

THE GOD WHO SPEAKS

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PROVOST OF THE QUEEN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD
FORMERLY CANON OF HEREFORD

WARBURTON LECTURES 1933-35

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1936

PREFACE

THE Warburton Lectures, founded in 1768, are given in the Chapel of Lincoln's Inn, one in each of the Law Terms; so the delivery of the course extends over a period of two years. The interval between the date of the first lecture and that of publication in book form allows time for development in the views of the lecturer. That has happened in this case, and has resulted in considerable amplification of the discourses originally delivered and some modification, including a change of title.

The aim and purpose of the book, as I now see it, is set out in the Prologue—to which I refer the reader.

Quotations from the Old Testament are from the Revised Version, which is here little, if at all, inferior to the Authorised in literary merit—except where the beauty of a rendering in the Prayer-Book Psalter seemed to demand its preference. The Gospels are usually quoted in the Authorised Version; the Epistles in the version which in any particular passage appeared to be the better.

To Canon J. S. Bezzant of Liverpool, and Col. A. S. L. Farquharson of University College, Oxford, I must express my gratitude for careful reading of the proofs and for valuable suggestions made in the course of so doing. For the Index I am indebted to Mrs. C. W. Sowby.

B. H. STREETER

THE QUEEN'S COLLEGE

OXFORD

25th April 1936

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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 question, however, whether, and (if so) how, we can derive from the Bible a knowledge of the character and will of God more definite and more profound than the human intellect unaided has so far been able to attain is of the first importance; for otherwise the word God is likely to degenerate into a name given to a "sort of a something", a vast vagueness—for some merely awful, for others benevolent but too hazy to affect practically the conduct of everyday life.

The exploration of the intellectual basis of religion—with special reference to the existence of God, the relation of religion and science, and the problems of pain and immortality—has since undergraduate days been a main preoccupation of my own mind. In the two books *Reality* and

The Buddha and the Christ I summed up the conclusions of my quest. The facts and considerations there adduced still seem to me important, and the conclusions drawn from them valid. But during the last two years I have come to see more clearly than before that certain limitations are inherent in any purely intellectual approach to problems of this kind.

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 inten-

tion 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 con-

ditions 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 to-day—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

SYNOPSIS

COMMUNISM, PREDESTINATION, FATE

The quality of a religion which Communism has for its adherents is largely due to the doctrine of "dialectical materialism", which gives it a basis in cosmic theory.

In its psychological results, the distinction between "dialectical" and "mechanical" materialism is comparable to that between Predestination and Fate. Predestination was once to whole nations an inspiration to heroism and effort. This came out of its assertion of a divine plan of which the individual can become the conscious and willing instrument.

The modern world needs a re-affirmation, not exactly of the classical doctrine of Predestination, but of the conception of God's Plan.

Some remarks on Providence and evil; and on Nature and the Reign of Law.

FALLACIES OF THE IMAGINATION

Effective belief in a divine plan requires the mind to be freed from three "fallacies of the imagination". We must discard the notions (a) that God thinks only in terms of astronomic magnitudes; (b) that He cannot be concerned with trifles; (c) that God and His activities may only be named in vague and abstract terms.

Between God's plan and mine, there can be no compromise.

Surrender of the self to God is not a renunciation of liberty. Analogy of the orchestra.

HOW KNOW THE PLAN?

The test of action; obedience the way of knowledge. Conscience; guidance; inspiration; grace; the climax in Christ.

THE FUNCTION OF PRAYER

The Pagan and Hindu conceptions of Prayer contrasted with that taught by Christ.

The Lord's Prayer.

The mind attuned to the Divine.

I

GOD'S PLAN

COMMUNISM, PREDESTINATION, FATE

To the materialist all things are determined; but nothing is planned. That is the explanation of a remarkable decision made, after a long and acute struggle between the philosophers of Moscow, by the Communist party. It was laid down that the Revolution must have a philosophy, and that this philosophy is *not* mechanical materialism, but *dialectical* materialism.

When I was informed of this, my first reaction was that natural to a common-sense Englishman: Well, if once you decide that there is no God and plump for materialism, what on earth does it matter whether your materialism is of the mechanical or dialectical brand?

Further reflection, however, shewed me I was wrong. It is precisely this doctrine of a dialectical, as distinguished from a mechanical, materialism that gives to Communism a basis in cosmic theory, and thus enables it to become, in

effect, a religion to millions of its adherents. Materialism asserts that nothing but matter is ultimately real and that all things are determined by the original constitution of matter. But if the evolution of matter is conceived of in purely mechanistic terms, the resultant process must be without plan, without purpose, and without direction; the Universe and all things in it are one gigantic accident. Dialectical materialism asserts the contrary. It asserts that the character of the Universe is such that all things, whether in inanimate nature or in the evolution of human history, move in accordance with a certain rhythm or law to which the name of "dialectic" is given. This dialectic rhythm is of such a nature that it necessarily results in progress—the conflict of opposites leading to a new and higher synthesis. Human history moves in accordance with this rhythm. It follows, therefore, that the individual by whose mind this law has been vitally apprehended can *co-operate with the cosmic process* and become a conscious instrument in the realisation of man's highest destiny. Such a doctrine, to those who hold it, is an inspiration to hope and to battle; it has for the Communist something of the quality felt by men of old when they sang *ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*. In Communist ideology the conception of dialectical materialism is

dynamic; by means of this it succeeds in making the denial of the existence of God into something like a positive religion. I quote from a recent pamphlet:

Dialectics [*sic*] not only points out to the proletariat its historical task, but it gives the proletariat the certainty of victory, it is to a certain extent *the guarantee of this victory*.¹

When I first grasped the practical importance of the seemingly fine distinction between a mechanical and dialectical materialism, I fell to thinking on another such distinction which has had momentous consequences in history—the distinction between Fatalism and the doctrine of Predestination taught by Augustine and Calvin. Many years ago a Turkish gentleman was paying a call on a friend of mine, when a messenger arrived saying that his house was on fire; the Turk merely shrugged his shoulders and remarked, “Kismet!” Contrast with this the normal reaction to emergency in countries which have largely accepted the teaching of Calvin—Scotland, Holland, Switzerland, New England. But what, precisely, is the essential difference between belief in Predestination and belief in an all-determining Fate? Surely it is this: Predestina-

¹ L. Rudas, *Dialectical Materialism and Communism*, 3rd ed., p. 13. (Labour Monthly Pamphlets.)

tion includes the idea of purpose, it asserts the existence of a divine *plan* with which the individual may consciously and willingly co-operate; Fate insists on a necessity to which he can only bow. In principle this is the difference between dialectical and mechanical materialism.

For a hundred years and more after the death of Calvin belief in predestination was a power in Europe stronger even than is belief in dialectical materialism to-day. Its tremendous emphasis on the divine plan—which because it was God's plan must necessarily be good and must necessarily prevail—inspired all who believed themselves to be privileged by His call to be its conscious and willing instruments, with a courage and certainty of victory which could battle successfully against overwhelming odds.

Personally, I should much regret a revival of the belief in predestination in anything like the form in which it was taught by Augustine or by Calvin. But 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. On these questions I have pondered much; and I have printed not a little on such subjects as the historical origins of Christianity, the interrelation of science and religion, the problem of pain, and the concept of immortality. What I have written I believe to be intellectually sound; but that belief has not, I confess, given me complete immunity from the psychological effect of that corroding atmosphere of world-despair which has gradually invaded the human race as a result of the World War, and the years of progressive chaos which have followed.

Who of us, indeed, has not during the last few years felt the doubt whether there is any purpose at all in things; or, supposing there to be some purpose or some power to which a philosopher could assign the name of God, whether He or It is concerned in any detail with man's affairs? In such a mood 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? Could they go on at all unless there were some kind of directive influence which, partially at any rate, counterbalances the stupidities, the egoisms, and the iniquities of mankind—unless there were, in Shakespeare's phrase, "a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will"? 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.

So far as the world of material things is concerned, the conception of a Divine Plan presents no difficulties. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork." It was the contemplation of *order* in Nature which first turned the minds of the Greek philosophers towards monotheism; and in the seventeenth

century this was fortified by the development of the scientific conception of the Reign of Law. In more recent times, the growing appreciation of the beauty of Nature has given increasing force to the aesthetic urge which feels that supreme beauty must somehow be the expression of an immanent Divine.

There are many, however, who regard the scientific conception of the Reign of Law as incompatible with belief in a divine ordering of Nature. This view is usually connected with the idea that science has proved consciousness to be merely an "epiphenomenon", and therefore free-will to be an illusion. In the history of human thought there are curious ironies. In the seventeenth century it was the freethinkers and scientific investigators who stressed the freedom of the will; the religious were concerned to preach predestination. To-day it is usually the atheist who proclaims that free-will is a phantasy, while the theologian seeks to defend it. On this I shall say more later.

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