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# The Supernatural is Personal\*

I PROPOSE TO discuss in this paper some considerations surrounding the central feature of the theology of H. H. Farmer. I do not do so with any sense of intellectual interest alone but because the matters under discussion are important in the Church's contemporary debate about its work and witness.

Herbert Henry Farmer was born in 1892.<sup>1</sup> After school days in London he entered Peterhouse, Cambridge, in 1911. He read the Mental and Moral Sciences Tripos, graduating with first class honours in 1914, and was awarded a scholarship for research in the philosophy of religion. He continued his studies in the University at Westminster College where he was strongly influenced by John Oman. He completed his theological course with distinction and after the war was ordained a Minister in the Presbyterian Church of England. For twelve years he was in pastoral charge, first in Stafford and then in New Barnet. In 1931 he went to America as Professor of Christian Doctrine and Ethics at Hartford Theological Seminary, Connecticut, but in 1935 the Presbyterians called him back to succeed his revered teacher John Oman as Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster College. He held various university lectureships and in 1949 Cambridge appointed him Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity in succession to C. H. Dodd. He retired in 1960.

In addition to a large number of papers on theological, philosophical and ethical issues he published nine books. These included two volumes of sermons, *Things Not Seen* (1927) and *The Healing Cross* (1938). In 1929 he published *Experience of God* which was an enquiry into the grounds of Christian conviction. This work was substantially rewritten and published in 1942 as a new book entitled *Towards Belief in God*. A series of lectures given in the United States on preaching, both its theology and practice, was published in 1941 as *The Servant of the Word*.

His most important work is *The World and God*, published in 1935 and dedicated to John Oman. The same approach in that book he re-expressed in *God and Men* (1948). His Gifford Lectures, which were a theological interpretation of religious types, were published in 1954 under the title *Revelation and Religion*. His last book, *The Word of Reconciliation*, a consideration of the saving work of Christ, appeared in 1966.

The central feature in all these writings is the affirmation that God is personal. Farmer directly states, "The conviction that God is personal, and deals personally with men and women, lies at the heart

\* A paper read to the Bristol Baptist College Brotherhood meeting on 1st October 1974 at the Bristol College.

of Christian experience and thought".<sup>2</sup> Farmer is little interested in any theological discussion that has no discernible relationship to the actual process of living.<sup>3</sup> Not the least reason for this is his belief that it is in the experiences of life that God makes his approach to man. God deals personally with men and women and thus theology is grounded in man's experience of God. Farmer argues that should anyone wish to set forth the Christian case then one characteristic of his approach must be to demonstrate Christianity's *radical and consistent personalism*.<sup>4</sup>

What did Farmer mean by the phrase "God is personal"? Most assuredly he did not mean that God is a person. God cannot properly be reduced to the level of a close and good friend and remain God. It is a thin and trivialized Christian life where the believer becomes "pally" with the Deity.<sup>5</sup> Farmer is ready to admit that there are childish and immature ways of understanding the personal nature of God, and these, he suggests, are better than impersonal conceptions, but "in point of fact mature Christian thought has never apprehended God as personal in a *merely* human way."<sup>6</sup> God is transcendent and other than man. Although there is continuity between God and man in the world of persons there is also radical discontinuity. We have to reckon, said Farmer, with the "Godness" of God.

Thus we must see Farmer's talk of God as personal not in terms of easy sentimental piety. He is concerned with good apologetics, with commending the faith and he believes Christianity offers a consistent and reasonable case for theism. He is a philosophical theologian. Theologian first, but philosopher also, not least because apologetics demand it.

Therefore in answer to what Farmer meant by the phrase "God is personal" we must note that as he observed the society of the 1920's and 30's he believed men were becoming increasingly naturalistic and monistic in their approach to life.<sup>7</sup> (By "monistic" Farmer refers to any ontology which fails to distinguish the world and man from God.) Impersonal forces shaped men's lives. Farmer cited growing industrialization and urbanization in particular. Impersonal philosophies such as Hegelian Idealism were powerfully influential. And along with all this went the rise of modern science and "*the obsessive place of the physical in human experience*."<sup>8</sup>

Farmer wished to challenge certain assumptions that were related to the spirit of that age. Just before he went to Cambridge as an undergraduate Bertrand Russell had been appointed a Fellow at Trinity College. In 1903 Russell had published his celebrated essay "The Free Man's Worship". Farmer thought this essay to be as magnificent in its language as it is complete in its pessimism. The world was portrayed as a great soul-less machine lurching on its way regardless of the ideas or ideals of man. A man must endure all this and bravely hold up his head before the inevitable and in an alien universe with dignity go down to death.<sup>9</sup>

There were assumptions and omissions in this essay that Farmer

attacked. Crucial was the fact that Russell seemed to overlook himself as part of this universe. Farmer argued that it is erroneous of the scientist just to study the world about him and assume that from his observations he is able to give an exhaustive account of reality. Any such account must be one that includes the scientist, or philosopher, or theologian himself. Russell's failure was not to see himself as part of the universe. If we are to study the world as a whole it "cannot be merely the world about us; it must be the world that includes us".<sup>10</sup> What was being overlooked, Farmer argued, was the importance of the personal.

We live, said Farmer in a key phrase, in the world of persons. Under the influence basically of John Oman and later confirmed by Martin Buber, Farmer stressed the contrast of I-It and I-Thou relations. The fact of I-Thou relations must be taken account of by any who would seek to understand the meaning of existence. These relations are so fundamental to human life and cannot be reduced to propositions in terms of things. Farmer argued that the experience of encountering a person is *sui generis*, self-authenticating and immediate.<sup>11</sup> We know ourselves that there is a world of difference between being treated as a person and being treated as a thing. That basic quality of trust, so fundamental to human society, is personal through and through. And when anyone treats another person as a door mat, or some other "thing", then we are enraged at this abuse of personality as though something sacred were being defiled.

The totalitarian regimes coming to power in Europe between the wars were impersonal and showed themselves to be such in their disregard for the individual will. Will, for Farmer, means person.<sup>12</sup> To be in a personal relationship is to be aware of another will potentially cooperative or resistant. The demonstration of the existence of a will, like a person, is impossible. Neither is it definable save in its own terms because it is, according to Farmer, an "ultimate" term. However, this world of persons is continuous with the world of things. It shares some properties with the world of nature. Man is flesh and blood, from the dust he came and to dust he will return. And yet, in the experience of us all, a person is no mere thing. The personal stands in some sense above the flux of things exercising its will. We might say that the personal transcends the world of nature.

"To be a person means to be a being who is not a mere item in process, not a mere function of environment, not a mere product of forces which grind on in mechanical necessity to their pre-determined end, but rather one which, while rooted in the process, stands in a measure above it and is able to rule it to freely chosen ends".<sup>13</sup>

We turn now to Farmer's understanding of God. It must be asserted that Farmer is a theologian working on the concept of God as personal. It would be a mistake to imagine he is like the American personalist philosophers B. P. Browne and E. S. Brightman who posited at the end of their systems the Supreme Person necessary to

complete the philosophical picture. Farmer indeed argues that the world of persons is fundamental to creation. It has ontological significance. Farmer argues that God and man share this world of persons although between man and God there is both discontinuity with continuity. But is Farmer fully aware of the fact that there is a logical gap between talk of God as personal and men as persons? The logical gap refers to the difference between talk of God and talk of man. The two forms of speech may have similar characteristics but they are not the same. The logic of God-talk and relationship with God is not the same as that of human relationships. There is nothing disturbing in this. It is simply to say you cannot talk about God in terms of man and remain coherent, in just the same way as you cannot talk sense about physics in terms of biology. But, as R. W. Hepburn says, the transition from talk about human encounters to divine-human encounters can be made to look "deceptively smooth".<sup>14</sup>

With this word of qualification let us then return to Farmer's argument and ask what Farmer means by God? It will not do for him simply to say that God is ultimate reality. This really tells us nothing. It is a theistic tautology. Rather is it the characteristics of God that interest Farmer. So he asserts that God is "rational intelligence and purposeful will".<sup>15</sup> The true nature of the transcendent God is personal. The Personal stands above life's process although it shares in it. Between God and the world there is continuity and discontinuity. So the supernatural is not the contra-natural as it sometimes supposed. The true supernatural is personal.<sup>16</sup>

But from where does this notion of God as personal come? Farmer's case is that it comes from man's experience of God. We have already noted that in any personal relationship Farmer discerns three characteristics. The relationship is *sui generis*, self-authenticating and immediate. We "just know" we are dealing with a person. But in this awareness of the "other" as personal standing over against us, are there any describable central and indispensable elements? Farmer believes there are two such. There is the element of the other's will over against our own. But also there is the sense that both my will and that which I encounter are alike subject to the same standards of unconditional worth or value. These elements, Farmer suggests, are present in all awareness of others as personal.

Turning to the living awareness of God as personal, Farmer argues that these same elements will be present in any experience of God because there is continuity in the world of persons. He says,

"Man could hardly react in one way in apprehending his fellows as personal, and in an entirely different way in apprehending God as personal, however great the difference in the total content of the two experiences, corresponding to the profound difference in the realities which evoke them, must necessarily be."<sup>17</sup>

So we come to the experience of God as absolute demand and final succour. These phrases, or ones very similar expressing the same thought, occur in all Farmer's books.

Following the human personal pattern, "First, central in the living awareness of God as personal is something which happens, and must continue to happen, in the sphere of the will."<sup>18</sup> In the concrete, historic situations of life men are aware of a certain peculiar type of resistance in the sphere of preference and values. They become, so Farmer claims, aware of absolute, sacred unconditional values that are "above" life in that they may only be met sometimes at the cost of life itself. The claim of such values is strong, it does not vary according to mood or desire. The claim is unconditional.

And whose will is it that is met in unconditional demand? For the religious man it is the will of God. But it is important to remember our earlier note on the elements of personal awareness that drew attention to immediacy. The awareness that this is God's unconditional demand is immediate. It is not felt and then interpreted inferentially as of God. Farmer says,

"the awareness of God as personal will is given immediately in the impact of unconditional value itself, so that the religious man says not that God is a necessary postulate in order to make sense of such absolute resistance to his will, but that he is a "consuming fire" or that "he is living and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword".<sup>19</sup>

As part of that same awareness, along with absolute demand, comes the sense of final succour. "The unconditional demands, the values of God, are apprehended as pointing the way to the highest self-realization, the final security of man".<sup>20</sup> This is possible because the unconditional claim we experience is not merely in the same world of values as ourselves but, because it is God's claim, is the very foundation of that world of values. So the claim may be trusted and obeyed as the way to fulfilment in the purposes of God. In God's service is perfect freedom. In his will is our peace. "Whoever cares for his own safety is lost; but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake and for the Gospel, that man is safe."<sup>21</sup> Such is part of the living awareness of God as personal.

Part and not whole. The awareness of ultimate demand and final succour Farmer describes as "central" but not exhaustive of the apprehension of God. With the experience of demand and succour there is perceived that deeper mystery of the Eternal. The awareness of God is also accompanied by "a reverberation of feeling, a peculiar feeling-tone". The word "awe" is too general for Farmer's use. It must suffice to say, "a situation in which God is livingly apprehended is like no other, and the feeling which attends it is like no other."<sup>22</sup>

The claim to know God by religious experience thus described is existential. God is known in the real situations of living people. He concerns man in his existence as a man in the world of persons. This means that the way to knowledge of God is fundamentally dependent upon God's self-revelation to men personally and not to mankind in general, though it must be assumed that all men have the capacity, being in the world of persons, to apprehend the approach of God.

The experience of God, Farmer asserts, is unique. In his experience a man may become aware that the demand made upon him is the demand of God, it has that character and the realization is immediate and gripping. The character of God as infinite ultimate source of all that is, guarantees the uniqueness of the experience. This means that in the very nature of the case there can be no analogies. Farmer argues,

“We would expect that if we know the reality of God in respect of this fundamental aspect of his being at all, we shall just know it, and we shall just know that we are dealing with God, the ultimate source and disposer of all things, including ourselves, and there will be nothing more to be said. It will not be possible to describe the compelling touch of God otherwise than as the compelling touch of God”.<sup>23</sup>

I interrupt my exposition of Farmer's position here to pose a question. When Farmer asserts that the experience of God is unique is he making a psychological or logical point? The two are hardly the same and no little confusion results from failure to draw the distinction. There are feelings, for example those covered by the general term “awe” which, as a matter of psychological fact, religious believers have, or are said to have. Empirical investigations can be conducted to find out if men have such feelings. But this is a matter of psychological enquiry. If Farmer is making the point that the experience of God is unique logically then this is another matter. The contrast can be drawn out this way. Is the experience of God as absolute demand and final succour unique psychologically, i.e. in its intensity, warmth, suddenness etc? Or is Farmer saying that the experience of God is unique by reason of the logic of God-talk, i.e. that divine-human relations are different from human person to person relationships? Is Farmer talking about psychology or is he making a point about what it makes sense or does not make sense to say in religion? The point of the question is important and I don't find Farmer very clear on this issue. Nothing is lost if this distinction between psychological descriptions of religious experience and the logic of religious language is drawn.

But to return to Farmer's argument, it is not experience in general that is his concern. He says, “the notion that faith should be able to discern the active presence of God in all events and all situations is merely pietistic.”<sup>24</sup> It is not the general but the particular that is important in this respect. So Farmer argues that revelation is always a “point of crisis” in human experience. The “crisis” is there because man has to do with God. “Every situation in which God reveals Himself to the soul is a crisis calling for obedience and trust.”<sup>25</sup>

This sounds like a life of “fits and starts”. Farmer concedes, as we have seen, that situations in which God is apprehended are like no others. But this does not lead, so he claims, to “a disjointed alternation of religious and irreligious moods”. Each man lives in the light of those moments of revelation believing that God can use any situation to make his approach to man.

This stress upon the particular and not the general is clearly evident in the doctrine of the Incarnation. The Christian Gospel rests on this particular act of God's self-disclosure. It is not the gospel simply to say in general terms "God is love". The Gospel centres on an event, birth, life, death, resurrection, through which and in which we are confronted by the love of God. Farmer finds it highly significant that this unique and final revelation of God should literally be in a person.<sup>26</sup> This characteristic love of God is not self-evident in the world. It is not read off from nature or history, both of which wear an inscrutable face. The love of God is revealed in a particular event. "At the heart of the vision of God there is the vision of Jesus Christ."<sup>27</sup> Here is the vision of God who entered human history as a man to address men in the midst of their humanness with the Word of Life. So Farmer asserts that the Christ who confronts us in worship is not "another Christ, but the same Christ as He who walked the earth as a historic being within the historic process itself, and is still at work in that process through the historic community which we call the church".<sup>28</sup> The task of the church is to bear witness to the Event, by becoming part of the Event. By going on telling the story the Church becomes a necessary part of the saving activity of God, confronting men in each generation of the world of persons with the absolute demand and final succour of God.

In his writings Farmer attempts to work out the implications of this doctrine of God as personal. He offers illuminating and stimulating discussions of the doctrines of providence, prayer and miracle. His comments on the problem of evil are particularly impressive and penetrating. I merely refer to this aspect of his work by way of commendation. I wish now to turn my attention to certain further questions arising out of the position Farmer adopted. The exposition of Farmer's argument I have given raises many issues, not least for those of us who come a generation later and have felt the forceful pressure the linguistic philosophers have put upon those who would talk of God. But I wish to make comments basically on the question of religious experience as a way to knowing God. And just as Farmer was aware of his historic context in the 1930's so I will try to be aware of mine.

Today a whole cluster of problems surround talk of a personal God. John Robinson gave popular expression to some of these in 1963 when he published *Honest to God* and that publishing event seemed to open the flood-gates of relief for not a few Christians. They could not think of God, so they said, in the traditional terms, neither did they have the religious experiences and needs as they were often described in pulpits or books of religious exercises. Robinson asked whether a contemporary person could be a theist and retain intellectual integrity. The radical theologians demanded the recasting of the fundamental categories of traditional theology, of God, of the supernatural and religion. "The Ground of our Being", "Religionless Christianity" and even "the death of God" were concepts offered as part of this exercise.



I am of the opinion that Farmer, as a Christian theologian, was right to speak of God as personal. The whole Christian tradition is bound up with this form of expression.<sup>29</sup> Consider the following statements. "I am the God of your forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob"; "The Lord is my shepherd"; "The Word became flesh"; "When you pray say, our Father". All these statements imply personal religion and God as personal. Taking the Bible as the foundational expression of Christian conviction, as basic Christian language, I would argue that Christian belief is constituted by the concept of God as personal. It is theistic in fact. Should it cease to speak in these terms it would cease in some essential way to be Christian.

Expressed in these terms my argument sounds as though it is just a matter of words. Again I ask whether those who cannot think in these terms are making a psychological or logical point? Are they saying that they don't have certain feelings as they have been psychologically described i.e. of guilt, or joy in forgiveness and therefore they don't believe God is personal? Or are they saying that the language used about God as personal is unintelligible to them as a matter of logic. Are they concerned with the logical matter of what it does or does not make sense to say in religion? Or are they describing their lack of certain feelings? I am asserting that the Christian concept of God is of God as personal. Consider the traditional categories of prayer, providence, miracle and grace. These are well nigh meaningless except in personal terms. I would submit that they refer to theology as she is lived. With regard to prayer I believe Farmer is right when he says, "Prayer is essentially a response of man's spirit to the ultimate as personal".<sup>30</sup> John Robinson did not address prayer to the Ground of our Being. Living religion does not use this mode of address to God. Ordinary religious language must not be ignored merely because it is not sophisticated. It has come to us, after all, as the language of living religion.

Here we have come to the complex question of the meaning of religious language. Broadly speaking, contemporary philosophers who study religious language fall into two groups. One group, typified by D. Z. Phillips, argues that the meaning of religious language is the use to which it is put. The language relates to and finds its meaning in a particular form of life. This is true of all those universes of discourse Wittgenstein called "language-games". It is idle to ask whether the language refers to anything or anyone that exists, because there can be no answer to that question outside the language game itself. As such, questions of the truth or falsity of religious claims are inappropriate. They cannot be answered outside of religious discourse. The meaning of religious language is its regulative role in the religious life. In terms of how things are in the world it is noncognitive.

The other group, typified by John Hick, argues that indeed the use to which religious language is put is important in appreciating its meaning.<sup>31</sup> But the issue of truth or falsity cannot so easily be

dismissed. Hick believes religious language is fact-asserting. "Christian language, as the actual speech of a living community, presupposes the extra-linguistic reality of God".<sup>32</sup> Because therefore the factual reality of God is asserted it becomes open to question as to whether this claim is justified. Hick of course allows that there is ample scope for non-factual language in religion and indeed there is myth, symbol, poetry, etc., in the Bible. But he claims the basic structure is of factual belief.

But what kind of a fact is God? In what terms is Hick making a truth claim when he says "God exists"? The statement "God exists" is not the same as the statement "The Queen exists" and amongst a number of dissimilarities is the fact that the Queen's existence can be verified because her existence makes an empirical difference to the world. Those who assert that God's existence or reality is a matter of factual assertion must face questions about verification.

And this applies to those who would rest their case, like Farmer, on religious experience as the ground of knowledge of God. Farmer believes the experience of God is *sui generis*, self-authenticating and immediate. We just know the compelling touch of God. Notice that it is a knowledge claim. But what does this claim amount to?

Knowledge claims properly have three features. When I say I know X, I imply—

- (1) X is true. I cannot know that Bristol is the county town of Devon. The "cannot" is a logical cannot. We may *believe* that is false but we can only *know* what is true.
- (2) I believe X. It makes no sense to say "I know X but I don't believe X".
- (3) I have reasons for being sure that X. This third condition must be more than a repeat of simply "I believe it". It is a matter of giving reasons or grounds for belief.

In the case of the appeal to religious experience there is always the logical possibility of being mistaken. How do we identify what is being experienced? Is it really God? Or is it the Devil, or the effect of the persuasive preacher with his impressive infectious personality, or the warmth of the honeyed tones of the clean smiling group at the gospel concert? Are the grounds for claiming it is of God good enough? If anyone wants to claim that they have had an experience of God then nothing could be brought to prove them wrong. All I am claiming is that the statement "I have had an experience of God" is not valid as a claim to objective knowledge of God. In the nature of the case, as C. B. Martin<sup>33</sup>, R. W. Hepburn<sup>34</sup> and Anthony Flew<sup>35</sup> have indicated with reference to Farmer, there are no tests available to give grounds for the statement. Personal experience is one thing but public truth or knowledge is another.

Farmer is agreed that there are no tests available and is at pains to indicate why he believes the objective existence of God (necessary for this inferential form of knowledge) cannot be demonstrated.<sup>36</sup> But he

also makes a point against those who say that the experience is wholly and merely subjective. He agrees it is subjective because it is personal but this does not mean it is private. The experience can be described and recognised by others.

But this brings us back to that question of those who today do not recognize these experiences as of God, who though they are aware of absolute demands do not speak of God because for them God-talk has no meaning. It does not refer to anything or any one in their own experience of life in the world. Here I believe is an acute problem for the apologist in this so called secular age and it is essentially one about the meaning of religious language. The fact that the concept of God in this generation is not regulative for the majority seems to make God-talk remote and inconsequential.

Sir Karl Popper has shown the fallaciousness of thinking that our experiences come clean out of the blue and impress themselves upon our minds ready made and formulated as items of knowledge. All our experiences are context dependent and conceptually loaded so that, in an important sense, we *make* our experiences. As Popper says,

“We do not stumble upon our experiences, nor do we let them flow over us like a stream. Rather, we have to be active: we have to ‘*make*’ our experiences. It is we who always formulate the questions we put to nature; it is we who try again and again to put these questions so as to elicit a clear-cut ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (for nature does not give an answer unless pressed for it). And in the end, it is again we who give the answer; it is we ourselves who, after severe scrutiny, decide upon the answer to the question which we put to nature”.<sup>37</sup>

The point here is that the concept of God is logically necessary and prior to an experience of God. Religious experience is conceptually loaded. It logically implies the concept of God. Ours is not an age dominated by this concept of divine agency. This in itself says nothing about the truth or falsity of theism of course. Questions of truth are not settled by counting heads. Nevertheless, if we, twentieth century men, religious believers or not, were walking along a road and in an instant were stopped short by a great blinding light our reaction would be to ask what had happened to our eyes. We would not *first* say, with St. Paul “tell me Lord, who are you?” Even Samuel had to be instructed as to the proper response to the call of God, otherwise he might only have come to complain in later life of Eli’s habit of talking in his sleep.

Wittgenstein argued that language games could lose their hold on people’s lives. They could become obsolete and forgotten.<sup>38</sup> Is this what has happened to religious language in recent years? Is it that we don’t have religious experiences, or appreciate theistic answers because we don’t put theistic questions? Certainly this generation, probably less than Farmer’s, does not think in traditional theistic terms. To those of us who share Farmer’s use of religious theistic language he still has much to teach us about the ways of God with man. But for the

majority of our contemporaries this language cuts no ice.

Honest John Robinson asked whether a twentieth century person cannot but be an atheist. It is a question about the rationality of theology and religious beliefs, of the meaning of religious language. Can we speak of God acting although He has no body? Does it make sense to speak of providence and to practise prayer? What are we doing when we pray? Can we say without contradicting ourselves what we mean by God? Christian belief, being constituted by the concept of God revealed in Jesus Christ, is committed to God-talk. Those who reduce religion to talk about love, or ultimate concerns, or leading an agapeistic way of life, are offering something less than Christian belief. You cannot logically have Christianity without theism.

The problem remains of elucidating the meaning of our talk about God, of how we are to help others understand and participate in religious language. This is the task of the theologian and it is urgent within and without the Church. The call to present a reasoned case for theism, if it can be done, is necessary for the upbuilding of the Church and the evangelization of the world. One present danger is that Christians resort to the less intellectually arduous task of resting our faith on "experiences". I have shown that this is not epistemologically sound. I have indicated the importance of the context of all "experiences" and how all such are conceptually loaded. I have also indicated the need for training in the use of any concepts as necessary for understanding.

Farmer offered a reasoned case for theism, for belief in the Supernatural and the importance of religion. In so doing he performed an essential task in and for the church. He challenged the assumptions of his day, not with mindless appeals, but with hard thought. And although he knew, as we know, that no man is fully won to Christ by argument alone nonetheless we are bidden to love God with all our minds. I reassert my conviction that Farmer is right. God is personal. Farmer inevitably stated this in the existential thought forms of his day. What is needed now is to take Farmer's insights and to restate them with regard to a more careful analysis of the meaning of religious language. This is not to replace experience with logic. It is the desire to let religious belief be religious belief, and to be propounded as such, without being incoherent or making recourse to psychological props. It is the desire to avoid speaking nonsense, for nonsense does not cease to be nonsense just because it is spoken of God. Thus those who come after Farmer, with the same grasp upon the faith and the same desire to communicate its truth, have some different questions to face. My criticisms must not be allowed to mask my admiration and gratitude for his work. Not the least, his clarity, humility and open-mindedness reveal a true Christian apologist. He was concerned with the ultimate questions and only the theologian's best would do for such momentous matters. As he said, although it is by the foolishness of what is preached that men are saved we are under obligation to see that our preaching is no more foolish than it need be.<sup>39</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> A short biographical sketch of H. H. Farmer is given in F. G. Healey, *Prospect for Theology*, Essays in Honour of H. H. Farmer (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd. 1966) pp. 30-33.
- <sup>2</sup> H. H. Farmer, *The World and God* (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd. 1955) p. 1.
- <sup>3</sup> H. H. Farmer, *God and Men* (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd. 1948) p. 9.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11, Two other characteristics are the *massive unity and consistency* of the Christian view and its *distinctiveness*.
- <sup>5</sup> *The World and God*, p. 238.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>8</sup> H. H. Farmer, *Towards Belief in God* (London: Student Christian Movement Press 1942) p. 135.
- <sup>9</sup> *God and Men* p. 37.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- <sup>11</sup> *The World and God* p. 14ff.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- <sup>14</sup> R. W. Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox* (London: C. A. Watts & Co. Ltd. 1958) pp. 24-59.
- <sup>15</sup> *Towards Belief in God*, p. 17.
- <sup>16</sup> *The World and God* p. 6.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- <sup>21</sup> Mark 8:35 (NEB).
- <sup>22</sup> *The World and God* p. 27.
- <sup>23</sup> *Towards Belief in God* p. 40.
- <sup>24</sup> *The World and God* p.90.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- <sup>26</sup> *God and Men* p. 96.
- <sup>27</sup> H. H. Farmer, *Revelation and Religion* (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd. 1954) p. 197.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- <sup>29</sup> The explicit doctrine that God is personal would appear to have only come to the fore in the last two centuries, cf. J. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1963) p. 10.
- <sup>30</sup> *The World and God* p. 129.
- <sup>31</sup> Hick states his position, with special reference to his disagreement with D. Z. Phillips in *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan 1973) Chapters 1 and 2.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- <sup>33</sup> C. B. Martin, "A Religious Way of Knowing" in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press Ltd. 1969) pp. 76-95.
- <sup>34</sup> R. W. Hepburn, *op. cit.* pp. 24-59.
- <sup>35</sup> A. Flew, *God and Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd. 1968) pp. 133-139.
- <sup>36</sup> *Towards Belief in God*, pp. 29-38.
- <sup>37</sup> K. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd. 1959) p. 280. The point I am making here was first indicated to me by W. D. Hudson and is elaborated in his *A Philosophical Approach to Religion* (London: Macmillan 1974). pp. 16ff.
- <sup>38</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (London: Blackwell 1972) I:23.
- <sup>39</sup> H. H. Farmer, *The Servant of the Word* (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd. 1960) p. 31.