

could not have found out ourselves, but that a personal relationship is established between God and men. God talks to us, and we talk to him. Revelation is the divine overtures in establishing friendship between God and men, concord between heaven and earth. One of the subsequent articles tells us something of God's infinite patience and tact in the approaches he has made to men in the course of history. The story of his revelation is contained in the Bible; no means were too trivial or petty for God to use, provided they were successful in establishing *contact* between himself and his people, until the whole process was completed, the friendship sealed, by the incarnation. Another article is concerned with man's answer to God's revelation—that is, with faith. The third article, on spiritual direction, may be said to deal with the arduous task of keeping up the contact, of making the revelation-faith conversation between God and us a lifelong and living affair, that will reach its apogee in the face-to-face colloquy of heaven.



WAYS MANY AND VARIOUS

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

God who spoke to our forefathers, through the prophets, in ways many and various, has at last, in these days, spoken to us through his Son . . .
(Hebr. i, 1).

WITH these impressive words begins the epistle to the Hebrews, and we are taught that God it is who commands all history, and God who reveals himself by speaking through all the sacred history of Israel as also to the new Israel of God or body of Christ. The stress in the text is first of all on God who has all the initiative, and who brings about a continuity in old and new testament covenants because the same loving God brought all essential history to its real conclusion in the revelation of a Saviour who is Lord of all.

Our text also speaks of *ways many and various*.¹ Two points are made: the frequency of God's utterance, and the variety of ways in which his message comes to the world. Let us try to illustrate that frequency and the many ways and modes.

We who live in a spiritual climate of faith-once-delivered and of faithful adherence to the infinitely precious deposit of faith, need also from time to time to reflect on God who spoke progressively, over long centuries, through the prophets.

Progressive revelation among the chosen people was closely woven into a long-drawn yet formative historical process. Constant speaking to the prophets led to the moulding of God's people. But the very constancy of utterance meant that each revelation was somehow incomplete, calling for more. Such was the very character and condition of revelation in the old testament. Surprisingly enough, Osee, one of the earliest writing prophets, had a sense of the multiplicity of God's utterances:

*I spoke to the prophets,
it was I who multiplied visions,
and through the prophets gave parables.* (Osee xii, 10.)

There were perhaps a thousand years of history in which God spoke again and again to the chosen people. Later in that history, a good Jew could have a sense of that whole process and come to write:

*Happy are we, O Israel,
for what is pleasing to God is revealed to us!* (Baruch iv, 4.)

This is the happy exclamation of a believer and theologian: it can be ours too. Theological too is the viewpoint of Deuteronomy and the deuteronomical history of Israel which has come down to us. This enables us to judge of the type of writing and to read more understandingly. But the Bible also tells us frankly of primitive states of mind as of infidelities and of compromises with infidelity, for God's word came into a world blind to the true and living God of Israel. The chosen people were always surrounded by pagan usages and often affected by them. The law was clearly against recourse to false gods or pagan divination:

'these nations whose land thou shalt possess hearken to soothsayers and diviners: but thou art otherwise instructed by the Lord thy God' (Deuter. xviii, 14).

¹ *Polumeros kai polutropos*: a conjunction of terms only found elsewhere in Maximus of Tyre, second century A.D.

The ideal was there, yet there were many Canaanite infiltrations in Israel's thought and worship; and the pagan hold on the leaders of the people as on the mass of the people was long and tenacious. In early days Saul, we are told, had rooted out magicians and soothsayers from the land (I Kings (Sam.) xxviii, 9); yet the story shows that he knew where they were, and he himself, when forced by the inexorable silence of God, did not hesitate to play with fire and call upon the witch of Endor and the ghost of Samuel, only to hear his own doom. Later in Hebrew tradition Ecclesiasticus interpreted the fascinating story as the last good deed of the prophet Samuel:

'He made known to the king and showed him the end of his life: and he lifted up his voice from the earth in prophecy to blot out the wickedness of the nation' (Eccles. xlvi, 23).

Certainly consulting or calling up of the dead seems to have persisted in Israel, together with kindred rites. Thus Isaias refers to those who would 'seek of pythons and diviners and mutter in their enchantments' (Isaias viii, 19). Manasses, whose very long reign seems to have been devoted to all manner of anti-Yahwistic practices, 'used divinations, observed omens, and appointed pythons, and multiplied soothsayers to do evil before the Lord to provoke him' (IV (II) Kings xxi, 6). Josias, the reforming king after him, strove to rid the land of all such things (IV (II) Kings xxiii, 24).

Rhabdomancy, or divining by a piece of wood, can be found in Osee iv, 12:

*My people have consulted their stocks
and their staff has enlightened them.*

Some implication of this sort, it can reasonably be argued, is in the very old 'Song of the Well' preserved in Numbers xxi, 18; for we are told that the leaders and chieftains were there 'with sceptres and sticks'. The reference may be to a water-divining ceremony; and water-divining, even in the twentieth century A.D., is done with sticks.

These and like practices are all concerned with getting something from God or getting to know however crudely about God. There is a primitive inquisitiveness intent on signs and portents which reveals the state of Hebrew society before and apart from the schooling of the prophets. Thus, for example, Gedeon is the recipient of a *sign* from God—'by the three hundred men that

lapped water I will save you and deliver Madian into your hand' (Jud. vii, 7); and he learned from a dream and its interpretations: 'and when Gedeon had heard the dream and the interpretation thereof, he adored . . . and he said, Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Madian into our hands'. Another primitive passage verges on 'tempting God' were it not for Gedeon's prayer, 'Let not thy wrath be kindled against me if I try once more, seeking a sign in the fleece', and, we are told, 'God did that night as he had requested' (Jud. vi, 39 & 40).

From an early period, too, priests were to give oracles or answers of God. Already in the desert period Moses was thus consulted, 'the people come to me to seek the judgment of God' (Exod. xviii, 15), and Moses was exhorted: 'be thou to the people in those things that pertain to God, to bring their words to him' (Exod. xviii, 19)—wording which came to be incorporated in the virtual definition of the priesthood in Hebrews v, 1. These texts of Exodus, together with Numbers xii, 8, belong to the oldest tradition which brings out the role of the covenant-tent in the consultation of the Lord. The people would approach the tent wherein Moses alone spoke to God 'face to face as a man is wont to speak to his friend' (Exod. xxxiii, 11). Significantly, centuries later, St John was to write how the Word of God 'pitched his tent' among us (John i, 14).

At an early period too, priests 'consulted the Lord' by the ephod and by Urim and Thummim.² 'Ephod' could mean several things, but we need only retain one sense and usage: a term used in oracular responses. A text of Proverbs xvi, 33 reads:

*From the pocket comes the lot
from the Lord comes all decision.*

The text becomes intelligible if we remember that attached to the high priest's 'ephod' was a pocket or folds containing the Urim and Thummim for oracular responses.

Urim and Thummim seem to have been sacred lots or holy dice, by which 'yes' or 'no' answers were given. I Kings (Sam.) xiv, 41-42 is the clearest text for showing the process at work:

Saul then said, if the fault is with me or with my son Jonathan, O Lord, God of Israel, then grant Urim; if the fault lies with your people Israel, then grant Thummim. Saul and Jonathan were designated,

² For these the most recent study is that of Fr de Vaux, O.P., in his *Institutions de l'Ancien Testament*, II, pp. 200-204.

and the people escaped. Saul then said: Cast lots between me and my son Jonathan; and Jonathan was indicated. (cf. also I Kings (Sam.) xxiii, 9-12.)

In I Kings (Sam.) xiv, 18-19 Saul is eager to know whether he should attack the Philistine camp. The consultation drags on, and Saul grows impatient, saying to the priest 'withdraw your hand'. Sometimes a decision was refused: perhaps the two lots came out together or not at all.

Anyway, there is no evidence for the use of such consultation after the time of David. The primitive drawing of lots made way for the consultation of the Lord through the prophets.

Dreams and dream-communications obtained at an early period as well as later. A dream could be represented as a favour of God, as in the Jacob story, 'truly God is in this place and I knew it not . . .' (Gen. xxviii, 11-16). Joseph in a dream is told of his future greatness (Gen. xxxvii, 9). Solomon is specially favoured with an apparition and utterance of the Lord God at Gabaon (III (I) Kings iii, 5-15). We are told that 'he awakened and perceived it was a dream'; yet he knew that God had spoken to him for 'when he was come to Jerusalem he stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered holocausts and sacrificed victims of peace-offerings. . .'.

Dreams however were not all from God, and there was a period in which dreams were associated with false prophets,

who seek to make my people forget my name through their dreams, which they tell every man to his neighbour: as their fathers forgot my name for Baal (Jer. xxiii, 27). Have you not seen a vain vision, and spoken a lying divination? (Ezech. xiii, 7).

And Zacharias refers to the dreamers 'who have spoken vanity' (x, 2).

After the exile there seems to have been a rehabilitation of the dream as a communication from God, as in the famous prophecy of Joel iii, 1, cited by St Peter (Acts ii, 16). In the new testament period it was generally recognized that God could and did speak in dreams, as in the dream of St Joseph (Matt. i, 20).

Also of a primitive period are presages or signs. Thus in I Kings (Sam.) xiv, 8-12, especially verse 10, the first word uttered by the Philistines becomes a good omen: 'this shall be a sign unto us', and they go up to defeat their enemies. So too Abraham's

servant fixes upon a sign whereby he can come to recognize the bride destined for Isaac.

Now therefore, the maid to whom I shall say: Let down thy pitcher that I may drink: and she shall answer, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: Let it be the same whom thou has provided for thy servant Isaac (Gen. xxiv, 14).

The origins of prophecy proper are lost in the far past. Certainly Israel was always conscious of God's intervention, and God gave answers and communicated messages long before the writing prophets whose works we have in our scriptures. As we have seen already, God gave replies to questionings and oracles. There is further evidence of this, e.g. Jud. i, 1-2: 'Who shall go up before us against the Canaanite and shall be the leader of the war? and the Lord said: Juda shall go up.' In another story God reveals where Saul lies hid: 'Behold he is hidden at home' (I Kings (Sam.) x, 22). Later David 'consulted the Lord saying, Shall I go up into one of the cities of Juda? and the Lord said to him, Go up . . . and into Hebron' (II Kings (Sam.) ii, 1). These are apparently all answers of God who has been consulted.

We now come to a higher level. No longer now man's questionings and cravings, but instead we discern God's choices and free gifts. Thus divine messages are given to those who have not sought them, as in the story of the birth of Samson (Jud. xiii). We read 'the angel of the Lord appeared to her' (3), 'thou shalt conceive and bear a son' (5), 'that the man of God may come again and teach us what to do' (9): all texts which appear to be echoed in the gospel story of the annunciation. God's call now makes vocational prophets. Some may have in past protested or resisted, as with Amos who asserted he was neither prophet nor son of a prophet or Jeremias who pleaded he was not adequate to the task. Yet both did God's work and remained faithful to the end.

God further commissions prophets to convey messages to others or to act as intermediaries. Thus Samuel comes between the wrath of God and the house of Heli (I Kings (Sam.) iii). A 'man of God' comes to Heli and gives him God's message (I Kings (Sam.) ii, 27). Nathan has messages from God for David: David is not to build the temple, that is left to Solomon (II Kings (Sam.) vii, 4); and he is reprov'd for having taken Urias' wife (II Kings (Sam.) xii, 1-15). Achias is yet another. He predicts the

rending of the kingdom, and by the vivid action of tearing his cloak (or 'overcoat') into twelve parts perhaps thought that he was setting afoot the process of division (III (I) Kings xi, 30-31).

There is no transitional prophetic writing in our scriptures. The earliest writing prophets, Amos and Osee, are fully prophets, 'every inch of them'. Thus Amos speaks in the characteristic way: 'these things the Lord showed to me' (Amos vii, 1 and 7, viii, 1), for the prophets present themselves as hearers of God's word or recipients of what he has shown (cf. Isaias viii, 1, 5, 11, or Jeremias iii, 6 and 11, etc.). Sometimes a kind of dialogue is suggested between the prophet and God, as in the magnificent chapter, Jeremias xiv, which is a penitential pleading with God, a communication and dialogue or exchange. We begin to grasp that prophecy is a sort of participation in the very knowledge of God. The prophet is convinced of speaking God's words for God. Their many 'conversations with God' are expressed by phrases as 'The word of God came to me' (Jerem. ii, 1 : xvi, 1) or 'when the Lord began to speak to Osee, the Lord said to Osee . . .' (Osee i, 1). Prophets thus privileged to hear the words of God could have but one desire: to communicate the lovable word to others. Hence much earnest pleading. Time and again we read: 'Yahweh says' . . . 'Listen! the Lord says . . .' (Isaias i, 2; Amos iii, 1, etc.); and indeed sometimes, simply, 'Listen to this . . .' (Isaias xlvi, 1) when the prophet so identifies himself with God's utterance that what he says is what God says. There are other phrases too, especially the solemn asseveration 'Utterance or Oracle of the Lord' (*Ne'um Yhwh*): God is, as it were, speaking emphatically at such moments (cf. Isaias xix, 4, Jerem. ii, 19, etc.). The new testament parallel is when our Lord says 'Amen, amen I say to you. . .'.

Thus there are innumerable utterances of God in the ancient scriptures. Their most sublime expression is in the prophetic writings. The epistle to the Hebrews has taught us that God spoke 'through the prophets'. They alone, under God, purified the religious instincts and cravings of the Hebrew people, and prepared them for the God-given truth which was to prelude God's greatest gift of his Son, our Redeemer. By taking the messianic prophecies alone, we can get this portrait of our Lord: he will be born at Bethlehem, of David's family, and of a maiden-mother. He will have special relationships with his heavenly Father who

will call him 'My Son'; and he will have titles as Counsellor, Strong God, Prince of peace. The Holy Spirit will come upon him, with many gifts, to found a kingdom of justice and to further utter peace. The role of Messiah will begin near the Sea of Galilee, and spread to the limits of earth. He will be king and priest, with a universal kingship 'not of this world': with a priesthood of another order (Melchisedech) perfect and eternal. Triumph of the kingdom will not be without struggles, yet the Messiah will free the human race from sin and the devil's power. He will take upon himself the iniquities of all; he will be mocked, condemned (though innocent), and despised. He will die to expiate the sin of the whole human race. Yet will he rise again from the tomb, and will have the great spiritual posterity of all those who are sanctified by his voluntary oblation of self. He will triumph over all enemies and for ever sit at the right hand of God.

Such is a picture built up from many particular prophecies of the old testament. God's way of teaching was gradual, and proportioned to the chosen people's capacities and weaknesses. And we now are the happy ones to whom 'God has spoken in these days through his Son'; and our Lord has said:

Many prophets and kings have desired to see the things that you see and have not seen them . . . (Luke x, 24).



FAITH AND THE SACRAMENT OF FAITH¹

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AND he said to them: "Go out over the whole world and preach the gospel to the whole of creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who refuses to believe will be condemned" (Mark xvi, 15). Our Lord shows us in these words that there are three stages on the way of salvation. First there must be preaching: the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ must be proclaimed to all creation; the revelation made to prophets and apostles must be passed on by preachers to all human beings. But God's revelation demands response on the

¹ For many of the ideas used in this article, I am indebted to the excellent book by Fr T. Camelot, O.P., *Spiritualité du Baptême*, in the collection 'Lex Orandi' no. 30 (Cerf, 1960).