

Not by Might*

Hugh J. Schonfield

INTRODUCTION

**"Not by might. nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts"
(Zech iv:6)**

It is with the perception of a Reality greater than what is embraced in our definition of realism that I embark on an undertaking hazardous in the extreme from the human viewpoint. To attempt to set right the world on paper is ambitious enough to give any man pause before he commits himself and his life to so assailable an expression of his opinions. But when, driven on by the Highest Spirit, he must include in his claim to attention the profession that he is an instrument of revelation his fear of what this may mean for him is well-nigh overwhelming. The risks that he must face of the repudiation of his contemporaries are no longer confined to the contradiction of his thesis, which as a man he can endure with courage and return in kind, they involve an assault on the temple of his reason and challenge the truth that is for him all truth, and may cover him with the obloquy of charlatanism. To court that fate can be of no man's seeking; and only his own soul's knowledge of its tuition and the calm that this brings to allay his fears and overcome his rebellion against the upheaval of the very roots of his existence can furnish him with the power to obliterate from his consciousness the thought of consequences which he has ceased to have any right to determine. There arises no question of worthiness or unworthiness, only of faithfulness to a trust. The messenger comes: the summons must be obeyed: the need is urgent.

The things of which I am to write have not been received all at once or by any method that singles out the writer for spiritual favouritism. There has been the slow dawning of apprehension of the sacred entirety of the terrestrial scheme, an awakening vision of the plot and plan which guides the impulses of our sphere and the growing sense of a story finished even as it is being told. Agitated often by the pressure of the drama upon my spirit I have been prone to start up thinking that I heard the call for which intuitively I had been listening, to discard whatever was in my hand and to go out un-summoned to an errand unknown. But each time I have been granted the grace to perceive that my judgment was in error, and each time have gained by waiting. As the years have passed the quietness of understanding preparation has subdued my impetuosity, and I have been more content to absorb the content of the message until it was fully rounded out. 'When the call did come I was surprised to discover that the event did not centre on my readiness, but on the readiness of what was all about me in the world and at my very doors. That was the last lesson; but one which it was provident to learn. It put the purpose I was required to serve in its proper perspective, and took away the alarming magnitude of my function. Far from being a solitary apostle I was but the coherent expression of a multitude of half-articulated hopes. They mattered: my individual contribution mattered not at all. Safe therefore from the frustrating drug of flattery I can devote myself to being what I am, a mouthpiece.

II

The trial that is upon us is not a trial of our wayward inclinations but of the deeper determinations of our hearts: it is not a weighing and assessing of the deeds that we have done but of the animating causes of our actions. We must know, and shall indeed know, that inherent in the nature of our being is the quality of self-judgment, which by an immutable law marshals the evidence on one side and the other and reaches infallible conclusions. If we are condemned it is on our own showing. No-one has testified against us. And as it is with man so it is with peoples. The dictates of conscience are not to be denied with impunity; and there is a corporate conscience as well as an individual one. When God made the world He gave to every living thing in it the power of will either to do good or evil, and the herd or aggregate, whether it be of man or beast, is obedient to its own spirit just as much as the single creature. The implantation of what is base is capable of resistance; but if we give it willing nourishment we may not complain if its fruits are bitter. The affairs of nations are of the order of souls, and are to be directed by the same power of will as is the provenance of the destiny of each of their constituents.

Ability to determine the course of our future is one of our peculiar creative functions as members of the human species. But because we are of this world and not omniscient if we determine to take a road which is not that appointed by the All-Knowing as leading to the true goal of our existence we shall inevitably after a longer or shorter time work our way back to the point of our departure from the right way. The margin of error can be very wide, and every detour is the measure of our unhappiness and the unhappiness of others whom we may influence to follow us. In our wilfulness it often happens that we meet with such perils and pitfalls that our only means of salvation is to cry out to God whose ear is ever open, and His deliverance is ever sure. There is provided by His mercy a method of escape and an indication how to retrace our steps or to find readily the better path which we have forsaken. But there remains with us always the power of choice and volition. We are not compelled or coerced. The prompting to well-doing, which is conscience, is a signal in the soul: it may be neglected or ignored: it cannot override our will to waywardness: it cannot pluck us by the hand; but it can and does direct us by a divine instinct away from what is false and illusive.

So it is again with nations, and with all groups, and with that entity which is our earth itself. Law is the conscience of nations: it is the unchangeable standard of equity. But laws may be good or evil according to the spirit which makes and applies them, and they will stand or fall by the judgment of law itself. Grace is a gift of power to accept law and to live by it, the power that continually stands between us and self-destruction, that seeks us out when we go astray, and that redeems us when we have sold ourselves into bondage. Grace is the evidence of a God who loves and cares.

Revelation is an act of grace. It opens the inward eye to the great issues of life and death. It comes only when conscience has been consistently denied, not to supersede conscience but to quicken it, to give the will another chance of obedience. Revelation may present itself through external persons and events, or directly to the soul of a sinner. It is the last alarm that we are capable of receiving. Perilous indeed is the state of that man or nation which, having stifled conscience, repudiates it. But revelation, because it is of grace, does more than warn; it puts at our disposal all those potent aids to restoration and rehabilitation which a compassionate God has provided out of His infinite resourcefulness. It describes to us the remedies we need in our individual case, seeks to give us confidence in them, and instructs us how to apply them. More than this, revelation strives to commend the right way to us, to show us why it is desirable to take and where to it leads: it argues as conscience does not argue. It is the Spirit of God

Himself impinging on our spirit.

Revelation in every age sets newly before man the divine plan for his collective and individual happiness. At each great crisis brought about by human failure there comes a restatement reinforced by fresh demonstrations of love and persuasions of reason. The plan is changeless as the unchanging God; but repeatedly new aspects are projected upon the screen of history as the plan itself keeps pace with man's progress, following patiently and urgently upon his tortuous tracks. We cannot be forced not to wander or made to see; but when we recognise that we are hopelessly lost and blind, then, miraculously as it seems, comes guidance and vision.

III

It is because the world of men to-day is shaken to its foundations, and the cry for help is ascending on every side, and the voice of prayer is insistent in its petition for a plan to create peace and brotherhood between the nations, that God's will is clearly and effectually made known in a message which answers to the instant of our need. Once more the divine plan is announced, the same as at the beginning, but wearing the clothing of the period and conforming to the shifted scene. There is no stranger here, or wild anachronism, that we should oppose our intellectual pride to God's salvation, deeming it dated, out-moded, and behind the times. The plan as it is now revealed was never in this form presented to any that went before us; they had it for their age as we for ours. If we reject it an age to come will find it ready at a call, still the same, but passed beyond our comprehension into that which then shall signify the compass and content of life on this earth.

The making of a decision that will affect our well-being and that of those who come after us is the business of this generation. Once the message has been sent in response to our summons there can be no further plea of ignorance: it must be obeyed. Rejection will make us wholly responsible for the suffering that we and our descendants will have to bear. We have demanded that the truth shall visibly appear: it has appeared, not to confound us but to save us, if we will submit to be saved. Everything has been done to make the truth acceptable both to our minds and hearts. Even before the presentation of the divine plan the Spirit has been working to suggest its terms in the interpretations of Bible students and in the theories and proposals of political thinkers. The method of revelation is not to astound and overwhelm us by a sudden wrenching aside of the veil, to confront us with the embodiment of a wisdom which surpasses the limitations of our understanding. Always there is a preliminary process, a gradual preparation of the world for the nature of the tidings. Partial illumination is granted first in the trend of contemporary speculation, so that we are in a measure conditioned for reception. It is a friend that approaches us not an apparition.

The messenger no less than those whom the message is to reach is educated for his vocation. Twenty six years have elapsed since the day that the writer of these things began to be conscious that a certain direction had been given to his ideas and a purpose-fulness had taken hold on his imagination. Looking back, it is easy to see how necessary each stage of development has been and with what remarkable provision one circumstance has succeeded another; and looking around, the heart is uplifted in wonderment at perceiving how many other paths from different sides have been unsuspectedly converging on the same point, and how ripe is the moment for revelation when it takes place.

Stranger still is it to be aware, and inspiring also, that the divine plan for the nations is as old as the nations, and that from the dawn of civilised history revelation began to unfold the tapestry on which was prefigured the design for the ideal human society. As man has advanced in skill and mental stature so the plan has advanced with him, always

ready for fulfilment but capable of infinite protraction as one generation after another has missed its opportunity.

Contrary to the belief of many who have had no deliberate dealing with God, and even deny Him, the divine plan is as practical as their ideas are impracticable. They assume, without precedent, that man in the mass is capable of leaping directly on to a new plane of living and achieving a sudden reversal of his former policies. They therefore make no adequate allowance for evolutionary growth and are driven to offer all kinds of explanations and excuses when the system to which they have pinned their faith breaks down when submitted to the strain of testing. God is a better judge of man's capacity. He knows the time it takes to bring the seed to birth and maturity, and His plan for mankind is conceived accordingly. There is experiment with the little world before the big world and a tempering with example before the application of sustained pressure. What is expected of the nations to-day is no violent change of constitution, no rashly given promises, but careful attention and observation. The wisest course for a drowning man who has not learned to swim is to relax and to cease from struggling, so as both to keep himself afloat and not to impede the movements of his rescuer.

The message that God sends to a stricken world is that help is near at hand, and further to give courage and hope He reveals in what way deliverance is to be accomplished, that the world may be still and not oppose the measures designed for its redemption.

The onus for the present and for a considerable future will rest upon those who have been chosen for the responsibilities of rescue. They are called to immediate and unremitting activity disregarding all danger and holding themselves ready for any sacrifice. Only if they are faithful and the nations are willing can the plan of God be effective in this age. May He who abounds in mercy and loving-kindness grant us the grace to avail ourselves of His ordinance of peace and to enter upon the enjoyment of an era founded on justice and equity!

Written by Hugh J. Schonfield 1940 (*original title lost)

Edited by Stephen A. Engelking

©2003 Hugh & Helene Schonfield World Service Trust