the trivialities and worse of contemporary religion were challenged; in Palestine – and that two centuries earlier – the challenge came from religion itself. On that challenge religion was reborn.

Amos and his immediate successors, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, made ethics central in religion.

FURTHER HEIGHTS

The insistence on the centrality of ethics to religion prepared the way for the recognition of religion as an individual as well as a social matter. It is in Jeremiah that this recognition becomes

explicit. In his writings there appears in a developed form that attitude of man to God which we commonly speak of as "personal religion".

"Isaiah of the Exile" gathers up into one grand climax the gains of the prophets who came before him. Not only that, he is more completely and consciously an absolute monotheist; he conceives God on a larger scale.

This proclamation of the transcendent majesty of God is accompanied by an insistence, which goes beyond Hosea's, on the divine tenderness :

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that give suck (Is. xl. 11).

And in his sense of religion as an inspiration and a stay to the individual. Second Isaiah goes beyond Jeremiah :

He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall : but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with the wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint (Is. xl. 29-31).

The prophets teach an unconquerable hope. Their hope derives from belief in divine purpose; the Hebrew is upheld by the conception of God's plan.

God's purpose may entail judgment; but its aim is restoration – and more than restoration. And those whom God has chosen to be instruments of His purpose may count on His support.

I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. (Is. xli. 10).

THE MESSIANIC HOPE

Sometimes a prophet looks far beyond the limits of Israel. A

passage in Zechariah, which is fortunately dated – the fourth year of Darius (= 518 B.C.) – is of special interest. Palestine was then an insignificant province of the world-empire of Persia; a few exiles had been allowed to return from Mesopotamia; but the impoverished struggling community had not yet rebuilt the ruined temple. Given this background, the forecast that some day the worship of the God of Israel would become a world religion is indeed remarkable: (Zech. viii. 20–23).

The conviction that history moves towards a glorious goal, defined and over-ruled by God, is the burden of a series of marvellous poems to which the name “Messianic” has been given.¹

There is one poem which influenced profoundly the thought of the first generation of Christians and probably that of Christ himself. It limns out what we may call “a philosophy of martyrdom” – the inner principle of that self-offering for the work of God of which centuries later the life of the historic Jesus was to be the perfect expression.

He was despised, and rejected of men; . . . he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Is. liii. 3–6, 10–12).

Jerusalem was in ruins; the daily sacrifice remained unoffered. Humiliation and suffering was the lot of any Jew in Babylon whose life was a continuous testimony in the surrounding paganism of faithful service to the Lord. Suddenly there comes to the prophet the understanding that this kind of life is the offering of the daily sacrifice – only lifted to a higher plane. Such service is always sacrifice; and when the service is absolute, the sacrifice is perfect. A vision of the worth of complete self-offering has flashed upon the prophet’s mind. The artist, the poet, and the prophet are alike in this: in moments of high inspiration they are possessed by an exaltation, an intuition, an imagination which bodies forth “the forms of things unknown”, and out of the immediate and the

¹ Cf. esp. Is. ii. 2–4 (= Mic. iv 1–4); Is. xi, xix. 23–25, xxxii. 1–8, xxxv; Jer. xxiii. 5–8.

actual creates something which is the expression of an eternal insight, something which has depths of meaning of which they themselves are only dimly aware.

WHENCE CAME THE MESSAGE?

What ruling motive, what aspiration, what inspiration, lies behind this line of prophets? Whence did they derive their message?

Their own answer is not in doubt :

The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy? (Amos iii. 8).

The prophet's message is not something of his own discovery; he speaks what he has been commanded to speak. It is not some brilliant idea which will win fame for him who proclaims it, or will bring success to his country. Isaiah is told at the very beginning that his efforts will rather make things worse. (Is. vi. 9-10).

The Hebrew prophets are not the spokesmen of tradition, they are the leaders in a revolution. But the revolution they look for is not one which either expresses, or will satisfy, a popular demand. They would save men in spite of, and against, their own desire.

Jeremiah spends a lifetime of lonely struggle, enduring hatred, persecution, imprisonment, and constant peril of death - fighting always a losing battle against the spirit of the age.

Ezekiel is told that his task will require, and that therefore there will be given to him, a more than human degree of courage and persistence. Religion to him is not that which calls to some far-off land of mystic dreams, or which beckons the life-weary (as in Freud's conception) to return to the deep peace of pre-natal slumber. It is at one and the same time a summons to battle and an arming for the fight.

God, so far as we can see, operates in accordance with large uniformities that we name the laws of Nature, which include the laws of psychology so far as such exist.¹ Suppose, then, He does at

¹ Certain psychological analogies which throw light on the form of prophetic inspiration are discussed in the appendix, "Dream Psychology and the Mystic Vision", to my book *Reality*.

times act in some special way upon the consciousness of any individual, we should expect this action, not to supersede, but to stimulate his highest powers, and to result in an enhancement of his profoundest insights. At such moments the individual might rise far above the level at which ordinarily either he or his contemporaries live and think. We should *not* expect him always or entirely to transcend the limiting conditions – historical, psychological, or even ethical – of his time, his race, or his personal idiosyncrasy. Indeed, the more the fact of such limitation is stressed, the more remarkable appear the heights to which at their best and greatest – and they are not always at their best and greatest – the Hebrew prophets soar. Like Paul, they would have admitted – rather they would have shouted it aloud – “We have this treasure in earthen vessels”. What is not disputable is that, whencesoever derived, the treasure is of exceeding great price. It is not unworthy of the high source from which, in their belief, it came.

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good.

Three reflections

FIRST, IT IS REMARKABLE how much of the Old Testament consists of poetry or of stories biographical in character imaginatively visualised and dramatically related. This is no accident. Religion resembles science in that it purports to be an apprehension of truth; but it is an aspect of truth which must be apprehended qualitatively rather than quantitatively. Its concern is with quality of life – a life which emanates from the Divine, but in which man is capable of participating if only he will dispose mind and heart aright to receive what is freely offered him. The love of God to man, and the answering trust and adoration of man to God, are not things which can be weighed, measured, or represented in schematic form by the concepts with which science operates. If, therefore, truth in religion is to be conveyed from mind to mind, means must be found capable of conveying, in all its subtly diverse forms, the quality of a life intensely lived. This can only be done by well-known stories taken direct from life, and by what we call “art forms”, such as the myth, the parable, the drama, and the hymn.

My second general reflection arises from the fact that more than half of the Old Testament was actually composed subsequently to the fall of Jerusalem, and that all the older writings included in it were collected, arranged and edited after that date. Taken broadly, therefore, the Old Testament may be regarded as the literary deposit of the spiritual revolution inspired by the prophets.

The third reflection which is suggested by our survey is this. Throughout the Old Testament the course of history is thought of as directed by the guiding hand of God, but in such a way that full room is allowed for freedom and moral responsibility on the part of man. The divine plan is not conceived as mechanically rigid, but as in some sort contingent on man's response.

It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which

I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin (Jer. xxxvi. 3).

The divine plan is seen as a high and consistent purpose, a summons and an education of individuals and nation alike to be its instrument, a call to a fellowship in work between God and man. By the many there has been rejection of that call, by the few acceptance.

And the Lord hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear (Jer. xxv. 4).

That rejection has brought disaster upon them and sorrow to God : (Is. lxiii. 8-10). Nevertheless there still abides the promise, the call, and the responsibility for right decision : (Malachi iii. 1-2, 6).

On God's unchangingness depends man's hope :

Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. (Is. xliii. 1).

So again Zechariah (ix. 12) :

Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope.

Christ and His interpreters

THE NEW TESTAMENT

JESUS THE CHRIST

JESUS, LIKE THE PROPHETS, spoke with authority and not as the scribes—with a significant difference. For the words “Thus saith the Lord”, he substitutes “I say unto you”. He speaks not only as prophet but also as Messiah; that is, as holder of an office of absolute eminence. And he summons man to an absolute ideal.¹

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies . . . (Matt. v. 43-44).

For him God is absolute love; that is why he speaks of Him as Father, not as King or Judge. And to the Old Testament title “Shepherd of Israel”, he gives a new interpretation :

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (Luke xv. 4-7).

Christ made possible an attitude which we may call “friendship” between God and man; in a sense he brought God down from heaven to earth. Christ also said :

¹ For an aspect of Christ’s teaching not touched on in this lecture, I may refer to my essay “Christ the Constructive Revolutionary” in *The Spirit*. (Macmillan, 1919.)

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. vii. 21).

Entrance to that kingdom is by the narrow way of costly moral decision :

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. vii. 14).

THE SPIRIT AND THE SON OF MAN

The New Testament is comparable to an ellipse, which has two foci, rather than to a circle which centres round a single point. This fact is obscured to the ordinary reader by the sheer moral splendour of the Gospel portrait of the Christ. To understand the rise of Christianity we must fix our attention, not only on the personality and teaching of the historic Jesus, but also on the experience spoken of by his followers as the outpouring of the Spirit, which began on the day of Pentecost next following the Crucifixion. One result of this, as I shall show in my next lecture, was the conviction that the Spirit of God had again raised up prophets to speak directly to His people. Only against the background of this conviction can we understand the Epistles and other documents which together make up what we call the New Testament.

But this Spirit is spoken of – indifferently it would seem – as “the spirit of God”, “the spirit of Jesus”, or simply as “Christ” or “the Lord”. How was it possible for Jews, fanatically monotheistic in training and outlook, to feel and speak of Christ in such a way?

The outstanding characteristic of the teaching of Jesus is the way in which it pierces at once through outward forms to inward meaning, through the letter to the spirit; almost every sentence of the Sermon on the Mount could be quoted in illustration of this.

I suggest that Jesus accepted and reaffirmed certain of the great ideas – such as Judgment and Eternal Life – which were the fresh contribution made by apocalyptic to Jewish religion, but recognised the forms in which these ideas were expressed as in the main

symbolical. As all his sayings show, the concrete picture-thinking of the poet was more native to his mind than the conceptual abstractions of philosophy. For him the coming of the indwelling Spirit, whom he calls the Comforter, is the real – or at least the main – fulfilment of the expectation of Christ's Return.

THE APOSTLE PAUL

Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all date their mission from a vision or audition which came to them with the compulsive character of a divine call. The Apostle Paul had a similar experience, only in his case it was more than a call – it was a conversion. Amos was taken from following the flock; Paul heard the voice from heaven, "Why persecutest thou me?" when journeying to Damascus to stamp out Christianity there by force. This event is described three times in the Acts – twice in speeches of the Apostle. We may perhaps infer that Paul, like others who have had a sudden conversion, was in the habit of recounting its circumstances as a means of helping others to a similar experience.

Whereas to Jeremiah his authentication is "The word of the Lord came unto me", for Paul it is that his message came not from man but "through revelation of Jesus Christ". There is another difference, that implicit in the notable phrase "to reveal his Son in me". Its meaning is more clearly brought out in a passage which occurs a little later in the same epistle :

I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me (Gal. ii. 20).

Paul has undergone a revolutionary internal change, which he explains as the result of the indwelling of a living spirit – divine and identical with the risen Jesus. What Paul knew was a glorious liberation from the oppression of guilt and fear, from bitterness and inward conflict; and along with this an enhancement of vitality which was a new thing in recorded human experience.

Upheld by intense inward experience, Paul seems to have felt

no need to think out an intellectually water-tight philosophical theory of the relation of Christ to the supreme and only God. Christ is the "power of God"; he is also the "portrait" of God.

The power of God that works through Christ is made effective primarily by the Cross.

The Cross of Christ was for Paul the annulment, not merely of the Jewish Law, but also of the philosophy of the Greek. In an age callous to human suffering the connotation of the word "cross" was disgrace even more than pain.¹ To hail as king a crucified Messiah, and to be an outcast from his own race among the kind of people who could so behave, was to Paul – whether as Roman or as Jew – the supreme humiliation. But the cross was God's way; and it was Paul's own experience that the complete acceptance of this humiliation was the gateway to that liberation for which before he had longed in vain, and to an access of power for which he had never even hoped.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

The letters of Paul have provided raw material for the theologies of all later writers; but he was in no sense himself a "systematic theologian". The first Christian whom we could possibly so name is the author of the epistle to the Hebrews – and he is first of all a preacher. In his grand exordium he outlines a theology of God's Plan :

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son. (Heb. i. 1-2).

THE WRITINGS OF JOHN

John too, as we shall see, was a prophet; indeed, for any theory of the nature of inspiration his work is the culminating peak in the development of the New Testament.

¹ The author of Hebrews shares this view. Cf. "endured the cross, despising shame" (Heb. xii. 2); "let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Heb. xiii. 13).

The "Word became flesh", that is, the Divine expressed itself in man. Was it, we ask, a misinterpretation of historic facts, or was it supreme insight into their meaning, that made John write this?

The distinction drawn by John between God and the Word of God is analogous to that which a modern thinker might draw between the transcendence and the immanence of God. It is only of the latter – of the indwelling Divine – that he conceives Christ to be an absolute expression. Nor does his thought entirely isolate the humanity of Christ from that of other men; for to these also, he affirms, there is given through Christ "power to become the sons of God" (John i. 12).

John is quite aware that his interpretation of the person and work of Christ goes beyond anything which the first disciples had apprehended; he believes that it goes further and goes deeper. And the reason why he is convinced that his interpretation is more profound, and therefore more true, is that it has gradually come to inspired prophets like Paul, to the Christian community at large, and to himself, by the operation of that indwelling Divine Spirit which is both the spirit of the risen Christ and of God Himself.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all the truth. . . . He shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you (John xvi. 12-14).

The conviction that, in Jesus, God was in man made manifest, is here unhesitatingly ascribed to the illumination of the mind of the community by the Spirit, that is, through a series of "prophets" – like Paul, the author of Hebrews, or himself.

Behind all John's thinking, making itself felt in every word he writes, is an intense conviction of a spiritual presence. This experience, visualised at Pentecost as tongues of fire, had resulted in the spontaneous formation of a brotherhood, pulsating with overflowing energy, courage, love, joy, peace – interpreted as the indwelling, in group and individual, of a Spirit which was at once that of God and of the risen Christ. In this spiritual return of

Christ and his continuous presence as Indwelling Spirit and Comforter, John sees the true fulfilment of the expectation expressed in the earlier Gospels and Epistles of Christ's visible return on the clouds of glory in the Apocalyptic symbol.

We gravely misconceive the purpose of this Gospel if we persist in treating it as biography; it is concerned not so much to recount facts as to suggest an interpretation of them.

It is all too easy, at any rate for students of theology like myself, to allow preoccupation with the philosophical and historical questions raised in and by the Fourth Gospel to distract attention from its practical and religious aim – "that believing ye may have life in his name".

Lord and Giver of Life

THE CONCEPTION OF GOD

THE NEW TESTAMENT conception of God is a permanent advance on that reached in the Old as a result, not only of the actual teaching of Jesus, but also of two other facts. First, the disciples believed that the gracious Jesus, whom they had known on earth, was now "sitting on the right hand of God", in some sense, that is, sharing God's throne. Secondly, they had personally experienced an inward revolution which began at Pentecost. From that day onwards they felt themselves, both as a community and as individuals, to be possessed by a spiritual power or presence. This they described indifferently as "the Holy Spirit", as "the spirit of God", as "the spirit of Jesus", or simply as "Christ", in unseen contact with them. God is still thought of as transcendent, as the Creator and the Ruler; but so far as His contact with man is concerned, God is visualised in the likeness of Jesus Christ and is also directly experienced as indwelling Spirit. Thus God has, so to speak, come down from heaven and is permanently tabernacled among men. "For we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them and walk in them" (2 Cor. vi. 16; cf. 1 Cor. vi. 19).

The significance of Pentecost marked the welding together of the disciples into a *fellowship* of a quality entirely unprecedented. This quality was explained by the early Christians as being due to their interpenetration by the spirit of Jesus. "The Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. iii. 17).

Not argument, but fact, says Paul; not persuasion but power from God. It is clear that things happened to people as a result of this experience. The phenomena which accompanied it were (and are) of a character sufficiently conspicuous to admit of verification by an outside observer. So again, writing to the Galatians (iii. 2), Paul speaks as if to "receive the Spirit" was a

thing as capable of objective verification as the catching of a disease. It was capable of such verification, for the reason that it normally resulted in a revolution in a man's life and a fundamental change in his character.

If any man is in Christ he is a new creature; the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new (2 Cor. v. 17).

"Ye shall receive power" (Acts i. 8); and the outward evidence of this, "the fruit of the Spirit", is predominantly "love, joy, peace" (Gal. v. 22).

THE NEW PROPHECY

A feature in the life of this fellowship which demands particular attention is the revival within it of prophecy – but in an altered form. One consequence of the growing emphasis in later Judaism on the idea of divine transcendence was that misdirected reverence which makes it seem unworthy of God to reveal Himself to the puny men of the present day as He had to the great men of an heroic past. But owing to that bringing down of God from heaven to earth of which I have just spoken, the early Christians, unlike the Jews, found it possible to believe that contemporaries could be vehicles of a divine message.

DIVINE GUIDANCE

The conviction that the individual can, through the Spirit of God, obtain guidance and direction for the conduct of everyday affairs is another characteristic of primitive Christianity, which is foreshadowed – and more than foreshadowed – in the Old Testament.

Jeremiah looks forward to the time when right conduct will no longer depend on knowledge of an external law in which the common people need to be instructed, but on the direct moral and religious experience of the individual : (Jer. xxxi. 33-34).

Similarly there is a passage in Isaiah which looks forward to a time when divine direction in practical affairs will not long be imparted to the people only through specially qualified prophets, but when God will speak directly by an inward voice to every faithful individual.

Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it; when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left (Is. xxx. 20-21, R.V. marg.).

So often, an idea first struck out by one of the great Prophets becomes later on to a Psalmist an abiding religious possession :

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go :

I will counsel thee with mine eyes upon thee.

Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding :

Whose trappings must be bit and bridle to hold them in.

(Ps. xxxii. 8-9)

It had always been believed that an inward voice, by which divine guidance is given, spoke to exceptional individuals like Abraham or Samuel at turning-points of their career; but here we find the conviction that this guiding voice speaks to any individual who conforms to the pre-condition, set out in a previous verse :

I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid :

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord;

And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

(Ps. xxxii. 5)

The thought is repeated elsewhere :

Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning;

For in thee do I trust :

Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk :

For I lift up my soul unto thee.

(Ps. cxlii. 8)

Nevertheless I am continually with thee :

Thou hast holden me by my right hand.

Thou shall guide me with thy counsel,
And afterward receive me to glory.

(Ps. lxxiii. 23-24)

In the New Testament the realisation of the Divine as an indwelling Spirit conceived in terms of Christ results in this guidance by an inward voice being taken as a matter of course. When Philip sees the Ethiopian in his chariot, the Spirit says to him: "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot" (Acts viii. 29). Paul's journeys are similarly "guided":

And as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, went down to Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus (Acts xiii. 2-4).

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Ghost to speak the word in Asia; and when they were come over against Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia; and the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not (Acts xvi. 6-7).

Paul purposed in the spirit . . . to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome (Acts xix. 21).

Then after the space of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also with me. And I went up by revelation (Gal. ii. 1-2a).

Sometimes, as in the case of the visit of Ananias to Paul (Acts ix. 10 ff.), and Cornelius' sending to Peter and Peter's response, divine guidance is given to get into connection with some person who is both absent and unknown.

This belief in guidance must be viewed in relation to the general problem of the intuitional element in ethics. Indeed the distinction

between conscience and guidance has been not inaptly stated thus : Conscience tells you the difference between right and wrong; but guidance tells you which you ought to do of two things which are both right.

There are four conceptions which, though up to a point different, are yet so related to one another that no hard and fast line can be drawn between them. First, there is the "Thus saith the Lord" of the prophets of the Old Testament; secondly, there is the high inspiration which expresses itself alike in the language and in the actions of a religious giant like Paul; thirdly, there is the belief that there is such a thing as divine guidance in everyday life possessed not only by persons like Paul but also by many quite average religious men and women; fourthly, there is the deep-rooted conviction that somehow or other conscience does speak with an authority which makes it at least intelligible to name it "the voice of God". These four conceptions are different; but they shade off into one another. And they do so in such a way that, if in regard to any one of them we raise the question of its validity, we shall find that we have raised a question which concerns the validity of the other three.

I have already indicated the importance of relating the conceptions of conscience, guidance and inspiration, not only to one another, but to the idea of God's plan. Unless this relation be kept in mind we shall inevitably think of guidance and inspiration, if not also of the operation of conscience, as arbitrary and spasmodic. And unless we believe that God has normal modes by which to make known His plan to men, the conception of divine purpose will become for us religiously and morally sterile; for to obey commands we must be able to hear them.

TESTS OF GUIDANCE AND INSPIRATION

The Bible itself is a monument of the principle that the validity of individual intuitions must be checked by the conscience and insight of the religious community. Clearly, then, the individual's conviction of guidance or the dictates of his conscience cannot be accepted forthwith as the authentic voice of God without some similar testing and sifting process.

One criterion of inspiration is found in the moral content of the message given. An easy-going religion is unlikely to be true.

A second is the ethical quality of the life of the reputed prophet. Wickedness separates from God; therefore, an evil character cannot be a vehicle of a divine communication.

A third criterion is one which cannot be applied by any outside judge; its value is for the prophet himself, to whom the assurance of divine commission gives courage to face the inevitable opposition which his message will arouse. A genuine "word" of the Lord authenticates itself in the mind of the prophet as something different in kind from a fancy or a dream.

The necessity of finding criteria of the genuineness or relative value of "spiritual gifts" was forced upon the consideration of the Apostle Paul by difficulties that had arisen in the church of Corinth. Paul knows that the clarity with which a message from the Divine is received must vary with the moral quality of the receiver. Nor did he ever suppose that his own contact with the spirit of Christ was of a kind that rendered him infallible. Yet again, Paul recognises that the indwelling of the Spirit in the Church as a whole is compatible with the inclusion of a large number of people whom conversion may have set on the right road, but who had not travelled far along it. Nearly every letter of his insists with considerable elaboration on the obligations of ordinary morality and kindness in human relations; these exhortations would not have been given unless among converted persons there were not a few who needed them.

His first test (1 Cor. xii-xiv) for deciding the relative value – and therefore in effect also the validity – of spiritual gifts is briefly this: That gift is the highest which most conduces to the common good. Among spiritual gifts the primacy belongs to love.

In Paul's treatment of the subject, however, we may detect a second criterion which is not far from being an appeal to reason and common sense. The action of the Spirit is seen, not in a superseding of reason or of the moral sense, but in an enhancement and intensification of these which enables them to function with greater accuracy and refinement. Again, allowance is made for the fact that egoism or self-interest may impair the judgment of the individual. Both the right and the duty of the fellowship to exercise

its judgment on the claim of any individual to have a word from the Lord is emphasised in an earlier letter : (1 Thess. v. 20 ff.).

There is a final criterion :

By their fruits ye shall know them.

THE WAY OF LIFE

Wherever there is life there is danger; but the danger of rejecting the call of God, and so lacking the guidance of His spirit, is far graver than that of being occasionally self-deceived. Life is action; and we have to choose whether or no we will habitually act with or without that spirit. And it is in action that we find it; only when the ship is in motion does the helm guide. Even self-deception, the last stronghold of the enemy, will lose its power in proportion as the individual conforms to certain conditions which must be fulfilled to qualify him for the reception of an authentic message from the Divine – whether at the level of the epoch-creating prophet or of the simple person rightly guided on the path of everyday duty.

These are mainly four :

- (1) "I would fain be to the Eternal Goodness what his own right hand is to a man." Absolute devotion or surrender of the self to the Divine. "Here am I, send me", says Isaiah; and when Christ addressed to his earliest followers the words, "Follow me", we are told that they left all and followed him.
- (2) Self-knowledge, and the consequent admission of failure. The promise, "I will guide thee with mine eye", in the Psalm quoted above, is given to the man who has confessed his iniquity and thereby established a right relationship with God. The first response of Isaiah to the divine call was that flash of self-knowledge which brings home to a man a conviction of unworthiness and sin; "I am a man of unclean lips". In the primitive Church, an initial confession of sins is assumed as an invariable condition of entrance to it.
- (3) "Tarry ye . . . until ye be clothed with power from on high" (Luke xxiv. 49). But this life of power, a power instinct with love and joy and peace, can only with difficulty be lived continuously

except in a fellowship, within which mutual challenge, mutual encouragement, and mutual confession of failure are easy: (Col. iii. 16), (James v. 16).

(4) Entrance into such a life and such a fellowship involves some measure of suffering, sacrifice, or humiliation. "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 27). It is perhaps not an accident that already in the Old Testament the promise, "Thine eyes shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it", is preceded by the words, "and though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction". To Paul, as was pointed out in the last lecture, the distinctive associations of the word "the cross of Christ" would be those of humiliation even more than suffering. The most fundamental difference between the Christian and the Confucian or Stoic is their attitude toward humiliation. The follower of Christ knows that it is unimportant "to save his face". He must be ready to own up to a moral lapse; though to do this before any fellow human being is acutely humiliating. He must be willing to apologise frankly to a person whom he has injured, and to make restitution for wrong done, though these may be extremely costly to pride or purse. Here a distinction of great importance must be made. Few things are more demoralising than humiliation, loss, or pain, if and when these are inflicted from without and are responded to with resentment; but freely accepted, as the price of following the highest, they become a self-indentification with the Cross of Christ. Resurrection follows that crucifixion. That is why Paul speaks of Christians as having been buried with Christ unto death, "that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life" (Rom. vi. 4). The actual result, he means, of this kind of self-indentification with the Cross of Christ is liberation from the bondage of inward fears and conflicts and, in face of the world, new hope, new courage, and new power.

"Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way." Those who have entered in thereby tell us that we may expect another prize—a new conviction that God exists and a new understanding of His will, as well as new strength and happiness in His free service.

If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God (John vii. 17).

The truth of this is a thing which can be tested by experiment; and it can be tested in no other way. It is by getting into water that you prove the practicability of swimming – and its joy.

To the rescue of reason

AN AGE OF UNREASON

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY thought of itself as the age of Reason, the last half of the nineteenth as the age of Reasonableness. The present is coming near to being the age of Unreason.

The result of disasters on the scale of a world war is merely further to incapacitate the race for sane thought and sane action; and also to weaken further the basis of accepted moral values on which alone a healthy reconstruction of political and economic life is possible.

RELIGION AS LIBERATION

There was a time when the champions of the freedom of thought, without which the pretence of reasoning is a futile sham, had to fight against religion – or rather against champions of religion who confused its essence with traditional views of history or theological definition. Today bad times are ahead for Reason and for Liberty – unless, indeed, they can summon Religion to the rescue.

Religion can overcome the ego-centricity of man – by inviting him to become the willing instrument of an Eternal Purpose, and then by giving him the insight and the power to be this. So long as a man's hopes, desires, and fears are primarily ego-centric, it is impossible for him to take an objective view, not merely of the comparative rightness of different lines of conduct, but even of their practicability. For the capacity of weighing evidence and estimating probabilities is conditioned by the degree to which a man has achieved the disinterestedness which at least desires to see things as an impartial intelligence would view them. The first condition of the attainment of knowledge is a disinterested passion for truth. But what is truth, except the power to see things as an undistorted and all-informed intelligence would see them? And

that means as God sees them. The ego-centric man is necessarily purblind.

No doubt, the extent to which the influence of desire can distort the findings of the intellect varies considerably with the material with which at any given time the intellect is attempting to deal. It is unimportant in a science like chemistry, where everything can be weighed and measured. Though even here it has happened that personal antipathy (whether conscious or unconscious) to a rival expert has delayed the acceptance by a particular professor of the truth of some new discovery; but, when the evidence is reasonably cogent, it will do no more than delay his acceptance. But in all international, political, and social questions, and indeed, wherever personal interests or emotions are involved, the bondage of the intellect to desire is obvious. And psychology has shewn that unconscious desires can be more misleading than conscious – for even a person who in all sincerity wishes to be impartial may be ensnared by these.

Unless it can be shewn that no form of religion whatever can be either reasonable or true, the fact that some people – for reasons that are psychologically explicable – misconceive the nature of God no more disproves His existence than the fact that some people have a neurotic dread of mice proves that these are exceptionally formidable creatures.

A famous pupil of Freud's once said to me that he (the pupil) had from his own medical practice come to the conclusion that the human race requires for psychological health either religion or some adequate substitute for religion which has not yet dawned on the intellectual horizon.

The intellect requires to be liberated from the bondage of guilt, fear, and pride before it can do its work properly in regard to the things of daily life.

Religion can effect this liberation. That is why Reason, I have urged, and also the Liberty which is only possible in a society where the majority are able to behave as reasonable beings, are today in grave peril unless they can summon Religion to the rescue. To each one of us the offer of that liberation is made – but on God's terms, not on ours. And for no two individuals are those terms exactly the same.

PSYCHOLOGY IN RELIGION

The great majority of the human race do not require a long course of psychotherapeutic treatment; nor, if they did, would it be practicable to supply it. But no individual, in actual fact, does develop to maturity without having in his psychological make-up a certain amount of narcissism, sex repression, phobia, etc.; and it is from the pooled results of these elements in the psychology of the individual (intensified by mass suggestion), quite as much as from economic conditions, that the bitterness of international or inter-class hostility arises.

It has long been known that the effect of a crowd is to bring into operation predominantly the lower and more primitive instincts which are common to all men. Mass suggestion also results in an inhibition of the critical faculties, which, having been developed late in the history of the race, are less universal. The modern state, through control of education, the press, and the radio, is enabled to multiply indefinitely conditions which make for mass suggestion. The use that is made of this control largely depends on the individual psychology of the persons or classes who exercise it.

No man, through his fully conscious self, can do more than surrender what he knows of himself to what he knows of God. Unless he recognises this limitation he will make little progress in that growing knowledge both of self and of God that will consistently issue in the kind of action which is the real test of a changed life. For such progress there is needed the constant practice of times of quiet listening to God and obedience to what we are convinced is His command. The practice of a "quiet time", supplemented by talks with a discreet and sympathetic friend, is specially useful in the case of an instinct like sex, which, wrongly handled, may be the root of faults of character of a type which Christ condemned more than those of the publican and the harlot. If Christianity is to save our threatened civilisation, its representatives must deflect their interest from theological discussion and denominational rivalries to a practical dealing with those basic infirmities of human nature which are the tap-root of all human ills; and it must do so in a way which, whether consciously psychological or not, is likely to be psychologically effective.

The right functioning of Reason depends on something which, though not contrary to reason, is beyond it. It depends upon the attainment of a higher wisdom – the wisdom that comes with, and from, a religious apprehension of the divine personality.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart;
And lean not unto thine own understanding :
In all thy ways acknowledge him,
And he shall direct thy paths. (Prov. iii. 5-6).

In certain matters, for example in regard to a piece of scientific research, such a wisdom is likely to manifest itself mainly as an enhancement of the individual's natural insight and intelligence. In the affairs of everyday life we should expect it to operate in this way, but also in another. Besides a further growth in "common sense", a clearer perception of the probable relations of action and consequence, we should expect also to find a different estimate of the comparative worthwhileness of things. In certain ways it might profoundly modify a man's valuations, and therefore his aims. He might come to think some things futile which he once thought important, and *vice versa*, and if a man's thoughts as to what is most worth while are coming nearer to those of Christ, he will sometimes act in ways which surprise his friends. But the results he will achieve thereby will often surprise them more.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.