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826TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,  
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,  
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH, 1939.  
AT 4.30 P.M.

THE REV. PRINCIPAL H. S. CURR, M.A., B.D., B.LITT.,  
IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous meeting were read, confirmed and signed and the Hon. Secretary announced the following elections :—As Members : Dr. J. R. Howitt, V.D., M.D., and Noel Paul, Esq. As Associate : Colonel G. M. Oldman, D.S.O.

The CHAIRMAN then called on the Rev. John Thomas, M.A., to read his paper entitled "The Spiritual Nature and Constitution of the Universe."

The meeting was then thrown open to discussion in which Dr. Barcroft Anderson, Mr. Sidney Collett, Lt.-Col. Skinner and Mr. Philip Dive took part.

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### THE SPIRITUAL NATURE AND CONSTITUTION OF THE UNIVERSE.

By the REV. JOHN THOMAS, M.A.

I FULLY realise the immense difficulty of dealing with such a subject as this within the allowed limits of the present paper ; but for the seemingly rash adventure I am able to plead some justification. The privilege of presenting this lecture to this distinguished assembly is the fruit of my Book on *Philosophic Foundations*, which I published in the spring of 1937. I am therefore able to appeal to this book as the background of my present exposition of the subject I have chosen, and can in this way economise and condense my presentation of the philosophic conception which it implies. For those members of the Victoria Institute who have already become familiar with the book, such a link of association will effectively compensate for the brevity of the present treatment. For the rest, I trust that the ideas now presented will be arranged and related with sufficient force to induce them to continue the study of this profoundly vital subject in the comprehensive treatment given to it in my book. For I venture to say that in the whole round

of human thought, outside the revealed Word of God, there is no subject comparable in importance with the one which is to occupy our attention here and now.

#### THE MODERN ATTITUDE TO TRADITIONAL IDEALISTIC PHILOSOPHY.

In these present times the old deep foundations of Philosophy are being forsaken over a large area by professional philosophers, with deplorable results to the æsthetic, moral, and religious ideals of the rising generation. This unfortunate change in the view-point of philosophic thought is partly the result and partly the cause of a general degeneration in the spiritual feeling and outlook of the times; but, whatever may be its origin, it has now become a general infection poisoning the springs of faith in the highest ideals of the human spirit. This reasoned and widely circulated scepticism concerning the profoundest visions of the spirit is largely responsible for the growing infidelity and irreligion which we plainly see in our own land, and which has produced a horrible miasma of evil in the international relations of the wide world. It provides an evil and far-reaching discipline which is driving the minds of the young age far from every approach to the Christian revelation, and fixing them in early neglect, and even contempt, of the gospel of salvation. In this way we are likely to breed a race of sceptics, almost as completely cut away from the message of salvation in the Son of God as the heathen to whom the revelation has never come. It is this tragic peril of the times that has led me, by the grace and help of God, to try to restore the spiritual ideals that are being widely despised and rejected in modern philosophic teaching, and to restore Philosophy to the reverence and nobility of its traditional depth, as the lowly handmaid of the highest truths. But there are reasons why I should, at the outset, justify such an attempt by giving assurance of its validity and effectiveness.

#### THE CONTENTION THAT THE PHILOSOPHY OF IDEALISM HAS FAILED.

The modern sceptical philosopher will probably tell you that the great idealistic philosophies proved a failure, and ended in a *cul-de-sac*. This will be given as one of their reasons, perhaps their chief reason, for relegating every such Philosophy to

permanent ostracism, and confining themselves to the shallower speculations of the modern sceptic. We shall find other reasons in a wider trend of modern thinking, but this criticism of the validity of philosophic idealism is so vital that it needs to be dealt with without delay. If the exploitation of this false idea were confined to the sceptic, it would not be very serious, because it could be countered at once by pointing to the greater futility of the modern sceptical guesses. But I have discovered that there are good Christian people whose minds have gone curiously astray on this subject, so that they imagine they are honouring the revealed will of God by discrediting the lowly and reverent use of the mind in quest of ascertainable truths which the sacred Scriptures do not give us. This misconception is to be deplored, for these good people unconsciously range themselves on the side of the enemies of Divine truth, and discourage those whom God enables to discomfit the enemy with his own weapons. It is safe to say that men with such a mistaken idea would have forbidden the great Bishop Butler to publish his philosophic *Analogy*, a book that did so much to stem the tide of scepticism in his day.

#### THE CHARTERED RIGHTS OF THE REASONING MIND.

The greatest thing in Man is spirit, and the next greatest is the reasoning mind. Remember that all the natural powers with which God has constituted Man are sacred; that is, all the powers of spirit and mind and body. They can all be vitiated by sin, and they can all be consecrated to God and holiness. When they are consecrated to God and truth they are good. And to this end we are expected to use them all with reverent prayerfulness and diligence. Without the exercise of reason we could not know or understand anything; therefore it is amazing to me that any man who honours God and truth should cast discredit upon powers of mind devoted to the love of truth. I affirm as strongly as any one that Holy Scripture gives us a revelation of Divine truth beyond the powers of the human mind to discover; but even to the understanding of this Divine revelation the powers of the mind have to be applied with all diligence. Christian theology is the product of human thinking applied to the oracles of God. When the thinking is wrong, the theology is also wrong. In truth some theological thinking is as sadly wrong as some philosophical thinking; but we do not argue from

this fact that all theology is a useless blind alley. Yet this is precisely the argument that a certain type of dogmatist flings at us with the view of summary condemnation of all philosophic thought. Such inconsistency as this is, however unconsciously, the enemy of the truth, because it violates the sacred balance of true reason.

#### THE LEGITIMATE FUNCTION OF THE REASONING MIND.

This unreasonable limitation of the functions of reason hides or obscures the vital relation between the Divine Revelation of Holy Scripture and the range of truths that are within the rational quest of the mind of Man. The revelation of Holy Scripture is *sui generis*, and every reasonable man must admit that outside of that revelation God has allowed and arranged a wide field of truth for the investigation of the human mind. I suppose that most or all of the stereotyped objectors to philosophic thinking admit the legitimacy of the investigations of Science, and are greatly pleased when scientific conclusions confirm the faith in which they stand, and the revelation in which they believe. In this fact we clearly perceive an important connection between truths gained by rational investigation and truths received by Divine inspiration. Yet Science has made as many mistakes as Philosophy without being anathematised out of all credit on this account. Such treatment of Philosophy has no Christian merit, for even this one fact shows it to be unreasonable.

#### THE INTIMATE RELATION OF PHILOSOPHY TO RELIGION.

I go further, and confidently affirm that the relation of Philosophy to religion is more vital than the relation of Science. Physical Science has chosen to approach the phenomena of being from a material standpoint, which shuts it up into a limited association with being as a whole. As Professor Whitehead has emphasised, it determines its own bounds by excluding at the start the highest forces and ideals of the human mind and spirit, an exclusion which condemns it to the investigation of a skeleton universe, from which the secret of universal being can never emerge. In contrast with this limitation, a true Philosophy is inclusive of all the knowable facts and forces of universal being, including all the ideals and aspirations of the human mind and

spirit, in which, of course, religious facts and forces are included. The conclusion from all I have said is this: While Divine Revelation has its own special range, the quest of mind has also an appointed range of its own, and this quest in a true Philosophy is in necessary and vital alliance with true religion and its Divine Revelation. There is a true Philosophy of being, whether we have discovered it or not, on which all the truths of life, from the lowest to the highest, must be based, and with which they must be in harmony. It is on these foundations of universal reason that all the heavens rest, and truth towers upwards into its highest Divine Revelation.

#### THE SANCTION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE TO THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE MIND.

Holy Scripture, being the Word of Truth, recognises this underlying foundation of truth, and emphatically appeals to it as sufficient to condemn the falsehoods of idol worship. The inner light of reason leaves the idolators, as Paul puts the case, "without excuse." As an instance of how a narrow bias can darken the understanding, I may state that the challenge has been flung at me, and that not by the uneducated, that the thinking mind of Man cannot, by reason alone, know anything whatever about God, not even that He exists. A more guarded denial, in a book by a Christian thinker, while admitting that the *existence* of God may be recognised by reason alone, strips that recognisable God of moral attributes, so that no rational relation can be established between Him and the righteous God of the Christian faith. From this it would follow that the moral quality of the Absolute Spirit cannot be used as the basis of any legitimate system of Philosophy. Such a limitation is more than arbitrary; it is irreconcilable with philosophic reason, and is clearly contradicted by Holy Scripture. It was through the truths which God has placed within the reach of human reason that Paul introduced the message of the Gospel to the Athenian idolators. He told them that God had so arranged the scheme of things that men might "seek God, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him; though He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being. As certain even of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring." It was by this clear journey of the rational mind that Paul led the Athenians to the gates of the gospel,

and some of them entered in, and found life. This rational ground of approach is still more impressively elaborated by the apostle in his great Epistle to the Romans. In reference to the heathen nations he writes: "That which may be known of God is clear unto them, for God has made it clear to them. For His invisible things are seen by intelligent perception through His works of world-creation, even His eternal power and Godhead, to the end that they should be without excuse." This is the consistent teaching of Holy Scripture, that God has supplied a deep and extensive knowledge of Himself to the reasoning mind of man, that "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork," that "day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge." The Scriptures also clearly indicate that this important source of knowledge should be investigated with the reverent diligence of consecrated minds, lest we miss part of the truth which God has placed within our reach, and thus miss the holy light which one God-given truth always throws upon the others. If we exclude or neglect any God-given source of light and truth, we make ourselves responsible for what may prove a grievous loss.

#### THE UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY OF THE BIBLICAL REVELATION.

To my mind it appears beyond controversy that this knowledge of God as conveyed to the human mind is the knowledge of the secret of the universe, so far as the human mind can discover it. If all created things "live and move and have their being in Him," He must be in a fundamental sense "All and in all." If He is Absolute Spirit, then the whole nature and constitution of the universe must be spiritual. It appears irrational to try to find the secret of universal being in any other way, and this is, in a phrase, the complete condemnation of all the sceptical or godless philosophies of our time. The philosophic reasons for positing the Absolute Spirit as the ultimate explanation of the universe are fully unfolded in my book, and will be briefly set before you in this paper this evening. For the moment we stress the philosophic importance of the knowledge of God attributed by Scripture to the rational human understanding. Since all creation is the product of His "eternal power and Godhead," and He is therefore "before all things," He is eternally self-sufficient and transcendent. Since the creation, as



the product of His power, "lives and moves and has its being in Him," He is necessarily immanent, the Life of its life, and the Power of its power. He is therefore both transcendent and immanent, "above" all things and yet "in" all things, He is the infinite Reason, for all things declare His wisdom as well as His power. This foundation of truth is emphasised by the apostle John, when He declares that all things were made by the LOGOS, or the eternal REASON. We are told in the Epistle to the Colossians that not only is this Infinite REASON "before all things," but also that "in Him all things consist." This clearly means that the essential ground of the whole universe is in the Absolute Spirit, and that the essence of all being flows from a spiritual fountain. The Scriptures assume that the Absolute Spirit must be Absolute PERSONALITY, because personality is the perfection of SPIRIT. They also assume that the Absolute Reason is a righteous personality, because absolute moral perfection is the fundamental quality of rational personality. This is what I may call the underlying philosophy of Biblical revelation, the self-manifestation of God to the reasoning mind of man, preparing the way for the higher Revelation of redeeming love and grace in the incarnate Son of God.

#### THE NEED FOR PHILOSOPHIC EVIDENCE LIBERATED FROM AUTHORITY.

All these great truths, so the Word of God affirms, can be known about God by rightly directed reason. Then what is the use or need of independent philosophical research? Why not direct the attention of the world to this sublime Philosophy that is embedded in the oracles of inspiration, and challenge men to reject at their peril the truth which comes from such a Divine source? That is the course which some dogmatically affirm we ought to pursue. I reply, with as little censure as possible, that there is in this attitude a narrowness which misses the world's great need. We cannot justly lay down conditions until we have gone as far as we can to lend a helping hand to the lame and the blind. Before we condemn the unbelieving minds of men, we must meet them as far as possible in the outer courts of the temple of truth, until a holier light guides them into the inner sanctuary of salvation. It is natural for the mind of man to desire to make an independent search into the meaning of nature and of life, lest he should be unduly fettered with the

bonds of unreasoning authority. Many sincere minds feel that the authority of Scripture is so overwhelming in its claim that the surrender of life and reason to such a sovereign and absolute demand, must be preceded by a sincere inquiry into the truths that lie within the quest of the reasoning mind. We must not shirk this challenge. Such a Philosophy as mine meets it fearlessly in this domain, and makes the independent search for truth subservient to the final message of life in Holy Scripture. In the phrase of Scripture, when the knowledge of God that is made manifest to the reasoning mind is clearly demonstrated, the unbeliever is left "without excuse." This, stated briefly, is the object of a true Philosophy.

TRUE PHILOSOPHY CANNOT FAIL, BUT MAY NEED A  
CORRECTED REASONING.

The narrow dogmatic contention that Philosophy has failed, and proved itself finally useless in the quest of truth, is both foolish and fatuous, as the Scriptures, in their own language, themselves bear witness, affirming clearly a sphere of truth discoverable by, and revealed by Divine purpose to, the reasoning mind. That human reasoning is fallible and makes mistakes is not disputed, but the history of Philosophy is not alone in this. The way of Science and reasoned Theology is marked by similar fallibility. But there is ever a truer reasoning diligently engaged in correcting these mistakes and leading the minds of men ever nearer to the truths which God has given to the quest of man. The past mistakes and failures of Philosophy furnish no reason for abandoning the quest of reasoned truth, but rather urge us to a more reverent, earnest and sincere quest. This is the answer, not only to those who rashly condemn all philosophic effort, but also to the numerous sceptical thinkers of the day who impatiently reject all the magnificent vision of philosophic idealism, and proclaim it obsolete through failure. This has become almost the philosophical slogan of the hour, and the philosophical idealist need not expect respect, or even toleration, from the serried ranks of modern scepticism. Yet I boldly maintain that the fundamental conceptions of idealism must triumph, that there is a way out of temporary failure into permanent success, and that my Philosophy is a valid contribution to this development. I also confidently prophesy that a

renewed and illuminative idealism in Philosophy will be the rational triumph of the days that are coming.

#### PHILOSOPHIC MATERIALISM AND PLURALISM ARE FATALLY IRRATIONAL.

In justification of this faith, the following facts must at present suffice. It remains true that philosophic foundations must be either spiritual or material, and one can say without hesitation that philosophic materialism is so crowded with irrationality that it can never become a permanent resting-place for the deeper reason of man. Reason is obviously the lord of creation, and the only clue to its nature and meaning. Materialism is therefore a meaningless nullity. Besides, the vastest and loftiest forces in human life are the forces, ideals, and aspirations of the spirit, of which materialism takes little account. No permanent philosophy can be fashioned out of a depleted universe. All kinds of philosophic pluralism are equally condemned by the fundamental intuitions of reason, which can never be shaken from its insistence on the essential unity of being. These facts leave us with the conception of a rational universe, or the Absolute Reason, as the only philosophic conception that can compass the whole of being. All other philosophies deal with broken parts of a divided universe, and inevitably lead, as they are doing at the present time, to intellectual scepticism, and to moral and spiritual despair. To this irrational chaos of futility and hopelessness the philosophy of the Absolute Spirit is the rational antidote. It will be stubbornly resisted by the prevailing sceptical forces; but its final triumph is assured.

#### IN A NEW AND LIBERATED IDEALISM THE IDEA OF NON-RATIONAL MATTER IS REJECTED.

The philosophy of Absolute Spirit, which I have offered in my book, is directed to removing the difficulties which brought the great history of developing philosophic idealism to a standstill, and stirred up the present prejudice against its conceptions. It goes further, and propounds and elaborates a new philosophy of the Absolute Spirit, in which the fetters that impeded the old idealism are no longer found, in which account is taken of all the highest forces and visions of mind and spirit, in which the constitution of Nature and its forces is rationally explained, in

which the highest ideals and aspirations of mind and spirit are shown to be valid, and in which a sure foundation is laid for a still higher faith in the self-revealing God. Such an aim may be anathema to stereotyped scepticism, but it meets the crying needs of the deepest heart of man. To develop the philosophy of the Absolute Spirit into this liberative form, two great changes have been found necessary. In the first place, the idea of matter as a non-rational opposite to spirit must be finally and completely rejected, and the conception of Absolute Spirit as the full and complete explanation of all being must be boldly and unequivocally affirmed. This is an easier step to-day than it would have been at any previous period; for the supposed solidity of matter is curiously vanishing before the search even of the physical scientist, while he has been obliged for a considerable period to invest his material "ether" with non-material, or even anti-material, qualities. The early English psychologists reduced what was regarded as matter to mental sensations and perceptions. Plato had his rational *Forms* and Forces obscured by a material medium that was both *formless* and meaningless. Kant was hampered by some mysterious material "thing-in-itself," which had no meaning at all for himself, or for anybody else. Idealistic philosophy, not having the courage, or perhaps not having reached the point of development, to cut away non-rational matter completely, timidly allowed it as "*phenomenal reality*," but no one even to this day has the faintest idea what that means. To deal sincerely and faithfully with the philosophy of Absolute Spirit, this irrational duality must cease, and Absolute Spirit must be fearlessly accepted as the "All and in all" of universal being. This is the first foundation-stone of the New Philosophy.

#### A LIBERATED IDEALISM AFFIRMS THE ABSOLUTE FREEDOM OF THE ABSOLUTE SPIRIT.

This was the first necessary act of liberation. The second necessary act was the philosophic liberation of the conception of the Absolute Spirit. In Hegel's system the freedom of the Absolute Spirit had vanished. The whole universe, the Absolute Spirit included, was imaged as a vast rational and inevitable machine. This closed-up conception of the universe precluded all further development on these lines. I saw that the freedom of the Absolute Spirit must be as absolute as His rational essence.

I know it was a daring step to take, but further philosophic investigation has convinced me of its fundamental necessity and truth. I set idealism afresh on the way of development by affirming the absolute freedom of the Absolute Spirit as the second foundation-stone of the New Philosophy. I know that such a fundamental revolution as this in Philosophy will startle many minds, and will surely meet with all possible criticism and opposition from the sponsors of modern scepticism ; but I have found it shed such amazing light upon the problems of the universe that I am convinced that it, or some philosophy closely akin to it, will shape the thoughts of the philosophic future.

IT ALSO AFFIRMS THE MORAL PERSONALITY AND FREE  
WILL OF THE ABSOLUTE SPIRIT.

It follows from the freedom of the Absolute Spirit that the secret of the universe must be sought, not in reason as a dialectical process, but in the Absolute Reason as Absolute Moral Freedom. I am certain that we cannot conceive infinite rationality as other than infinite personality. Nor can we conceive infinite rational personality as other than infinite moral personality. To conceive a non-moral personality is to conceive an irrational personality, for the moral consciousness is the supreme quality of pure reason. Therefore the supreme dynamic quality of the Absolute Spirit is not a rational dialectical process—such as Hegel worked out into a final mechanical routine of barren necessity—but the ordered energy of an infinite moral personality expressing the perfection of moral activity, and ever perfectly fulfilling the moral ideal through the fundamental laws of moral perfection. For the moral life of the Absolute Spirit is the moral law of the universe. Thus the mechanical necessity imposed by Hegel's rational dialectic is dismissed, for the essence of morality, whether finite or infinite, is the freedom of the will. The universe is the product, not of mere rational necessity, but of God's free will and purpose. Of course, perfect righteousness is the highest fulfilment of perfect reason ; but what we sometimes call the necessity of righteousness in God is fundamentally the expression of His absolutely free will. Of that will the universe is the essentially free and full expression. It is the Absolute Spirit in action, expressing and realising His infinite moral self.

THE FREEDOM OF THE ABSOLUTE SPIRIT CREATES THE  
FREEDOM OF THE UNIVERSE.

Thus we conclude that both the creation and the history of the universe arise out of a moral motive and purpose, through the will of the Absolute Spirit. The essence of the universe is not mechanism, but rational freedom. By this conception the universe is enfranchised, and Philosophy itself is set free for rational development. Through this conception new light is shed upon the warfare of Nature, and upon the perplexing problems of human history in gross, and the experiences of individuals in detail. Man's spiritual aspirations and ideals are here based on eternal foundations, the hopes of religion are set in the essential purpose of creation, the man who lives for this Divine reason is assured that the whole scope and purpose of the universe is on his side, and that the eternal Spirit, in Whom all things "live and move and have their being," is omnipotently shaping events towards the final moral harmony. I have not attempted more than to suggest the direction and scope of this lofty and liberative philosophical principle, with its great possibilities of development, and its manifold application to the problems that beset us on every hand in the facts and forces of Nature and of the life of man. For it is impossible to do more than this in a brief paper. But this new vision has brought a new joy into my life. The strong and organised forces of modern scepticism had troubled me greatly, for I could not see in any quarter an enlightened philosophy which might break down the intellectual barriers that were keeping thousands of men and women from all approach to the Divine wisdom of the gospel of the Son of God. Then the vision came to me, which I have now given you in brief glimpses. I want to spread it far and near, for it leads to the very gates of the Christian faith. In this vision of the spiritual nature and constitution of the universe in which we live, faith will have room to flourish.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Rev. Principal H. S. CURR) said: There are many points of interest raised by Mr. Thomas's paper. It is my purpose to draw attention to some of these as having been of special significance for me personally. In the first place, I wish to associate myself very cordially with the lecturer in the references which he

made to the influence of philosophy on public life. That is much more powerful and pervasive than might be imagined largely owing to its subtle character. It is not so much in evidence as such scientific doctrines as organic evolution, but it is none the less potent, and of many modern tendencies in philosophical thought it may be truly said that their effect on the minds and hearts of their champions is as inimical to the acceptance of Christianity as much scientific doctrines. An excellent illustration is furnished by the philosophical and ethical teaching which was so popular before the outbreak of the European War in 1914. The evil seed was sown in the classrooms of the German universities, and almost the whole world had to reap the harvest in blood and ashes and tears. That is an example of what philosophic propaganda can accomplish. Mr. Thomas has then rendered useful service to the cause of Christianity by emphasising the perils which are associated with the popularity of a metaphysic which provides a soil uncongenial for the truths and principles of Holy Scripture which must be received with intellectual, in addition to spiritual, meekness as the engrafted word.

I am also in hearty accord with Mr. Thomas when he offers such a spirited defence of the rights and privileges of man's reason. It reminded me of the words inscribed on the walls of the Logic class-room in Edinburgh University. Sir William Hamilton is said to be responsible for their appearance. The motto runs thus: "In this world there is nothing great but man; and in man there is nothing great but mind." If the last word be understood as including the soul and spirit as well as the intellect, no fault can be found with it. As the paper has reminded us, we are living in an age when the human reason is no longer regarded as a trustworthy guide to truth. Mr. Thomas has dealt trenchantly with these aberrations. I should, however, like to add a footnote. On the one hand, the authority of reason is assailed by modern scepticism. But in so doing it seems to be forgotten that reason is being criticised by reason. It is by reason that reason is pronounced to be a blind leader of the blind, and there is no scepticism exhibited with reference to that conclusion. What is thus thrust out at the door returns through the window. On the other hand, reason is denounced by the Barthian School as impotent by searching to find out the truth of God. No true and wise defender of reason would challenge that

position, but he would argue that it is possible to acknowledge the inexorable need of revelation without disparaging reason. I do not need to belittle silver that I may extol the merits of gold. On the contrary, injustice, intellectual or otherwise, has got a wonderful way of avenging itself. It seems to me, therefore, that there is nothing to be gained by deprecating reason in the quest for truth. It can never be a substitute for revelation. If that were possible, there would be no such thing as revelation, since God never does for man what he can do for himself. The magnitude of revealed truth only proves the poverty of the results obtainable by the exercise of unaided reason. God never does more than the barest minimum for man. That being so, the extent of revealed truth is a strange commentary on the limitations of pure reason.

With the lecturer's contention that the ultimate reality is spirit and not matter, I am also in hearty agreement. The task of philosophy is not unlike that operation in simple arithmetic known as finding the least common denominator. A series of fractions of varying denominations are examined until the least common measure to which they can be reduced is discovered. In the same way the student of metaphysics endeavours to find the least common denominator for existence and reference. That must be either matter or spirit. It is impossible to argue the point in detail or at length. My only comment would be that those who postulate matter as ultimate are guilty of what St. Paul calls the worship of the creature, rather than the creator. There is no limit to the power of mind over matter. Mr. Thomas then would seem to be amply justified in making spirit the basic principle of the universe. As he reminds us in his paper, the conclusions of modern science point in that direction.

In conclusion, may I express to our lecturer in your name our deep appreciation of what he has said to us. I do so with all the more enthusiasm because, as he himself remarks in his prefatory sentences, he has purposely avoided the language of the schools. Philosophy has its distinctive vocabulary like any other branch of science, and it is as unintelligible to the layman as any other form of jargon. In these circumstances, we are all very grateful to Mr. Thomas for clothing his ideas in words which all can understand and follow. I described him in my introductory remarks as an evangelical



philosopher. To my thinking, it would not be easy to pay a higher compliment.

Dr. J. BARCROFT ANDERSON said : The Author of the Scriptures fourteen times (Matt. ii, 6-18, iv, 16, xii, 19, xiii, 35, xxi, 9, 42, xxii, 37, xxiii, 39, Mark i, 3) uses the Greek word  $\epsilon\nu$ -EN as the equivalent of the Hebrew word  $\aleph$  — B.

If Mr. Thomas understands the  $\epsilon\nu$ -EN is elsewhere used in the Scriptures to mean more than does  $\aleph$  — B in the Scriptures : would he define exactly what he understands to be such additional meaning?

In Jeremiah, chapter one, we read : “And Word-Jehovah ( $\aleph$   $\aleph$  — DBR IEFE) was existing to me to say : Before I formed thee I knew thee . . . I have appointed thee Prophet to the Nations . . . I am with thee to deliver thee saith Jehovah . . . and Jehovah was stretching forth his hand : and He was touching my mouth : and Jehovah was saying to me : Consider, I have given My words, by Thy mouth : see, I have this day set thee over the Nations.” This title “Word-Jehovah” appears over seventy times in the Scriptures. Does Mr. Thomas believe it implies anything different from “The Word”— $\delta$   $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ —of John’s Gospel ? And if so, what additional does either title imply ?

Mr. SIDNEY COLLETT said : Mr. Chairman, I only wish to make two brief remarks on this very able paper. First, the lecturer misquotes the words of Acts xvii, 28, by saying : “If *all created things* live and move and have their being in Him.” What the Bible says is : “For in Him *we* (*i.e.*, human beings) live and move and have *our* being.” Such words surely cannot refer to “all created things” : for many created things neither live nor move ! and I merely suggest that the words the Holy Spirit uses in the Bible are so carefully accurate that they cannot safely be altered by any words or phrases of our own.

Secondly, I notice the very frequent use of the expression “Absolute Spirit”—always with a capital “A” and a capital “S.” and sometime it *seems* to refer to the Holy Spirit ; while at other times it refers to something which is not made sufficiently clear. I am not forgetting that this is a philosophic lecture. But it would be very helpful if this point were clarified.

Lt.-Col. T. C. SKINNER said : In the second paragraph on page 68 the author links the Absolute Reason with Absolute Moral Freedom and cites the moral consciousness as the supreme quality of pure reason. Does not this throw a flood of light on man's original status before the Fall ? Created in the image and likeness of God, he was endowed with the faculty of pure reason coupled with perfect freedom in its exercise. Nor can the divine purpose be in doubt that he should develop his reasoning powers to the full by suitable exercise ; his commissions in the garden—horticultural (Gen ii, 15)—and in the field as a naturalist (vv. 19, 20) necessitate this. But with all the potentialities of a rational being Adam was as void of experience as a child, and the risk of his tasting evil experimentally ere his senses had been exercised to discern both good and evil was imminent from the outset. Hence the ban on the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil alone among all the trees (including even the Tree of Life in the midst of the Garden). Knowledge *was* good and a thing to be desired, but only under restraint and direction of the Divine Wisdom, and then only as they were able to bear it. And the moral test was the simple one of obedience to the God and Father in whose image and likeness they had been created. Do we not see Man's fatal choice of knowledge in independence of God working itself out in all its evil consequences to-day ?

We owe much to Mr. Thomas for his thesis of Philosophy's true foundation to which we have had so interesting an introduction this afternoon.

Mr. PHILIP DIVE said : Mr. Thomas proposes that "In the first place, the idea of 'matter' as a non-rational opposite to spirit must be finally and completely rejected." (Pages 66-67.) But, as Professor Whitehead remarks, "Matter . . . expresses something so evident in ordinary experience that any philosophy must provide something which answers to that experience."\* It will be agreed, I think, that "knowingly," we never come into contact with "matter" in the sense of a primary physical substance—the "stuff" of the universe. The term, when so employed, represents a convenient "abstraction," merely. *Our*

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\* *Science and the Modern World.*

contact is made, solely, with organised entities ; such, *e.g.*, as wind, rain, soil, rocks, plants, *et sequentia*. Moreover, dissection into "parts" of these organic entities cannot bring us nearer to an imagined "matter."

Where philosophy (until very recently) spoke of an implied opposition between "matter" and "spirit"\*, it is noticeable that in the rarer instances in which the sacred scriptures speak of a successive cosmic order ; that which belongs to the natural and temporal order (*ψυχικός*), is put in contrast with that which belongs to the spiritual and non-temporal order (*πνευματικός*). I Cor. xv, 46.

In an earlier passage, in the same epistle (vii, 31) it is the *σχήμα*—the "outward fashion" of the cosmos—which is said to be destined to "pass away" (*παράγω*).

This distinctive way of approach to basic questions raised by philosophic inquiry, may, I think, prove fruitful to the reverent mind that will value the least hint from the Holy Writ.

#### AUTHOR'S REPLY.

I counted myself happy in having a chairman who is himself a philosopher, and imbued with the spirit and vision of the philosophic quest when legitimately and earnestly pursued. This was all the more important for me, as my philosophy is starting on a revolutionary and militant campaign against the subtle scepticisms that are being sedulously spread at the present time in our philosophic seats of learning. The philosophy I offer is not only startling for the ranked votaries of Scepticism, who will bitterly antagonise it, but many Christians of the Barthian type will hinder, rather than help, me to fight the foe with a reverent and reasoned philosophy. So I might easily have had a chairman in agreement with my aims, but out of sympathy with any reinforcement which the reasoning mind can give to the cause of truth. I know that I am fighting a very necessary battle, and in a legitimate way, the way of consecrated reason, whoever may help or hinder. But it was a joy to have in the chair a man who realises that the reason in man is a sacred charge from God, to be used for the highest ends, and has

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\* Descartes, and the seventeenth-century philosophers who followed would probably have discriminated the two entities as "matter" and "soul."

often, as in the case of Butler's *Analogy*, been a very serviceable handmaid to the cause of Divine revelation.

It pleases me that our Chairman spoke so strongly about the absurd use of the processes of Reason to disqualify reason itself. Reason and Revelation are so sharply distinguished that there need be no confusion between them. Human reason cannot attain to Divine Revelation, for the latter is the prerogative of God. But even that revelation has to be accepted and understood by Reason, so that, if Reason is to be utterly discredited, even Revelation must leave us in a hopeless case. But, if Reason can be trusted to interpret the oracles of God, it may well have an important range of its own in which to render preliminary service. That it has such a range is made clear even by the Word of God itself. There can be no conclusion *against* REASON because Reason is always necessarily the *author* of the conclusion.

The Chairman suggests a footnote on this crucial point. I have, however, dealt very fully with it in two sections of my lecture, "The Contention that the Philosophy of Idealism has Failed," and "The Chartered Rights of the Reasoning Mind." If it is thought well to do so, a footnote may be added at the end of the second of these sections, thus: "It is obviously foolish to try to discredit Reason by means of reasoning. Nor is the Divine Revelation exalted by decrying the legitimate use of Reason in its own quest, or by labelling as blind the noble faculty of thought which we must of necessity apply to the oracles of God."

I believe that the Lord has given to my searching mind this new and startling vision of philosophy. Wherever it is able to enter, it will flash a deadly ray on the scepticisms of the hour.

I am obliged to Dr. Anderson for his critical hearing of my paper, although the point of his first question is not clear to me. I understood him to contest my statement that the fundamental meaning of the Greek preposition *ἐν* is "in" or "within," and in some manner to prove his negative by the equivalence of the Hebrew preposition *בְּ*. But I cannot see how his quotations serve his purpose at all. They undoubtedly have considerable area of equivalence, but it would be a curious philological freak if they were found to be inseparable twins, in two languages so remote from one another as Hebrew and Greek. According to the best

Hebrew authorities, the fundamental meaning of the Hebrew preposition is "into" and then "in." According to the best Greek authorities the fundamental meaning of the Greek preposition is "in." Other meanings, secondary ones, arise through varying idioms, ellipses, and other causes, but the fundamental meanings still govern, and demand to be used when not clearly modified by the context. This is the law that has been observed by recognised scholarship up to date. My Greek Concordance informs me that the translators of the New Testament into the Authorised English version translated the Greek *ἐν* by the preposition "in" 1,863 times. That is the verdict of Greek scholarship.

Dr. Anderson prefaces his next question with a spice of unusual philology which ignores the acknowledged world of Hebrew scholarship. His translation of DAVAR YEHOVAH (the word of Jehovah) as WORD-JEHOVAH, thus assigning Divine Personality to DAVAR, has no foundation either in philology or theology, and is, therefore, as all the great translations have indicated, inadmissible and even eccentric. The meaning is made so clear throughout the Old Testament in various ways that there is no reasonable excuse for such mistranslation. In Isaiah lv, 11, it is clearly defined:—"So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth." DAVAR is here the word that is *spoken* by Jehovah, and not Jehovah Himself. It is a spoken word, and not a Divine person; and there is no exception to this in the whole of the Old Testament. I know that attempts have been made to find genuine exceptions, but without success. No quality can be found assigned to the Word of Jehovah which does not rightly belong to it as the *spoken word* of the Eternal God.

In emphatic contrast to this, the LOGOS of the beginning of the gospel of John is emphatically and fundamentally a Divine PERSON. The Hebrew DAVAR is simple in meaning, and in that simplicity it is IMPERSONAL without exception. The Greek LOGOS differs significantly in that it is complex in meaning, and thus presents both a PERSONAL and IMPERSONAL aspect. In this word both REASON and rational EXPRESSION are included. When the emphasis is on the EXPRESSION, the word LOGOS becomes impersonal, as it is throughout the New Testament with few exceptions. When the emphasis is on the Rationality behind the expression, the LOGOS becomes personal, as it is in the beginning of John's gospel. For

there cannot be PERSONALITY without RATIONALITY. This is why DAVAR is always impersonal, while LOGOS rises into this unique revelation of PERSONALITY. This *personal* LOGOS is obviously a difficult word to translate into English, because its emphasis is on REASON and not on verbal expression. To translate it as the ETERNAL REASON is completely justifiable, while it is greatly misleading to try to put it on a level with the essentially impersonal DAVAR.

It only remains to add that the adjective λογικος appears twice in the New Testament, and is translated RATIONAL by the best Greek scholarship. I know of no corresponding derivative from the Hebrew DAVAR.

I deeply appreciate Mr. Collett's generous tribute to my paper, and sympathise with him in seeking accuracy in the quotation of Holy Scripture, but such accuracy is not at variance with reasonable interpretation. This statement brings me to his complaint of misquotation. When I gave full quotation marks to Paul's great utterance, I quoted the sentence with careful accuracy. When I *interpreted* his saying as inclusive of all created things, I showed by the quotation marks that these words were not in the quotation. Mr. Collett does exactly the same thing in his criticism, and is as assured that the "we" covers only human beings as I am that it logically includes the whole creation of which man is a part. Paul had already declared that the God Who had "made of one blood all nations of men," had also "made the world and all things therein," so that all things had a common derivation in God. Such a context is by no means friendly to Mr. Collett's limitation. And in the light of Science to-day it is strange for him to say that "many created things neither live nor move." Science affirms that there is *nothing* that does *not* move. As to LIFE, it is too abstruse a term to deal with here, but more than a passing thought may be given to Paul's amazing statement in Romans viii, 22: "For we know that the *whole creation* groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

My philosophy makes it perfectly clear that as the philosophy of Absolute Spirit, that is, of pure Rational Idealism, it does not enter into the revealed mysteries of the Christian faith. It is an ultimate philosophic conception, and has nothing to do with the Christian revelation of the Trinity in the Godhead. My philosophy

only lays rational foundations of truth, and allows another and higher range for the oracles of God. When Jesus said, "God is Spirit," He was obviously not speaking merely of the Third Person in the Trinity, but of the Absolute Deity. That is the nearest analogy in Scripture to my use of the term. The Absolute Spirit of my philosophy is the Absolute Infinite.

I am greatly obliged to Lt.-Col. Skinner for his appreciative and suggestive remarks, and the opening out of a very important standpoint from which reasoned philosophy is variously judged. There is such a thing as the prostitution of the reasoning faculty to evil desires and godless prejudices, to the craving for the pride of a knowledge which is divorced from the vision of God. We have abundant evidence of this in the wild riot of godless psychologies and philosophies of the present time. The result is a parade of knowledge falsely so called. On this account there are those who rashly condemn all philosophical thinking. But, if they do this, they must condemn all the reasonings of the human mind, and this, of course, would make a clean sweep of all thought, including theological thought. For an evil mind can distort theology just as it can distort philosophy.

The only cure for false thinking in theology is true thinking, and it is a true philosophy that must destroy false philosophies. We cannot accept the demands of Divine revelation except by the assent of the reasoning mind. It is in such acceptance that faith comes to lift us a step higher. The philosophy of truth will not disdain the light that has come in Jesus Christ, but will let all light from the heavens as well as from the earth light up the way of holy and reverent thought. No evil and godless mind will ever evolve a true philosophy. For a true philosophy can never be divorced from the greatest and highest and best. It cannot be a substitute for Divine Revelation, but it can catch its glory from afar.

I fully appreciate Mr. Dive's difficulty in my Philosophy of a completely rational universe, in which the old non-rational *surd*, distinguished as MATTER, is dismissed as incompatible with pure rationality; for my Philosophy is confessedly revolutionary, and a reasoned advance upon the long-held idea of some non-rational and for ever unknowable, "stuff of the universe." My philosophy urges Mr. Dive to move forward from this non-rational *surd* to a

purely rational conception of the universe and all its stuff. My reasons for making this great revolution in philosophy are fully worked out in my *Philosophic Foundations* to which I must again refer him, as it is impossible to expound those reasons here. His quotation from Professor Whitehead, to which I must refer the reader, gives him no new proof of a non-rational "stuff" of the universe. For what is the "experience" of so-called "matter"? The ordinary experience of the man in the street is one thing, the experience of modern science is another, the experience of the psychologist is another, and the experience of an idealistic philosopher may transcend them all. Man can know only by means of REASON, and no philosophic thought can legitimately go beyond the bounds of Reason. If there is non-rational "stuff" in the universe, then Reason is not ultimate and Infinite, and a true philosophy is impossible.

Mr. Dive's quotations from Scripture have nothing to do with the rationality of the universe, for the terms "psychical" and "spiritual" are used in a Divine revelation of successive kinds of "corporeality." As to "the outward fashion of the cosmos," which is to pass away, I don't suppose that Mr. Dive imagines that only the "non-rational stuff" of things will remain. The Scriptures teach that "the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." But these are regions that belong to revealed theology. Philosophy has to be content with the discovery of a rational universe, without seeking to discover the future unfoldings of the cosmos and all its thought-forms. But Philosophy can show that the possibilities of these thought-forms are immense.