IS GOD SILENT?

by
Frederic W. Farrar

The icy wind of atheism is stealing through our literature and chilling the hearts of many. Myriads more, although they do not doubt the existence of God, are denying his providence. An image is before them, but there is silence. For them God is as inanimate as an idol.

"What do you mean by your God?" they ask us. "What is he but the universe? A vast, formless fate? A dread magnificence of nature? A fearful uniformity of laws? What is he"—to take one of these philosophic utterances—"but 'a stream of tendency flowing through the ages'?" They insist, "If we sin, what does it matter to blind, infinite forces which may crush us but cannot love? If we repent, what will the spaces care for our repentance?"

All too often the very best among us fails to realize that God *does* speak, and speaks to *us*, and speaks distinct messages in voices awfully articulate. And even when we believe it with all our hearts, how little are we ready to say with bowed head, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

A Jewish legend tells us that on Mount Sinai the lawgiver Moses needed no human sustenance because the subtle harmonies of the universe so filled his soul as to satisfy and sustain his whole being with their heavenly diapason. Later, when he came down out of the rolling clouds and heard no longer, he hungered for earthly food.

Is it not so with us? Times are when we hear the voice of God as he walks in the garden in the cool of the day—yea, when we hear it all the day long. At other times we listen with fainting hearts as people tell us that we have but mistaken the pulse of our own bodies for a

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■ *Frederic William Farrar (1831-1903), dean of Canterbury from 1895 until his death, was one of the Church of England's great preachers of the late 19th century. He served as chaplain to the House of Commons and wrote a "Life of Christ" which went through 12 editions in one year. This message is taken from his volume "The Silence and the Voices of God," published by Macmillan in 1874.*

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sound above us; that the universe in which we live has long been smitten with the curse of silence.

Oh, they do not lack for arguments. Look, they say, at all this pain and misery and evil; how is it reconcilable with the Being of a God at-once omnipotent and all-loving? Look at the myriads of mankind who have lived only as the beasts live, and have died as the fool dies.

John Ruskin asks us to examine all the evidences of "insane religion, degraded art, merciless war, sullen toil, detestable pleasure and vain hope or vile, in which the nations of the world have lived." We are told that men do wrong and prosper; men do right and die in defeat and darkness. The seducer lies down to sleep as softly as the innocent and the just.

I shall not attempt to answer all these objections from the supposed silences of God. God makes no ado. He does not defend himself. He suffers men to blaspheme. His enemies make a murmuring but he refrains. And much of what is said is awfully true—for those who utter it. To men, to nations, God *is* silent; there *is* no God. Their ears are closed so that they cannot hear. They who love the darkness have it. To those who will not listen, God does not speak. Like avenges like; and then

Take the trouble to listen; perhaps you will find Him speaking ~ to you

the whole universe becomes a gulf of silence, a void of blackness. They suffer, and there is no God. They sin, and there is no Redeemer. They despair, and there is no Comforter. God forgotten is God ignored; God ignored is God doubted of; God doubted of is God denied; God denied, sooner or later is God detested.

But on the other hand, to seek God is to find; and to listen is to hear; and to hear is to know and love, so that to his saints, "day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night, showeth knowledge."

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He speaks, for instance, in nature, which is but the visible translucence of a divine agency working upon material things.

Every bird that sings,
And every flower that stars the
elastic sod,
And every breath the radiant
summer brings,
To the pure spirit is a word
of God.

God reveals himself also in the moral law. That law was written on the hearts of men, their conscience also bearing them witness. In a sense all mankind has been on Sinai and learned the eternal distinctions between right and wrong.

Once more, God speaks to us in Scripture, which means that he speaks in that revelation of himself that he has vouchsafed to the lives and hearts of other men. He has sent us the prophets, rising up early and sending. My brethren, he who has lost this belief has been robbed of a blessed heritage.

It is true that the Bible has been wounded in the house of its friends. Men who were professed defenders have deprived the Scriptures of their glory and universality, reading them under the veil of bigoted misconception or through the smoke of sectarian hate. They have made the Gospel of life and love and liberty little better than "the remembrancer of salvation and the messenger of hell."

Yet there in all its human tenderness, in all its divine wisdom, for all who will use it rightly, that holy and blessed Book is laid upon the inviolable altar of truth and honesty, the eternal protest against the very sins that are committed in its name.

Do not read it with slavish superstition or with a blind fetish worship, but in loving humility, in intelligent faith. Then you, like your fathers before you, will find it the best comfort in sorrow, the best warning in danger, the best hope in death. When all else is bitter, it still shall be sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. When all else is dross, it shall be as refined gold.

And let us never forget that it is in the history which it records and in the sacraments [and ordinances] which it perpetuates that we hear most clearly of all the voice of God speaking to us by the divine lips of the Son of man. It was thus

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that God revealed himself; and if we reject that revelation, can we hope for any other?

"God, who in many and various ways spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, in these last days has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). Oh, let us hear that voice of the Son of God, for if we hear it not, we may hear no other; and they who hear it *live!* In the light of that truth, and amid the ever-widening skepticism of this generation, let us pour out the impassioned prayer of Martin Luther: "Oh, my God, punish us far rather with pestilence, with all the terrible sicknesses on earth, with war, with anything rather than that Thou be silent to us!"

Such silence never means that God does not speak, but that we will not hear.

To the self-honoring children of a cold and faithless generation, who have invested so much of modern thought with the clammy mist of your uncertainties and your negations, we would say: Try your very utmost to rob us of God, but it will be in vain. We too are biased. Where you argue, we feel. Where you doubt, we know. Where you hesitate, we are certain. Where you deny, we live.

Hold yourselves, if you must, to be the sport and prey of every angry circumstance and every pitiless law, but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God. Stumble in the cold and storm if you will, but we will grope for our Father's hand. And never have we, never has any man, groped for that hand in vain.



Frederic W. Farrar

(1831 - 1903)

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Jesus People

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