



## Is There Anyone In Charge Here?

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January's *Reform* gave us the moving story of Alfred Bosshardt's ordeal on the Long March and of its recent re-issue in Chinese as a manual for army cadets. Bosshardt entitled his book *The guiding hand*, but General Xiao Ke explained that there was no guiding hand at all; it was the action of the troops.

The General, as a good Marxist, is a child of the Enlightenment which undertook to explain everything without reference to the hypothesis of God. No-one can prove that God exists; why talk of a 'guiding hand'? Everything can be explained without this hypothesis.

### **My invisible person**

It is possible to explain the movements of my fingers on this typewriter in mechanical, physiological and neurological terms. I remain convinced, however, that there is a person who is deciding what to write. This 'person' is invisible. Its existence cannot be proved and is denied by some philosophers. The movements of my fingers, once they have happened, can be 'explained' in these ways. But I know that until I have decided what to write, the matter is open.

The idea that the universe is a closed system, working like a machine, a 'thing' to be observed from outside by a subject who is not part of it, has dominated the European mind for three centuries. Modern physics does not see it that way, and nor does the Bible. The setting apart of 'mind' and 'matter' is typical of ancient Greek thinking, but not of the Bible where one Hebrew word is sometimes translated 'body' and sometimes 'soul'.

### **Do they make sense?**

Everything that has happened can be 'explained' in terms of what caused it to happen. This writing is caused by the pressure of my fingers on the keys. If that is all there is to be said, then neither this writing nor anything else that happens has any meaning. The 'explanation' explains

everything except what matters. All events in the world can be 'explained'; the question is: Do they make sense? Have they any meaning? Do they point to any worthwhile conclusion?

How could I know the answer to these questions? If I see men working on a building site, how do I find out what they are building – a church, a factory or a home? There are two possible ways, only two. I could hang around until the job is done and see for myself; or I could ask the builder to tell me.

If it is not one building site that I am contemplating, but the whole universe, the first option is ruled out. When the universe comes to its end, I shall not be around. If I want to know what is going on, the Maker will have to tell me.

I can learn a lot by observation, but the big question, 'What is it all for?' can only be answered by the One in charge. He must reveal it. He must speak the word. And this could only be by actual happenings in the world, happenings which his Spirit interprets to our spirits. Then the happenings begin to make sense. Behind even the strangest and hardest of them we begin to recognise the guiding hand.

### **Enough horrors**

The Bible tells the story of happenings in this world interpreted as disclosing the nature and the purpose of the One who is in charge. There are enough horrors and disasters in the Bible to furnish an atheist with all the arguments he needs. And at the centre there is the supreme horror, the supreme argument for atheism, when the holiest of all is condemned to death on a cross.

That could be the place where we exclaim 'There is no God'. What followed on the third day is what gives us the confidence to say with Paul that God works all things together for good to those who love him.

Life is not a jumble of meaningless happenings. There is a guiding hand. We know that to be true, not when everything is easy but when we follow Jesus in challenging all that denies God's love, and take the consequences.

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