

# **The Prophets and Their Message**

by

**J. CALVIN KEENE**



**SHREWSBURY LECTURE**

“Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God.” GEORGE FOX

**6**

# THE SHREWSBURY LECTURES

In preparation for the tercentenary, in 1972, of George Fox's visit to America and to Shrewsbury Meeting an annual Shrewsbury Lecture is given on some basic aspect of Quakerism. A particular phase of the special emphasis which Quakerism gives to the Christian message is presented.

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# **THE PROPHETS AND THEIR MESSAGE**

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**J. CALVIN KEENE**

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## PREFACE

The biblical illiteracy of our generation, has led to a diminishing understanding of the prophets, their message, and their place in the development of Judaism and the Christian faith. This has been particularly serious for Quakerism which has often viewed itself as a continuation of the prophetic “main strand” of Judaism as it developed into Christianity.

Calvin Keene re-examines the prophets and their message. He not only takes a fresh look at the biblical evidence but he sets it in relation to this Quaker view of itself. He also considers the place of prophecy among the various elements which together compose a living faith. “As the Hebrew prophets made explicit the meaning of the Covenant under Moses...” he writes, “the Christian (prophet) makes explicit the revelation of the New Covenant in Christ...he opens the eyes of the Christian Community to Christ’s deeper meaning and to the work which Christians should do in the world in their own day.”

For Quakers this has not meant merely the delivering of intellectually prepared sermons on the issues of the day - what Protestants call “prophetic ministry” - but a conviction that direct communion with God is still possible. This is the basis of Quaker worship. It strives not merely for silence from words, but for the quieting of the intellect as well, in the belief that God’s Spirit within the Christian community will communicate to the group his meaning for this hour and this day.

This worship is semi-contemplative in method, prophetic in expectation. When it achieves its goal - spiritual communion in which Christ is truly Present according to his promise - individuals may be called to speak.

When the prophetic expectation is lost in Quakerism, it is generally replaced by an intellectualism that analyzes everything. The spoken ministry becomes coldly logical, is generally more “topical” and less inspirational - the ecstatic element is gone.

Such a loss of a sense of Holy Expectancy may be the counterpart of the final historical transformation of prophecy. Prophecy developed from a primitive purely ecstatic experience (e.g. Saul’s dancing naked) to a “true prophecy” which turned men to ethical living and interpreted God’s meaning for life’s daily situation. The end of the process was a conversion to a pure legalism or sacramental system which replaced prophecy entirely.

The examination of these transformations points to the tension which exists between the ecstatic and the intellectual. Calvin Keene repeats Rudolf Otto’s warning that these need to be kept in balance. When the ecstatic factors exist alone, the warning goes, religion has little relation to the intellectual and ethical forms of life. But when the prophetic expectation is lost and no longer experienced, the religion becomes “identified entirely with the intellectual and ethical qualities of life, then its power and importance evaporate and disappear. Man then loses his sense of mystery and awe, as well as his third dimension, his living relationship with God.”

Dean Freiday

# The Prophets And Their Message

It may seem odd in some respects that in this day of science and its controls over nature, we should take time to think about a small handful of men who lived in a thoroughly other age and in a time when the understanding of the world was totally different! The fact that we do give serious attention to these men more than 2500 years later, undoubtedly indicates that, vast as our knowledge of nature is, we are aware of our own inner perplexities and uncertainties. We hope to find light in the prophets and their work which may illumine the meaning and show us a “way” which is viable for us.

Historically, this topic is of great interest because the Hebrew prophets were a main strand from which Christianity developed. And within Christianity, Quakerism has often viewed itself as a continuation of that prophetic strand. It is with the hope of gaining personal insight that we turn to these great figures.

## Background of the Prophets

We begin not with an abstract definition of a prophet, but with a look at those who have been designated prophets in the past, and by asking what sort of persons they were. It is their lives and messages which show us what the word “prophet” truly means. Biblical scholars generally think of the great prophets as appearing first in the 9th c. B. C. (Elijah and Elisha); reaching full development in the 8th c. in the four men Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah; and culminating in the three 7th and 6th c. figures of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Second Isaiah. Lesser figures appear after the return from Exile in Babylon in 537 B.C., but by the middle of the 5th c. prophecy had largely disappeared in the Hebrew religion. If to the names already mentioned we add Moses as the greatest of all the prophets, and possibly Abraham, we have **in toto** fewer than a dozen of these great men. I mention this to suggest that even in their heyday the great prophets were in fact very rare.

Prior to the 9th c. and the appearance of Elijah (whose name means Yahweh is God) and Elisha (whose name states that God is salvation) there were centuries of preparation for these men, Again disregarding Moses and Abraham, the first prophets, or at least the first “prophetic guilds” or “orders” appear in the biblical accounts during the time of Samuel, in the late 11th c. They were there designated the **nebi'im**, plural of **nabi**, **prophet**.

These early bands were seers and ecstasies. It is probable that both seers and ecstasies had lived in Palestine among the Canaanites long before the Hebrews arrived there about 1200 B.C. Their roots may go back to Babylon. The seers were believed to have powers of foretelling the future or uncovering information not generally available to others. Seers appear also in ancient Greek accounts - we think of Calchas who told Agamemnon, in the **Iliad**, that the wind would blow favorably for the Greek ships only if he sacrificed his daughter Iphigeneia. Other Greek seers predicted success or disaster. We would probably classify such persons today as having clairvoyant and telepathic powers.

One of the best-known accounts of a seer in the Old Testament is the story found in 1 Sam. 9. Saul was sent to look for lost asses belonging to his father, and when he was unable to locate them he went to consult the “man of God,” Samuel. He was prepared to offer him a quarter silver shekel in payment for his clairvoyantly produced information as to the whereabouts of the donkeys. In the text there is a break at v. 9 and the reader is told parenthetically that “Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, ‘Come, Let us go to the seer’; for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.” Some will recall that the result of this search for the lost asses was that a king was anointed to reign over Israel, yet not before Saul was assured that the animals had been found.

The function of such seers was scarcely religious, although Samuel had other tasks to perform that were religious in character. Babylon and ancient Rome also had their seers, but the Hebrews generally scorned them, especially, in later times. The events with Samuel took place about 1020 B.C. At that same time there existed ecstatic bands of men who “prophesied” as they were “inspired.” These were called **nebi'im** and may properly be considered a further development from the seer. Possibly they formed bands in order that the prophetic emotion could readily spread from one to another.

As Saul left Samuel he met such a band, “a band of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying.” And as they met Saul, “the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he prophesied among them” (1 Sam. 10:5-12). Hence arose a proverb, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”

We note then that the beginnings of Hebrew prophecy are found centuries before Elijah, as indicated either by the possession of supernormal powers of perception in the seers or by ecstatic conditions in the prophets' guilds. So far as our information goes, these latter were famous less for the messages received than for the emotion generated. Exciting music, produced by types of flutes and tambourines, helped to develop the abnormal state, for which the same word is used as for madness. In this condition the ecstasies believed that they sensed the power and “holiness” of God - they had reached another level of consciousness we would say.

Paul Tillich would state that they stood outside themselves, which is what the word “ecstasy” literally means, and the Revised Standard Version words it as “turned into another man.” The emotion and the sense of being caught up by powers greater than one's own are the marks of this early prophet, while intellectual and spiritual content appears to have been minimal. No ethical or moral teaching characteristic of these men can be discovered. We are reminded also of King David who, bringing the Ark to Jerusalem, became ecstatic, stripped off his clothes and danced Before the Lord, humiliating his wife Michal, daughter of Saul.

### **The Prophets and Their Message**

The prophetic guilds continued for centuries after we first meet them at the time of Samuel and were a highly significant part of the religious scene in Palestine. But over against them in form, and frequently in overt opposition to them, arose the great individual prophets whom we

now honor. In them we find new forms of prophets and new concepts of the prophetic role. In order better to understand their messages to the Hebrews, let us note the general situation in Israel within which they appeared.

It was in the 13th c., under Moses, that the Covenant had been drawn up between the Hebrews and their God, Yahweh. Because of familiarity with the concept of the Covenant we may fail to realize how very significant for future religion it was. God was understood as having adopted the Hebrews to be his own Chosen People, and they in turn, out of loyalty and gratitude, had agreed to fulfill their obligations through obedience to his will. God was thought of as awesome, unpredictable, "holy," and yet concerned with his adopted people. The ideal was that of a theocracy in which God rules every aspect of life. Four possible ways to exist to serve him within the tribe (or later the nation), i.e., as priest, as prophet, as wise man, or as king. The first two were especially religious functions, but the latter two were also service to God in dealing with the life of the people. In each instance, **obedience** was the central point.

By the time we approach classical propheticism in the time of Elijah we discover the typical marks of the prophet. The ecstasy, emotion, voices still remain, but now somewhat muted. The welfare of the nation, the passion for Yahweh, and the message dealing with the future of the Hebrew people were the points receiving the chief emphasis. The prophets announce the word of Yahweh to the nation; they are in effect his spokesmen in his relation to his people. It is the Word of God that is central, and the prophet's function is to proclaim it precisely as he receives it.

His primary object is not the inner experience of God, as it may be for the mystic, but it is to deliver properly and convincingly the message entrusted to his care. The roots of his message are still found in the ecstatic sense of God's nearness and actuality but the results of that relation in terms of the message granted are what really matter. The Word of the Lord comes - and it must be spoken. This implies that what was in the earlier days an experience sought for its own sake - the ecstasy - has now taken on content appropriate to the lives of men in God's nation. In other words, the emotional experience is a cup which holds vital contents, and the contents are more important than the cup. Meaning becomes primary, rather than visions and auditions.<sup>1</sup> And again we mention how closely related is the prophet's message to the entire Jewish background of Covenant relationship, chosen peoplehood, and duty to obey God's will.

The prophet's message, further, was not something that the prophet felt he had himself created or consciously reached as the result of intellectual consideration of a national problem. He felt that he was acted upon by someone other than himself; that God had taken the initiative with him. Yet the great prophets do not lose themselves in the experience. They retain their own individuality and self-awareness. The Word which comes to them under the Covenant relationship, a word of condemnation or of promised salvation, must be heeded for the sake of the nation. Here again the situation is radically different from that of the extreme mystic, who is uninterested in history and time as a result of his absorption in the eternal. The prophet is deeply concerned about the here-and-now, the active forces in history, and the future of his people.

Having received the Word from God, it becomes the prophet's task to participate fully and consciously in the work of bringing knowledge of it to the people. At times, along with his proclamation, he may act out the message as did Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Hosea. The Word is not eternal and unchanging. It is, in fact, a word conditioned by and addressed to the historical circumstances. The coming of the Scythians, Babylonians, Assyrians gives the specific content to the Word. Amos declared, "Surely the Lord does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (3:7). Yet a great central theme underlies all the variations of historical relativisms. This theme is the kingship, the sovereignty, of God. We are reminded of the Greek dramas which repeat the same basic stories, but cast them into radically varying forms. The prophet's one central message of God's sovereignty for the nation was related to the changing political framework of the times.

In relation to the Covenant itself, the idea of the chosenness of the Hebrews was preserved in the vocabulary of husband-wife, shepherd-flock, potter-pot, father-son. The relationship of God's gracious adoption of the Hebrew people as his special people is a firmly established one and the people need to be reminded of their responsibilities under it.

Highly important for later Christian interpretations was the fact that within the Covenant concept four distinct ideas appear. First the fact of the **rebellion** of the people against their God. Second that the **judgment** of God is their due, and will soon appear, generally in the form of political disaster. Amos, for instance, declared that "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I (God) will not revoke the punishment" (2:6). It is coming, it is just about to appear. For Amos, the destruction of Israel would be at the hands of Assyria, he said, and so it was.

But then, third, there appears the note of **Compassion**. Even in Amos this note is strongly present, yet most markedly so in Hosea. In the face of disobedience and coming judgment, God's faithfulness to the agreement still holds. Hosea states it most tellingly: "How can I (God) give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel!...My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender" (11:8). Yet compassion waits upon repentance and a changed way of living.

Fourth, and finally, there is **redemption** or consummation for Israel. There will be a Day of Yahweh. In the last of the great prophets, Second Isaiah, it is not only Israel to whom the message comes, but to all mankind, and Israel will itself become the means by which the knowledge of the true God shall come to cover the earth. Then the nation shall itself be the prophet, and shall bring salvation to the world. The four central terms of rebellion, judgment, compassion, and redemption were central for the prophets and remained so in the New Testament as well.<sup>2</sup>

In biblical times many persons claimed to be prophets and belong to the prophetic guilds. We think of the group of such prophets gathered about King Zedekiah as Jerusalem was besieged by the Babylonians. Opposing Jeremiah's message to the king (that he should surrender to the Babylonians), the prophets in the name of God advised him not to make peace with Nebuchadnezzar, promising that God would deliver the Hebrews. One of these, Hananiah, was especially outspo-



ken against Jeremiah, claiming divine authority for his message. Jeremiah, however, stated that his was the true message and that both Hananiah and his associates were lying prophets.

How could one know with certainty? The answer appears to be that at the time there was no sure way of knowing. Jeremiah himself criticized his opponents on three grounds. First, their message lacked teaching on morality and ethics while true prophecy turned men to ethical living. Second, the false prophets did not see the relation between sin and destruction, while the true prophet did. And the false prophets imitated each other while the true prophet, since his message came from God, was original.<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, it was the prophet's own inner sense which gave him his conviction of complete certainty about both his calling and his message. Yet for those who were not prophets, this was not a sufficient test to distinguish true from false, since the latter also claimed the same. Of course in time the events sometimes indicated the distinction. For instance, when Zedekiah followed the advice of the false prophets, Jerusalem was destroyed, as Jeremiah had said it would be. The test, finally, between true and false prophets was made more generally by the community's own sense of where God was truly found, rather than in subjective feelings. The messages rang true over the decades and centuries and on this basis Hananiah is only a name and Jeremiah one of our greatest mediums of God's revelation.

### **Prophecy in Late Judaism**

After Nehemiah, who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in 444 B.C., prophecy came to a virtual standstill. No longer did the "Thus spoke the Lord" thunder in Israel. But since the prophets had made clear the nature of God and of his relation to his people, was this a great loss? In some ways it was. The sense of divine inspiration, of God's immediate contact with the Jews, was now lost, and was replaced by the written Laws, which were also derived, it was believed, from God's revelation. They had been given by Moses in their very specific form, it was thought, and thus the will of God could be known in its concreteness for each and all situations.

As in prophecy, God's will was central here too, but now in the form of detailed commands that were believed to be eternally valid. Two results followed. One was that the Law and Legalism once and for all froze God's will into a set of unalterable commands. The other was that man's relation to God through his prophets was brought to an end. This latter was a great loss, mourned by the people, who hoped there might again be a restoration of the prophetic mission.

The former, the specific knowledge of God's will for every situation, was a matter of great satisfaction for many. To be able to say, "Thy Law is a lamp unto my feet," showing how one should walk through life, was a great relief from the uncertainties of being told to live by ideals without knowing the exact application of the ideals in daily living. On the other hand, of course, Legalism stands in danger of closing the door to the future.

During this post-exilic period, also, a new emphasis, arising in Jeremiah's "New Covenant" and carried into Ezekiel's teaching, now began to make itself felt. It is the individual in his per-

sonal relationship to God, rather than the tribe or nation, upon whom the demands fall. Jeremiah had had to face the question of what would happen to the Covenant relationship when the nation ceased to exist as such.

The nation did fall and was carried into captivity. Never again was it so singly a unit as it had been earlier, for the majority of the Jews in future times lived outside Palestine, in the Dispersion. Many of these had no sense of belonging to a restored Israel, even while they recognized it as their "homeland" to which they might return for the sacred holidays - much as some American Jews do not recognize Israel as their home.

A new attitude toward God had to be formed, and Jeremiah did just that in his emphasis upon the coming New Covenant, according to which an inward and individual relationship would take the place of the outer ritual performances and tribal relationship. It was also to be a Covenant for all the people, a universal relation, between God and all his children. It is to be noted, then, that the movement of Hebrew prophecy led from the seer and the merely ecstatic to the relation of God to his chosen people and the ethical demands of that relationship, and then to the message of universal individualism and God's personal relation in demand and mercy to all human beings.

Another feature of prophetic teaching, beginning as early as the first Isaiah, and increasing in interest in later post-exilic times, was the expectation of a chosen man, a Messiah, who would serve God in a very direct way. In first Isaiah this Messiah was spoken of as another David. The hope intensified in periods of great national need and near the beginning of Christianity it took a wide variety of forms, ranging from the longing for a divinely appointed human deliverer to an angelic or superhuman being such as the Son of Man in Enoch.

### **Prophecy in the New Testament**

The person of Jesus Christ made for radical shifts concerning prophecy in the New Testament, when contrasted with the Old. He was understood in terms clearly derived from the Old Testament, first as the fulfillment of the messianic expectation. Christians proclaimed the good news of that fulfillment, and of the appearance after eight centuries of him whom Isaiah and others had envisaged. Yet they announced that the Messiah who had come was far greater than any expected; greater even than Enoch's divine figure. He was not just God's agent for political salvation, but was the 'Son of God' himself, a concept which took on increasing meaning until it finally eventuated in the symbol of the Trinity.

Consequently the center of the Christian faith had shifted radically from the earlier prophetic understanding. In the first place, prophecy was believed to have reappeared, God was once more in personal relation with man, revealing himself first in and through his Son and then through his Holy Spirit in the **Ecclesia**. One interpretation of this was given by Peter in Acts 2:16ff, as the indication of the end of time before the direct coming of God, with salvation open to all who "call upon the Lord."

Furthermore, because of the uniqueness and centrality of Jesus and the closeness of the end of all things, Christian attitudes toward prophecy were different from the ancient in that the early prophets had only begun to glimpse the coming of the Messiah while Christians knew him in his reality. The Apostles were therefore far superior to the prophets. John the Baptist, for instance, was more than a prophet for he was the messenger of Christ, whom he came to know (Matt 11 :9). And since this Christ caught up unto himself all of the central value in the prophets, they moved into the background and lost some of their significance, even while retaining value as those who saw his coming from afar off.

Still another important issue should be noted, touching the point that the ancient prophets saw themselves as standing within the revelation of Moses and the Christians within that of Jesus. In the Old Testament, Moses is the greatest of all figures, combining in his single figure the four great religious and revelatory functions of king, wise man, priest and prophet. The first five books of the Old Testament, the Torah, are believed by Jews to be the most sacred portion of the Hebrew scriptures because of their supposed Mosaic authorship.

The prophets we have been studying, living after Moses, are accepted not as his rivals nor as those who would contradict him, but rather as those making explicit the truths of his teaching. For example, the emphasis of the eighth-century prophets upon God's demand for ethical and moral living was understood by those prophets as implicit within the meaning of the Covenant given under Moses—not as setting aside an older form but as further insight into the true meaning which was always intended, yet sometimes misunderstood or corrupted. In Amos 5:25, for example, it is suggested that the developed sacrificial system of the eighth century and identified by the Hebrews of that time as the religion of the fathers, was not the result of Moses' command, but was a departure from it. It is implied that Moses' message was that of Amos. Hence, the prophets regarded themselves not as innovators but, rather, as restorers of the pure religion of Moses. It was through him that the original and fundamental revelations and words had come.

As Christianity now appeared on the historical scene with its belief that Jesus was truly God's Son, the word of Moses was felt to be superseded by that of a greater-one who not only knew God but was himself divine. After his death, there had appeared an outpouring of God's Spirit, now within the framework of the revelation received through the Christ. This revelation was believed to be complete and final in a sense that the early Christians believed the one received through Moses was not: in fact, it was the fulfillment of that earlier message.

Yet while this was taken to be true, the **meaning** of Christ and his revelation of God needed constantly to be made clear. There is a parallel here to Israel's early belief in an eternal Covenant coupled with God's immediate message to his people through the prophets which was for a given moment in their historical life. In a similar way Christians believed in the final nature of Christ's revelation, yet they needed interpretation of his meaning for life's daily situations. It is God's Spirit within the Christian community, that opens the eyes of the members of that community to these immediate meanings. In theory, every Christian is potentially the receiver of 'revelation,' the spokesman for God, and that in a way superior to the ancient prophet simply because of the final nature of the Christian revelation itself, in Christ, Son of God. The Christian hope and pur-

pose in the early church was to be used by God, and one of the ways of being used was that of prophecy, which Paul (1 Cor 14) places as the greatest of the spiritual gifts.

Like the ancient prophet, the Christian prophet, who is Spirit filled (again the ecstatic element!), finds himself the recipient of God's action. He too must bear a Word from God, for the Christian community, but now within the Christian revelation and the New Covenant relationship. As the Hebrew prophets made explicit the meaning of the Covenant under Moses, so too the Christian makes explicit the revelation of the New Covenant in Christ. He does this not by equalling or rivaling Christ but, inspired by God's Spirit, he opens the eyes of the Christian community to Christ's deeper meaning and to the work which Christians should do in the world in their own day.

Like the Hebrew prophets, the Christian also has one center to his message, namely the sovereignty of God, and, within that kingship the four points: (a) man's rebellion against God, (b) God's judgment, (c) his love and compassion, and (d) the redemption of God for those who truly repent and obey. Yet although the Christian message contains the same elements as the Jewish, now the new knowledge of God in Christianity lifts it to a high plane of love for God as revealed in Jesus and love for fellow men, not known in Moses and the Hebrew prophets. For Christian prophets have before their eyes the very incarnation of God in human life.<sup>4</sup>

### **Friends and the Prophetic Function**

The early Christian understanding of the New Covenant, ushered in by Christ, is the vision which George Fox also knew and incorporated. He himself had had inner, spiritual 'openings' which gave him the meaning of Christ for his time and circumstances. As a Christian prophet, he received God's Words, to be spoken to sensitive fellow Christians, and lived in his Society. These fellow Christians were in their turn inspired by the Spirit and in turn also became spokesmen for God.

The message of all of them was, of course, that of God's kingship and consequently the need for man's proper obedience to God, the coming judgment, God's compassion, and the availability of redemption. The call of Fox was received in ways similar to the ancient prophets. His was not simply a stimulating or enlightening subjective 'mystical' experience, to be enjoyed and appreciated by himself alone, but was a message with which he was entrusted, as had been the case with Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the others.

The message was to be addressed to the community of which God is the head, and it called the members of that community to obedience to the Word. By so doing, the community became the living body of Christ, the incarnate Word. The burden laid upon Fox was one in which God's revelation met the needs and directed the activities of men in their particular day and situations. Running through all Fox did and said was the great prophetic emphasis upon God's demand for ethical perfection.

The formalized Christian church had largely lost the original emphasis on prophetic revelation long before the Protestant Reformation. The Spirit had been found too difficult to control and too easy to misunderstand. Frequently, as in the false prophets, it seemed more demonic than divine. We noted above that Judaism replaced the prophetic by legalism, thereby achieving stability in its religious life. Similarly, the Christian church replaced the prophetic and spiritual expectations mentioned by Paul by the sacramental system.

This system in its emphasis upon sacramental acts, not legalistic requirements, was different from the Jewish development, yet it was similar in that it replaced the free movement of the Spirit with the controlled pattern of church life. As in Judaism, the effect was the threatened loss of the element essential to living religion, namely the experience by some members at least in the religious community of knowing the Divine.

To continue the parallel, God's relation to his church was 'frozen' in a set of ceremonial holy actions, in those sacraments which alone we reinterpreted as the vehicles of God's grace—that grace which is the compassion of God bringing redemption to men out of his love of them. George Fox had experienced for himself the fundamental Christian relationship, that of the individual called to the prophetic role as spokesman of God to the Christian community, the carrier of revelation to others. This it was that he lived and taught and it was this that became early Quakerism. This statement is brief, but for the purposes of this paper, it will have to stand.

### **The Psychology of the Prophets**

Our final treatment deals with a very difficult and yet very fascinating topic. Much of the vocabulary used in the paper thus far is vocabulary which makes little connection with the thinking of modern men, especially those who have been reared outside the Christian church. Words such as revelation, redemption, and also God, leave conceptual blanks in the minds of many, and perhaps even in the minds of some of my readers. It is my intention to look at the experiences of these figures we have been discussing, asking the question how these experiences can be best understood.

Should we think of these men, for instance, as mentally unbalanced and at least partially insane? That would be going too far, for we recall that William James pointed out the relation between roots and fruits, stating that the fruits of the work of mystics and prophets are so positive and creative and so vital to society that they cannot be explained on the basis of sick minds. If not the product of insanity, are they, then, possibly understandable as the product of the human psyche in its depths, unrelated to anything that might be called God or divine? Or were these prophets correct in their conviction that their lives were in some amazing way joined to the ultimate Reality and genuinely responsive to it? We must say in advance that no indubitable conclusion will be reached, but we will be able to gain some degree of insight into the nature of the intellectual problems involved.

One of the first difficulties is that of knowing what is meant by the self or the psyche. Usually we mean the conscious mind, yet like everyone else I am aware that my self is far more ex-

tensive than the single point of awareness which is my consciousness at this moment. My self includes all my past experiences, my memories, and very many other elements of which I am only dimly aware. What the boundaries of the self are who is brave or rash enough to try to say? Those who accept telepathy as a fact would have the selves of each of us touch with each other. I think we can all agree on the point that we are here examining an area of basic experience of which we are certain of little aside from its mysteriousness.

It has been noticed that the fundamental element in prophecy is that of a deep, inner experience having what we designated ecstatic overtones. All direct, religious experience contains some of the elements of this inner happening—something mysterious is taking place within oneself, an action which cannot be identified with one's conscious intentions. Because of it, one is momentarily in possession of a wider consciousness; feels himself part of a larger reality than himself; finds his own small self lifted up, inspired as it were. I doubt that there is anyone who has not known something of this type of experience, at least in its elementary forms. In Greek times (and not only then!) alcohol was valued just because it lifted up persons temporarily, destroyed their normal sense of limitation, making them feel like gods. Dionysus was the spirit in the wine who by "inspiring" those who drank it gave them godlike qualities.

"Revelation," this experience is called on its highest plane; "inspiration" may be an acceptable term for its more common manifestations. In this latter form it need have no necessary religious overtones. In all creative work it is a necessary element. The 'inspired' artist or writer does not normally regard himself as being in close touch with God, yet something happens to him as work of a high quality proceeds from his depths. The meaning and value of creative work seems often the greater as it proceeds from the unconscious. Coming from this non-rational source it may have the power to awaken the subconsciousness of the sensitive persons who read, or look, or listen as the case may be, I give one illustration of this, taken from Nietzsche, in whose writings many have sensed the ecstatic qualities. In his *Ecce Homo* he writes,

If one had the smallest vestige of superstition left in one, it would be hardly possible completely to set aside the idea that one is the mere incarnation, the mouthpiece, or medium of an almighty power. The idea of revelation in the sense that something which profoundly convulses and upsets one becomes suddenly visible and audible with indescribable certainty and accuracy describes the simple fact. One hears — one does not seek — one takes — one does not ask who gives: a thought suddenly flashes like lightning, it comes with necessity, without faltering. I have never had any choice in the matter.

Many persons have felt moved and deeply stirred by the ecstatic element in Nietzsche's writing, yet at once we come face to face again with the question of the true and the false prophet, Surely much that is "inspired" in Nietzsche is not valid. Also, the poetry of the French writer, Rimbaud, has a strong mystical sense yet it would be rash to identify it as genuine mysticism. It is a very strange matter, this sense of inspiration out of which creative work arises, yet the sense alone is no guarantee that the inspiration is genuine. **That** is tested by life and its positive effects upon life.

For the prophets, the sense of the One who called them and gave them a message was a necessary part of the experience. Not only did something arise from the depths, but it was a divine **Other**, not be identified with their depths, who was doing a work **through** them. The prophet's first awareness of this Other was in the call, which introduced him to the prophetic life.

In its most general form, revelation may be interpreted as removing veils within the individual, veils which seem to separate him from truth that is all about him yet is unseen until they are drawn aside. In this form of experience, God or his truth is felt to be present always and God makes no special effort on his side. It is man's problem to open his eyes.

Such a view fits the mystical experience. But the prophet cannot readily interpret what happens to him in these terms. The sense of the otherness of God before which he feels his own sinfulness appears over and over. We think of Isaiah and his statement (6:5) at his call, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips..." The prophet not only has the veils removed from his ignorance—he has been grasped by a reality before which his response includes recognition of his own insufficiency, shortcomings, and guilt.

The particular message for his day given to him adds an element of the specific which does not permit him to think of the experience only in terms of insight into ever-present reality. The God who has made himself known to him and given him his commission is not just an eternal principle or Absolute, but a living god, of time as well as eternity.

If the prophet of old tried to resist doing the work of God he found the inner pressure too great to bear. Jeremiah, for example, states (20:9), "If I say, 'I will not mention him (the Lord) or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot." George Fox, when he refused instant obedience, became temporarily blind, as readers of his Journal will recall.

In psychological terms we can say that in the prophet is found an abnormal kind of consciousness. When normal men sense their relation only to nature and other men, the prophet sees beyond and is aware of still another kind, or level, of reality with which he is in close relationship. What he finds is a greater, deeper, more demanding, more rewarding relationship than any of the normal kind; he is in touch with genuine **reality** of a sort **more** real than the world of his sense perceptions.

Such again is the way it is described in the Bible and in Christian tradition. It is easy to deny the significance of such experiences by labeling them "merely subjective" or "products of the unconscious." Parenthetically, some modern persons treat the unconscious as something known and obvious, even while they pour into it all the mysteries of life. If the unconscious is used as explanation for these happenings, then it becomes our problem and the heart of the mystery of life. Certainly the unconscious and the psyche or self of which it is a part are not a matter of modern unconcern, whatever we may say about revelation and the prophets.

On the contrary, as Carl Jung pointed out over 30 years ago, modern man is fascinated with the psyche and seeks actual experiences of it in its deeper reaches.<sup>5</sup> He seems unwilling to attempt this by the religious means used in former days, considering formal religion authoritarian and consequently to be resisted by our individualistic and freedom-loving modernity. Modern man therefore uses subjective or artificial means of contacting his psyche. There is no doubt that the current extensive interest in the so called psychedelic drugs is part of this pattern. The dangers in the direction of insanity of using drugs such as LSD and mescaline are disregarded in the hope of finding experiences of unity with Being or the feeling of having met the Ultimate.

In the past it was religion that related man to a greater reality than himself. It appears that man needs an eternal dimension or at least a sense of unity with reality. Somehow, far down in his consciousness or unconsciousness he natively feels himself not to be one atom in a sea of unrelated atoms, but an organic element within the whole, and in that relationship he finds his meaning.

Now that religion is denied by many, there have been those who have attempted to live life on a two-dimensional plane, yet deep within themselves there has been a vast hunger, hardly understood, but pressing upon them in great dissatisfaction and a yearning for something that nature alone cannot provide. Although they deny the old answers of religion, they want its experiences, and some turn to the psychedelic drugs to provide them. I would regard this as a proper desire, even though wrongly directed. Some of those who report good experiences from the use of LSD or mescaline claim to be convinced through them of the reality of God or of the ultimate goodness and oneness of all.

This is the basic step of religion, if only the first step. It reminds us that religion in its origin was related to experience and was not just the product of intellect. Of course these newer drugs are not the first consciousness-affecting drugs to be used. From ancient times alcohol especially, and tobacco have been used for similar ends, and the early Hindus used soma juice, whatever that may have been.

At the beginning of this century, William James discussed in his **Varieties of Religious Experience** the effects of ether and nitrous oxide, both recently discovered at that time. He states: "Nitrous oxide and ether, when sufficiently diluted with air, stimulate the mystical consciousness in an extraordinary degree. Depth beyond depth of truth seem revealed to the inhaler."<sup>6</sup> After one regains consciousness "The sense of a profound meaning having been there persists." He adds that some persons he knows believe one receives a metaphysical revelation under these conditions. His conclusions, derived from his own experience of nitrous oxide, is that "Our normal, waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is one special type of consciousness, while all around it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different."<sup>7</sup>

The problem is that of understanding the nature and validity of these forms. The point being made is that many modern persons, skeptical of religion, are seeking a religious-type experience through other than religious ways.



Leaving consideration of drugs, we turn to more serious attempts to study the experiences of oneness and meaning which men have always sought. Rudolf Otto's, **The Idea of the Holy**, is a unique attempt to analyze the experiences of prophets and mystics. Several points of importance that he deals with will be mentioned. First, Otto finds that the original experience of "the Holy," or of the **numinous** as he also calls it, is that of the "Mysterium Tremendum" which is vastly mysterious and awakens feelings of demonic dread, terror, awe, remorse, otherness. "The fear of the Lord" in the Old Testament is this side of the experience of the numinous. But there is another side of it: the numinous also draws and fascinates.

These are the raw, primitive experiences which underlie the religions. Otto next goes on to show that gradually there appeared ethical and rational factors within these early, awesome beginnings. The mystery and otherness remain but now their content becomes more understandable and shows a relationship to human life and welfare. The original meaning of the holy as the incomprehensible other takes on the moral and ethical qualities we associate with the word. Both the non-rational and the rational qualities he believes to be rooted in the human soul, potentially present in each of us. They become fully actual in some few, and these then are able to awaken in others the power of true religion, as Fox did.

Otto warns that genuine religion always has both aspects. If the awesome, non-rational factors we have earlier called the ecstatic exist alone, as they do in the earliest forms of primitive religion, then religion has little relation to life in its intellectual and ethical form, becoming just strong emotion. When, on the other hand, the non-rational factors are lost and no longer experienced, and religion is identified entirely with intellectual and ethical qualities of life, then its power and importance evaporate and disappear. Man then loses his sense of mystery and awe, as well as his third dimension, his living relationship with God.

Without further elaboration, we can clearly see the application of Otto's thesis to the prophets and to our own times. The prophets began in the ecstasies with their sense of the mysterious. The great ones blended the mystery with reason and ethical principles. The weakness in Christianity generally and in much of Quakerism specifically lies today, as it did when George Fox rediscovered the experience of God, in the loss of the central experience and in the reduction of religion to concepts, ethics, good works, or other forms of human activities. These forms, taken alone, apart from the experience of God, leave us unsatisfied, and seeking,

If there were time, I would like to call our attention to some of Carl Jung's suggestions in these same regards. As an empirical psychologist, he points out the need man has to believe in God and in immortality, and the loss of psychic health which results when these two faiths are denied. He informs us that none of his patients regained their psychic wholeness until they regained their faith in God and in continuance of being beyond death. These beliefs are part of man's collective unconscious, and if they are driven out, he disintegrates inwardly.

In closing, I will refer once again to William James. Much in his pioneer work may now be questioned, especially as concerns interpretations of his materials. Yet much that he has written still deserves very serious attention some 60 years after he wrote his Gifford Lectures. In the

conclusion to these lectures, after discussing the relation of spiritual experiences to the psyche of man, he states (in italics for emphasis) that the man seeking for salvation from wrongness of life becomes conscious that the higher part (of his being) is “conterminous and continuous” with an other of a higher order.<sup>8</sup> As his own Overbelief (as he designates his faith) James states that “The further limits of our being plunge, it seems to me, into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and merely ‘understandable’ world. Name it the mystical region, or the supernatural region, whichever you choose...we belong to it.”<sup>9</sup>

For what it is worth, it is my considered ‘Overbelief,’ to use William James’ term, that the psyche of man and the Divine are not without contact but that in the depths of his own self man becomes aware of the presence of the Divine. We are within God and He is within us. Psychology when carried sufficiently far necessarily leads to theology; the question of the self takes us to the question of God.

I for one do not think that man’s psyche dwells alone in the world, sufficient unto its own self, nor, oppositely, do I believe that man is cut off from God. Rather, the experience of the prophets to my mind points to the fact that the God who is infinite reality and exceeds all our knowledge is concerned with us for our good, and our good is found finally only in our relation to God and what proceeds from that relationship.

When our lives touch the reality of God and we know the deep movement of the Spirit, we need not, like Saul, dance ecstatically before the Lord, but we become his willing and obedient instruments in the world. And if to us individually, it is not given to become prophets, then at least we have the messages of those great prophets who have gone before from which to know the form in which the Word of God comes to man. By this it is possible for the community to live the God-directed and truly human life for which God intends us.

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<sup>1</sup> John Skinner, **Prophecy and Religion**, pp. 220ff.

<sup>2</sup> B. D. Napier, **Prophets in Perspective**. pp. 97ff.

<sup>3</sup> John Skinner, **op. cit.**, pp. 191ff.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit, **Prophecy and Inspiration**, pp. 43ff and Victor White, **God and the Unconscious**, pp. 152ff.

<sup>5</sup> C. G. Jung, **Modern Man in Search of a Soul**, c. 10.

<sup>6</sup> P. 298 in the Mentor edition.

<sup>7</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>8</sup> **Op. cit.**, p, 384.

<sup>9</sup> **Ibid.**