

Prophethood

In recent years there has been a great deal of interest evinced in the study of the Prophets and the psychology of Prophecy and Prophethood. Many of us have become quite skeptical in this regard, doubting that there ever could be humans who were privileged in having some special relation to God or to ultra mundane beings. In any event, it has long been regarded by the generality that there are no longer any prophets, at least in the Scriptural senses.

There is a certain amount of truth in this conclusion. Mohammed who seems to have been the last to openly claim the position of Prophet declared "After me there will be no more prophets," and he called himself "the seal of the Prophets." Since his time the great faiths have spread over the face of the earth until at this hour it would appear that there is hardly a nook or corner that has not been reached by the missionary or ambassador of some one or more of the great religions. Therefore there is no particular need for the appearance of a prophet in that sense.

But what was the particular mission of the prophet? Was there any fundamental difference between him and the average man? A study of the prophets of all nations and faiths would indicate that they came to teach and preach the principle of the Unity of God, to inculcate this in people's minds as far as possible, and to oppose idolatry, at least in its grossest and basest forms. Pure idolatry hardly exists; students of Hinduism, for example, know that behind all the figures and images of the Oriental devotees is the One Universal Principle.

There is a sense in which there have always been and there may always be prophets. That is, there will always be men who become instruments of God, living according to His Will and working among their fellow men. As Professor Hocking has stated in *The Meaning of God in Human experience*:

"... The prophet is but the mystic in control of the forces of history, declaring their necessary: the mystic in action is the prophet. In the prophet, the cognitive certainty of the mystic becomes historic and particular; and this is the necessary destiny of that certainty; mystic experience must complete itself in the prophetic consciousness." (page 511)

This quotation will assist in explaining what the prophet is and what he is not. For he is not the soothsayer who may foretell specific event, or who depends upon divination or other occult arts. The soothsayer is not conscious of his relationship to God or the Universe, whereas the true prophet must be so conscious. In fact it is not even necessary that he fore-tell specific events but only give his message, seeing and knowing the unity of cause and effect. Thus, while Jeremiah foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, he said this could be averted if King Zedekiah would give up his idolatrous practices, and also if he would surrender to the King of Babylonia.

The prophet sees from a universal point or view. He knows how laws operate, and he is "in control of the forces of history." He differs greatly from the historian who is often able to make accurate predictions or a general prediction, for that one, although he may have a clear insight and good reasoning ability, is not in control of the forces of history, and his viewpoint, at best, is limited. It is wrong to call such men prophets for by that term is not meant one who "speaks beforehand," but one who "speaks in behalf of," and is therefore a herald or messenger.

The prophet must have the consciousness of the mystic but it is not necessary that all mystics become prophets. Some mystics are so absorbed with God that they pay little or no attention to the

Prophethood

affairs of the world. Others become poets or musicians or philosophers or teachers or engage in other pursuits. The prophet goes into the world of men and offers the solution to problems that confront groups as well as individuals, and endeavors to combat collective rather than individual evil.

It is very difficult to understand the personality of the Prophet without some knowledge of mysticism. Those who claim that the visions of Jeremiah or Ezekiel were the results of wishes, may retract in their examination of the Johannine sections of the N.T. Again when they seek for a common denominator between the characters of both divisions of the Bible and the personality of Mohammed and the saints of Islam, the solution is more difficult. But when they examine the lives of the Teachers of the Further East, they generally give up the problem or adopt another point of view.

In this respect it is very interesting to read many of the books written on the psychology of mysticism and prophethood, that they study the individuals in a limited field and apply their conclusions to similar types in other parts of the world. This method is really the opposite of the scientific. We have enough data about the saints and sages of all countries from Japan to France to formulate principles underlying subliminal and superliminal states of consciousness, but few have yet ventured into this field. Students of Buddhism feel almost forced to change their opinions about consciousness and the difference states that one may enter. R. H. Nicholson, who has spent many years translating the literature of Persia and central Asia has become convinced of the validity of the experience and growth in faculties among the Sufi Sheikhs.

The Sufis were regarded as the successor of the prophets. It is certainly true that we find among them many who had the mystical consciousness and also apparently understood the operation of historical and social forces. Even in the 18th century Nadir Shah consulted the works of Hafiz before setting out for his famous—or better be said infamous—India expedition, the results of which were entirely in accordance with the divined predictions. The Mogul Empire lost its power when Aurungzeb turned his back on Sufism, persecuting both Hindus and the mystics and heterodox among the followers of Islam, lapsing into a policy of extreme puritanical Orthodoxy.

The Sufis differ from the prophets in that they were born into a world already cleared in great part of idolatry and infidelity in their broadest sense. Their mission was to keep the Message Pure; they were preservers rather than creators. The same classification may be applied in some degree to the Patricians and Apologists among the Christians, to the great bodies of Commentators among the Hebrews and Hindus, and to the mystics of all religions and races. The prophets had seen that immorality and corruption went hand in hand with idolatry. Image worship was accompanied by love of wealth. Jesus was born and lived in a country free from idolatry but he said “neither can any one serve God and mammon (wealth).” And Paul after him said, “the love of money is the root of all evil.”

There need be no more prophets in the sense that there is idolatry to be combatted, in the sense of worshipping sticks and stocks and stones. It should be recognized that there is Truth in all religions. The God Ideal is found in them all: the Spirit of God will descend on mankind at all times and the one on whom It descends will be fully conscious of his mission and obedient to the One Who sends him forth.

In endeavoring to solve the problems of the day, God is not considered, or at most He is regarded as One far removed from this world. The War brought us many problems, but with a decade passed, they still remain unsolved and there is little understanding of them to permit a lasting

Prophethood

solution. At the same time, there is a growing disposition on the part of mathematicians, and those philosophers and scientists whose investigations carry them into the mathematical realm to hold “no Infinity, no Science.”

The Unitarian should recognize not only the One-ness of God, but the Allness of God. As the mathematical Infinite cannot be expressed in finite terms, so God cannot be expressed in human terms, but He can be felt and loved, and what is more—realized. To express Him in words is like trying to express a Four-dimensional or Multi-dimensional proposition in Three-dimensional terms.

Mohammed Iqbal, the Hindu Philosopher who has been blessed with an Occidental education, an Islamic religious background, and Iranic ancestry, has recognized the necessity of a Universal point of view. Furthermore, he has concluded that there may be some truth in the statement of those who claim that Truth can be known—that it can be known in a different state of consciousness, a conclusion totally differing from that of the Watsonians and greatly differing from the opinions of most psychologists.

The prophet must be a true Unitarian; he must be able to see the viewpoints of others as well as his own; he must be in a position to reconcile differences, not by a compromise of principles, but through synthesis born of insight; he must feel his unity with God and man, and must live fully the life that he preaches to others.

The mission of the prophet is difficult for his strength comes from the silence, yet he must talk and write and act in the outer world. He must face the world and at the same time never lose sight of God. He must be able and ready to face difficulties and to undergo persecution and hardship should they come. He must always live up to his highest ideal, fully aware of his limitations and ever leaning on God.

The prophet must now appeal not only to individuals and to nations, but to the whole world. Today we can see that the political, the social and economical worlds, as well as the world of thought, have advanced towards the realization of the unity of humanity. They are beginning to recognize that all rise and fall together. It is true that religions have taught this and religion has a stronger affect on people than any other force or institution. The prophet must now make clear the universal aspect of religion—not necessarily a universal religion—but a universal aspect will best bind humanity and assist in bringing concord and agreement.

At the same time the prophet must not mingle in politics. He may—like the Oracles of Greece—give advise. The Oracles for ages were the only means of keeping the various states of Hellas at peace, and they suggested the institution of the Olympic games which served to preserve amity among the Greek states.

The Divinity was represented in all the ancient governments. There were the three divisions: the priests and prophets, the king and nobility, and the people. Vestiges of this division still existed in the Holy Roman Empire and the Kaliphate. The Holy Roman Empire did not take the generality of humanity into consideration and was rent by struggles between the clergy and kings. In the Kaliphate all power and authority were lodged in one man. This has finally brought about the dissolution of the Kaliphate, but Islam has long been divided over the problem of spiritual leadership.

Prophethood

Nations of the world will only solve their problems, people will only solve their problems, by taking God into consideration, by acting according to Principles. This must not be in belief alone, but through realization and practicing the Divine teachings. There has probably been no time when all men knew God, but there have always been some on earth who were His willing instruments. God loves humanity and never leaves it without guides. The time may be at hand when such instruments of His Will may again go before the world in a spirit of helpfulness.

In one sense, there can be no more prophets—in another sense, the time for prophets to speak to the world is here. The mystic who has made himself an empty cup, fully realizing his dependence on the One Only Being, his heart and soul filled with the Divine Spirit, loving humanity and in control of the forces of history, such is the one to carry on this work.

Purdah, March 30, 1927