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# The Living God\*

T. A. MATHIAS, S.J.

## *God is dead*

One of the most fascinating tasks of future historians will be to analyse the extraordinary times through which the world is passing today. It is our privilege to be in the midst of this situation; we are actually living the revolutionary changes and the contradictory trends of the modern world; it is our good fortune to be able to influence the movement of history, or perhaps if we are inactive, timid or despondent, it will be our fate simply to be carried along like deadwood adrift. On the one hand, our world seems to be totally divorced from God, a fact that has been dramatically expressed by the several 'death of God' theologians. For many of our generation God is not living, but dead. Thus Thomas Altizer affirms: 'God is dead in our times and our experience.' And this does not mean the absence of the experience of God, but rather the experience of the absence of God. Modern man simply does not feel the need of God any more. The world and human existence are completely self-sufficient; problems can be solved with the aid of science and technology without calling on any other-worldly person or power. Our existence is horizontal and has no vertical dimension whatever. The dynamism of our life is completely confined to history; it neither aims at nor seemingly needs anything beyond. The longings of the human heart, the idealism that stirs the human breast, the messianisms that draw men and raise up leaders—these are no longer expressed in religious but in economic, political, social, scientific—purely human—categories. This is dramatically demonstrated by the appeal that organizations like 'the Peace Corps' can make to the idealism of youth, whereas the religious ministry and missionary work which formerly called forth the hidden reserves of generosity in the young now seem insipid and pointless.

## *God is alive*

On the other hand, this is also the age when the highest ideals of Christianity have received more homage in word and

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\* Inaugural lecture delivered at New Haven at the triennial convention of the division of overseas ministries of the National Council of Churches of Christ.

performance than ever before. For the first time in the history of man, human brotherhood means something serious to a majority of men. It is strong enough to impel affluent individuals or nations to part with their money for the uplift of the poor and the youthful or talented to spend themselves for the less fortunate. For the first time, the idea of human solidarity cutting across boundaries of race, culture, language has ceased to be a philosophical ideal and become a reality in international organizations like the U.N.O. Take the new appreciation of truth and sincerity, the readiness for sacrifice, the disparagement of ostentation, Pharisaism and facade that find violent and sometimes distasteful expression in youth movements like that of the Hippies. I see in all this a real, though hidden, worship of God. This new sense of God is more comprehensive than former concepts; it includes a new appreciation of the depth and richness of all human values. We have fortunately outgrown gnostic dualism, a segregation of spirit from matter, and are open to the acceptance of the universal mystery of God which expresses itself even in human values. It is in this sense, I believe, that we must take the development in depth and understanding of the mystery of marriage and the value of sexual love which we have seen flowering all over the world. In spite of the growing eroticism of the modern world, sex is no longer considered by large numbers of people to be merely a pleasurable biological function, aimed exclusively at perpetuating the race. It is seen to be an expression of some of the highest human instincts and values.

These developments are surely the result of the advances of science and technology which have brought the human race together and given us a greater understanding of man and the universe. But they are also definitely (at least for those who still believe in God's direction of history) the result of the Holy Spirit's action in human hearts. I am, therefore, inclined to say, with several others, that God is not dead, but alive and active today, only he is no longer recognized under the categories, the form and the concepts which have till now been used to describe him. As that great prophet of the modern age, Teilhard de Chardin, aptly says: "Whatever may be said, our century is religious—probably more religious than any other. How could it fail to be so, with such vast horizons opening and such problems to be solved? The only thing is that our age has not yet got the God it can adore."<sup>1</sup>

### *Our problem*

It is this situation, in which every Christian is placed today, this experience that confronts him. We can react to present trends by a wholesale condemnation of everything modern, by retreating into the citadel of the Church and placing our complete trust in

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<sup>1</sup> From a letter written in December 1952, printed in Claude Cuenot, *Teilhard de Chardin* (Baltimore, Helicon Press, and London, Burns Oates, 1965), p. 368.

God who will save the Church and make her triumph over the world. But it is not by retreating from the world in which we live, nor by accusing it of inability to understand the Church that we Christians can fulfil our role. It is by realizing that the Church, too, perhaps does not understand the modern world, and yet has to, since Christ and the Church are meant to save the world, such as it is, and such as history has inexorably fashioned it. Our problem, as Christians, is to give a truly Christian interpretation of the situation and the experience of the men of our times. We cannot turn back to 'the living God' as presented in the anthropomorphic and mythological terms of the past. We have to find the living God in this secular, evolutionary, forward-looking world of ours—the living God who is its true salvation. The Gospel words, 'A saviour is born unto you', are as true for modern man as for the simple shepherds who first heard them. Where shall we find the living God today? How can we offer his message to our contemporaries?

### *The living God in history and in the world*

Christian theology, as we know it, took shape at a time when the world was regarded as a static reality, governed by the Aristotelian concepts of permanent substance and cyclic time. Hence, Christian theologians have generally proposed the idea of a worker-God who created the world once and for all, is interested in it surely, but who somehow remains outside its evolution and progress. The natural result of this thinking has been that Christians and Christianity have unwittingly become allies of all that is conservative and reactionary. Progress and change have been regarded as unreal, unimportant, even dangerous. Christianity has persistently minimized any notion that the future would overturn the religious or political institutions of the day. As a result the Church has often become an objectively conservative force in society. 'Why is a believing Christian, nine times out of ten, a sceptic in regard to the progress of man?' exclaims Teilhard de Chardin in despair.

A conservative stance, such as we have described, may indeed be natural to a religion like Hinduism when it stresses the mythical, the transitory and the illusory nature of man and the world. Christianity, however, is, objectively speaking, not a religion of withdrawal or of the *status quo*, but one of hope, of transformation and change; a religion of optimism, of involvement in the present and expectation for the future. It is this hope, this attitude of dynamic and creative expectation, that vividly comes through in the New Testament, with its insistence on the resurrection of the dead and its symbol of the triumphant return of Christ on the clouds. The early Christians were living in the hope of something that would transform this world. Even Communist philosophers like Bloch at the beginning of this century and Merleau-Ponty today acknowledge that Christianity should

not be an opiate for the people which Marx thought all religion necessarily was. They feel that Christianity is the purest and most consistent expression of man's basic necessity—hope. In its universal messianism and its inclusive eschatology Christianity becomes the religious experience *par excellence*, giving substance to that hope-laden dissatisfaction which spurs man on towards the future. The unfortunate thing is that Christian hope has been either so postponed or so underplayed in the history of Christian thought that Christianity somehow got excessively linked up with the past and became the very symbol of conservatism in society. Even more, Christians with visions of the future were held in suspicion and even sometimes considered to be heretical and a menace to the Church and to their fellow Christians. This was the fate of a man like Teilhard de Chardin. The problem now, for us Christians of today, is to restate the hope of the New Testament, to regain the true Christian posture of radical optimism and its early stance which was unswervingly oriented towards the future. Yet we have to transmute and express the content of our hope, so that it becomes available and meaningful to contemporary man. In other words, we must be witnesses in our day and our time to the living God, the God of today and tomorrow, the God of progress and change.

I think the first thing is for us Christians to revamp and revolutionize our attitude to God and to reality. We have resolutely to abandon a metaphysic which deals exclusively with immutable essences and static time and a God that is above and beyond the changes of the world. Two elements of rethinking are necessary in our theology today. First, the transcendent God must be understood as one who is immanent, indwelling and inspiring. Second, the God of the Bible, who is essentially the God of the 'world to come', the God of promise and of trans-historical eschatology, is also the God of today, present and living, active and directing history. In other words, our concept of God must be a synthesis of the 'transcendent' God of traditional Christian theology with the immanent mover of evolution and history; a synthesis of the Christian God 'of the above and beyond' with the immanent, God of the 'yet to come' of Marxist philosophy. This is the only God we can now adore 'in spirit and in truth'; and the relations between him and the world cannot simply be external as with worker and work, creator and created.

The creation and the incarnation are not simply isolated though revolutionary events in the history of the world to which we look back as things long past. No, creation is still going on around us; every scientific advance, every technological improvement and discovery is a sign of God's hand, not the devil's, at work in the world. The incarnation means that God has immersed himself irrevocably in humanity and in human history and hence directs every change in this history. The world is *not* secular in the sense that it is divorced from God, it *is* secular in the sense

that it has reached a state of development, willed and desired by God, where human forces and freedom have an autonomy of their own, where man with his god-given powers is able to govern himself and develop himself and his environment without necessarily coming under the control of ecclesiastical institutions and persons. 'The world has come of age,' as Bonhoeffer would put it. And let us remember, as Christians, that God so loved *the world* and not merely the Church and its members. Today's Christians must give the fullest meaning to the word 'world'. It must mean today's world with all that this implies.

We need a new attitude, a truly Christian attitude to matter and material things. Through the efforts of a host of sciences we are beginning to realize that there is a fundamental unity between all levels of life and existence. Spirit can no longer be considered completely isolated from matter; matter is no longer impervious to spirit; man is not a kingdom within a kingdom, but has roots within the cosmos around him. Evolution is not merely a biological theory, but an upward movement of the universe, culminating in the spirit and having its origin and its fulfilment in God, the Alpha and Omega of history. God must in fact be considered as the Living Force behind the world's progress and development, more than as the Lord and Master of the Universe. This was St. Paul's magnificent intuition in Romans chapter 8 where he asserts that not only man but the universe itself *travails and groans, waiting for its redemption*. This was also the great vision of Teilhard de Chardin:

'I should like by my thoughts, my words and the whole activity of my life to bring to light and preach the continuousness that makes of the cosmos an all-embracing medium that is divinized by the incarnation, that divinizes by inter-communication and is divinizable by our co-operation. My task is to show that the universe is fundamentally lovable and loving. To bring Christ, by virtue of strictly organic connections, into the heart of realities which are considered the most fraught with danger, the least supernatural, the most pagan—such is my gospel and such my mission. Would not the reconciliation of our age with God be effected, if men were to see in themselves and in one another a part of the fullness of Christ; if they were to understand that the universe, with all its natural opulence and all its exciting reality, does not reach its full development save in Christ? And that Christ for his part does not reach full stature save through a universe pushed to the very limit of its potentialities.'<sup>2</sup>

We need a new, modern and yet truly Christian appreciation of the meaning of history. History, though necessarily involving a powerful element of evolution, moving inexorably upward and

<sup>2</sup> Teilhard de Chardin in 'Le Prêtre', 1918, published in *Ecrits du temps de la guerre, 1916-1919* (Paris, Grasset, 1965), pp. 285-302.

forward towards the Omega point, yet is much more than evolution. It brings in an entirely new dimension: human freedom, man's personal decision. Evolution is inexorably forward moving; history is the sphere of decision; it is man's encounter with God in events. Hence, in Biblical perspectives, the final outcome is not inevitably the Omega point, but Jerusalem or the abyss. Thus a Christian view of history today would consider it as a call to a fundamental option between stultifying, confining, personality-destroying self-love or the love of God and neighbour which opens up before a man vistas of fulfilment, development, achievement. This is the Christian challenge before every man, a challenge to free and personal commitment.

### *The living God in the Bible*

Strange as it may seem, the view I have expressed above is nothing but an explication of what we find in the Bible. The distinctive element of the Biblical revelation is precisely the manifestation of the living God, the God of evolution and change, God in human history and in all the daily events of human life and society. In concrete the living God of the Bible appears in the events of the history of Israel, principally centred round the Exodus. God is the destiny of this people. Their God has no name; he is simply 'He who is', who always remains beyond the grasp of man and never becomes subservient to his desires and ambitions and yet is intimately connected with them and looks upon man with tender loving care. The God of the Bible is the renewing, unifying, sustaining and inspiring force of the Jewish nation. He is living, not in the sense that they understand him and have monopolized him, but rather in the sense that he is their life and they obey his guidance in all things.

Out of sheer necessity, the Israelites must find a name for God and express their ideas about him in pictures and images and offer worship to him. And the 'religion' of Israel is precisely the expression of the persistent struggle between the transcendence of God asserted repeatedly by the prophets and the necessary embodiment of God in daily life: through worship, through the temple, through national interests and national figures, like the prophets and kings. These two aspects of the religion of Israel are not simply opposite and mutually exclusive, but present in a state of dynamic tension which has to be resolved in the maelstrom of real life. The Jews have to live their national life; yet their vocation is beyond their nation; God is in the temple and yet not confined to it; there must be a cult, but the real sacrifice is in man's heart. The living God of the Bible is in the Jewish religion and yet beyond it. The Jews find him in their cult, yet when the cult dies the true Israelites find him as real and meaningful as before; for only then does the prophetic experience begin to get interiorized. For the people this interiorization comes through exile when the temple sacrifices are gone and even their identity

as a nation has vanished. For many of them, God dies with the death of the cult; but the real prophets find the living God precisely in death and total loss; not in death as an end, but in the death of self-gift for the sake of others which is death unto rebirth.

The ultimate revelation of the living God is, of course, in Jesus Christ. The great lesson of Jesus' life is that he is in the world, lives, works, teaches like an ordinary man and yet the 'glory of Yahweh appears in him'. Still God is fully revealed in him only when he has accepted death in obedience to the Father, and 'has given his life as a ransom for many'.

All this has an immediate application to our own times. We have to acknowledge that the living God, while he acts in and through the Church, is not identified and co-terminous with it. Even if the traditional Christian cult is losing some of its hold on people, God is not dead. He lives and works in the heart of men and manifests himself in different forms, in every age. Indeed the characteristic of life is continual adaptation to every age and need and circumstance. The living God shows himself in us and through our activity, not merely when we 'live our life to the full', but even more in the gift of life which we make to others and even, strange to say, in death, the death that is implied in self-giving.

This is in fact the 'Paschal mystery' which is the very essence of Christianity, the mystery of death and resurrection, of sacrifice leading to life, of self-giving in order to realize the full potentialities of the self in all its dimensions.

### *The living God in society*

We are living in an age when people realize much more acutely the essential values of society, the collectivity, the human family, the people of God. One of the tragedies that has befallen Christianity is that the early Christian conviction of the importance of the group was slowly eroded, through the influence of values imported from Greece and Rome during the Renaissance. Little by little, individualism in morality and religion began to reign supreme. Martin Luther unconsciously turned the Biblical 'we' and 'us' into 'I' and 'me'. In this way faith became essentially reflective. 'I' must be convinced that 'my' sins are forgiven by my own attachment to Christ, not through the intervention of the Church. This paved the way for later pietism with its subjective spirituality and generally a loss of sense of community in the Church. Among Catholics, even a great churchman like Cardinal Newman could speak of 'only two final realities in the universe, myself and God'.

Thus, little by little, the Christian moral sense underwent a subtle transformation, concentrating on individual sins, like sensuality, greed, pride and in inter-individual relations; but becoming completely blind to crimes against mankind: crimes

committed collectively, nation against nation, race against race, social class against social class. In the order of individual perfection, at least among Catholics, morality has become extremely detailed, infinitely subtle in building up a 'beautiful soul', and developing techniques for caring for the beauty of this soul. At the same time, the so-called Christian nations have lived collectively on wars, slavery, colonial exploitation, manipulation of markets to the ruins of under-developed nations, exploitation of their own working classes and other social crimes. The 'mote' of individual sin has been carefully picked out, but the 'beam' of social crimes has been allowed to pass. A puritan morality, very severe concerning prostitutes, drunkards, individual liars and murderers, has shown limitless complacency in the face of massacres or exploitation of nation by nation, race by race, or class by class, so long as these were committed collectively to the profit of the nation, the race or the social class to which one belonged.

This development is one of the facts of Christian life in all the churches which has contributed most to the rise of a generation that has lost faith in the Church and considers 'established religion' as responsible for the death of God. Today it is resoundingly affirmed that the collectivity is more precious than the individual, that personal sins such as those catalogued above are in the last analysis, less important than collective sins which ruin whole nations or races or social classes. Perhaps we Christians needed the catharsis of the death-of-God theology in order to realize how disastrously out of touch we are with the revolution that is transforming the third world and burning the centre of American cities. Perhaps only these grim realities will make us realize how much we are lacking in a theologically grounded social ethic. God will become alive and active again if we Christians understand that we have duties to society and if we join together with all men of goodwill in a common commitment to serve the world for the sake of the salvation which is given to all men in Christ.

The living God is present in self-gift wherever it is found and in whatever form, surely in the tireless work of the missionary who preaches the gospel or attempts to raise the living standards of his people, in the educator who gives himself to his students, the nurse and the Peace Corps volunteer and in all the countless ordinary folk who in their daily lives think of others besides themselves. Much as it may go against the grain to say so, God is also present in the dedication of the Communist worker who strives to uplift the lot of the working class or the burning zeal of the Black Muslim who may be misled but sincerely wishes to make the life of his race more human, in the Hindu or Buddhist who endeavours to spread contentment and peace around him. The real manifestation of the Risen and Living Lord, let us remember, is not the empty tomb, not even his apparitions, but the heartening assurance: 'We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren' (1 John 3:14).

### *The living God in the Church and in her mission*

The living God must, of course, be found in the Church. In fact the Church has no other purpose but to be the sign of the living God and his salvific action on behalf of men of all ages, races and social conditions. In the Church, God must live and die and rise again. The Church is the sacrament, the living embodiment of the 'Paschal Mystery'. The implications of this fact have to be thought out in the concreteness of the Church's mission in general and in particular in the world of today. To make Christ alive and present in the world, the Church must embody him in the diverse human cultures and societies. The incarnation is complete only when Christ becomes an Indian in India, a Chinese in China and American in the U.S.A., i.e. when the Church is fully domiciled in every land and culture, using its art forms, its liturgical attitudes, its modes of worship and thought. To achieve this is the Church's mission; it ought also to be the principal preoccupation of Christian missions. Unfortunately, Christian missions in the past were closely linked with the expansion of European imperialism and so consciously or unconsciously took on some of its attitudes. There is no need for me to repeat the familiar charge, that Christianity not merely changed the soul, but even the heart and mind and attitudes of neophytes. It converted and also, alas, denationalized! Even today Indian Christians are often distinguished by their European names, and modes of life and are not fully at ease in their own motherland. In this way, Christianity, the religion of man, came to be identified with one of the races of man, the white race; in this way ancient and highly developed cultures were excluded from making their contribution to the patrimony of Christ, to the great impoverishment of the Christian heritage. Here, also, we have an explanation, at least in part, of the opposition which Christian missions meet in countries like India.

In a certain sense, the climax of the 'incarnational' function of the Church was reached during the Middle Ages when Church and society were widely coincident. However, it was the tragedy of that age (as it was also of the Jews) that it identified God's kingdom with a concrete civilization and a state of history; and so, when radical changes occurred, the Church began to be left behind, invincibly bound as she was to structures and attitudes of the past. Today, the world has moved on still further and become secular; human values are emancipated from ecclesiastical control. The realm of the 'sacred' has shrunk and seems to be outside our real world and its dynamism. God seems to be dead. In fact, however, only the idols are dead, the idols of the Church's political, economic, cultural, social power. They are being buried one by one, and in this death of the idols, the real God appears. To be a sign of salvation and a sacrament of the living God, the Church also must die to her institutionalism, her self-centred perspectives, her self-reliant structures. She must no longer seek

to conquer but serve. She must be fully transparent and have no other purpose than to make Christ present, to allow Christ's light to shine forth, unobscured by the ecclesiastical lumber of past ages, by cultural symbols and attitudes belonging to one nation or civilization. The Church is a sign; but a sign can either obscure or reveal. It must be the earnest desire of all Christians to help in making their Church once more a revealing sign of the presence of Christ. This is what the Second Vatican Council attempted to do for the Catholic Church.

### *The living God in the non-Christian world*

To accept that God can be alive and active in the world of non-Christian religions is surely the most radical change that Christians can be asked to accept. We have been brought up in the tradition that the Christian religion is absolutely unique, the only way to salvation. Add to this the fact that the missionary movement developed at the period of the imperialistic expansion of European nations, when Asian and African peoples, their cultures and religions were automatically considered inferior. It is not surprising then that the conviction grew and became established that non-Christian religions could not possibly contain anything but evil; they could never be channels of God's grace to their adherents. Hence, the idea prevailed that Christianity had to take over and colonize these religions and eventually obliterate them. Yet, at the same time, there practically always existed the teaching that men of goodwill who honestly follow their conscience would be saved, even though they were ignorant of Christ and his saving action in the world. It was generally agreed, however, that grace came from God to these benighted souls, not through their religions, but rather in spite of them.

Part of the revolution through which we are living is a new-born appreciation of the spiritual riches and treasures of non-Christian religions and cultures, chiefly the great ones like Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism which have sustained the life and spirit of millions of people for thousands of years. There has also dawned upon us the bitter realization that we are wilfully living in a pluralistic society where different religions coexist, and by no stretch of imagination can we hope that this state of affairs will change in the foreseeable future. Moreover, the 'Christian' West itself seems to have abandoned its faith in its own religion. It seems to have lost its inner moorings and to be suffering from spiritual starvation. With what face, then, can European and American missionaries go out and preach Christianity to others?

It is in such a contradictory situation that we must go back to fundamentals. God is alive and active, not merely for a small and fortunate section of the human race that has the immense privilege of knowing and loving Christ and being internally transformed by him. As St. John and St. Paul say, 'God has not left himself without witness' among the different peoples and

the Holy Spirit has always been at work among the nations of the world. It is difficult, indeed, to conceive of such religious masterpieces as the *Bhagavadgītā*, the Upanishads, the hymns of the Bhakta saints of India or the poems of Tagore being written by men totally devoid of God's transforming grace. Moreover, we now see more clearly that God normally acts through society and the social milieu in which a man lives. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that non-Christian religions can themselves be channels of Christ's grace and salvation to those who have not yet come to the knowledge of Christ and who sincerely profess and follow the teachings of their own faith.

What, then, is the purpose of the missions if people can be, nay are being, saved through their own religions, and if the living God and the living Christ act on them through the channel of their own religious traditions? This is indeed a basic and sometimes anguishing problem for thousands who have given their lives in one way or another to the 'preaching of the gospel'. One solution surely is to remember that the Church's mission is not only to bring salvation to individual souls, but to be the sacrament and sign of the living God, of Christ and his saving action on behalf of the whole world. It is, therefore, the task of the Church to make Christ present in every age and culture and race. This is the basic purpose of evangelization or missionary work. The missionary era is not dead, as some would have us believe. Christ's command to go and teach all nations has to be fulfilled today also, but in a different manner and with radically different theological and human attitudes. Though Christ's grace is working in an anonymous manner in the hearts of non-Christians through their own religions, this working is incomplete and has to be brought into the open. They, too, must share in the fullness of Christ. Only then will Christ's true function be achieved. 'It was God's loving design centred in Christ to give history its fulfilment by resuming everything in him; all that is in heaven, all that is on earth is to be brought into a unity in Christ' (Eph. 1:10).

Let us not, however, forget one important point. The countries of Asia and Africa which for the most part constitute the non-Christian world are also inexorably being drawn into the current scientific and technological revolution. For them, too, it will be a tragedy if they keep their knowledge of God as something static and irrevocably bound up with a past culture that is fast disappearing. This linking of religion with the past is responsible for the fact that in a country like India religion, in the traditional sense of the word, is the greatest obstacle to progress, the most effective brake to social and economic advancement. The countries of Asia and Africa, too, have to adapt their religious concepts and practices to the revolution of today which uproots the traditions of the past and nullifies its religious expressions. The mission of the Church to the nations in this hour is to show them that in this 'death' to the cherished past there is true life.

The Church must inspire them with a faith in God which transcends the vicissitudes of time and circumstances, a faith that will purify the practices and beliefs of the past and adapt them to the age in which we live.

### *The living God in our personal lives*

For one who holds to the truth that the living God is not some sort of vague, all-pervading force, but a Person, who knows and loves us individually, it is self-evident that he must manifest himself not merely in society, in the Church, in the Bible, but also, and even primarily, in each one of our lives.

All this preoccupation with the 'death and burial of God' shows one thing clearly: that man simply cannot get away from the question of God by ignoring him. This is, of course, nothing but the exemplification of what St. Augustine used to say: 'Thou hast created us for thee, O God, and our heart is restless, till it has found its rest in thee.' The current trends about God are not universal. They are the result of Western secularism and confused Christian thinking. They also show that believing in God in the true interior sense of the term is not an easy matter. To confess the reality of the living God is a different thing from asserting the existence of some sort of supramundane being. The God whom we seek is the living God of the Bible, the God Jesus made known to us, the God who encounters us in our world—in its claims and its duties, in its relationships, in its ecstasies and sorrows.

We must, therefore, expect God to meet us in the every day. It is this experiential element of religion which has unfortunately been neglected in Christian, at least Catholic, theology. Though the value of experience has never been completely denied, yet it has not been considered a suitable starting-point for a theology which has to be 'objective'. We forget in this attitude that God is not an object of scientific study and research. He cannot be mastered by human logic or contained in finite concepts. Even St. Thomas Aquinas, the prince of rational theologians, affirms that the only things we can say for certain about God is what he is not. And in this he is at one with the great Indian philosopher, Shankarāchārya. The best way of defining God according to the latter is *neti neti*, 'neither this nor that'. No, God is but a living person, the supreme subject who can only be known through experience, through dialogue, through love. The first thing, therefore, for us Christians to do is to put God where he belongs not in the creeds and theologies, not in discussions and books, but in our daily lives. It is through prayer and service, through personal commitment and the actual encounter with God's Word that we shall meet the living God. Even in the secular city, prayer is not a meaningless pretence. It is like the breath of our lives, provided, however, it is not purely individualistic and concerned with petty ambitions, but the expression of our basic need for

contact with the life-giving love of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Service to our fellow men, for love of them and for love of God, will also make us experience and intimately know the God of love in our lives.

The message of the living God is, therefore, not so much a doctrine to be taught and discussed, but a life to be lived and a witness to be given. The Christian is the man of faith: who believes that the visible phenomena of life and of the world are enclosed in an ultimate reality of love. He is the man of hope: who knows that all death, if it is death for the sake of others, turns into life. He is the man of love: who understands that love is the ultimate and only reality that lasts forever. Our God is not something outside the world, 'living' his isolated existence; the living God is the heart of the world and yet greater than the world which is only the manifestation of the divine mystery of love. This is the joyful news which should transform us giving meaning, fulfilment, joy to our lives. These are the good tidings which Christianity has to bring to the world age after age. This is the 'wonder' of the living God. And so with, Dag Hammarskjöld, I would like to end: *God does not die on the day we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illuminated by the steady radiance renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason.*