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no reason for goodness but that it has behind it the moral imperative.

There never was a time when faith had more reason to be sure and aggressive than it has to-day. It is pathetic to see people waiting for a scientist's nod before daring to achieve a confident faith in the unseen. The swing back from distrust and neglect of science to abject dependence on it for prescribing the limits of faith has gone too far. Such an attitude is not welcomed by the scientist. He works steadily in his own sphere, but he has no desire to set any limits to the spiritual sphere. The new note in science is that of genuine spiritual humility. Within the region of the moral and spiritual life a certainty can be reached which science is prepared neither to reject nor to affirm, but with which, if the phrase be possible, it finds itself increasingly in sympathy.

What the world wants is testimony. It is waiting for those who have found God real to themselves, who come not to argue but to witness. It is remarkable how successful are the religious books which make simple testimony their main theme. Here is a list of 'best sellers': *What I Owe to Christ*, by C. F. ANDREWS; *What Christ Means to*

Me, by Sir Wilfred GRENFELL; *Christ at the Round Table*, by Stanley JONES; and *God in the Slums*, by Hugh REDWOOD. The popularity of books like these means that people want to find the secret of how to reach God for themselves. Gone is mis-giving. Gone is the old inferiority complex. Gone is the old emphasis on restatement and adjustment. Christianity has found itself. It is rejoicing in the exuberance of its own life.

Can we break through the spiritual lethargy which has crept over us partly as the result of a long accepted minimizing view of Christianity, and partly through the policy of always waiting for fuller justification for putting our faith to the venture? We not only need to capture the old spirit of confidence, we have abundant reason for possessing it. And we cannot deprive the world of what it may receive through us. The cry 'Give us God' is in our ears. We hear it in the markets. We hear it behind international conferences which deal with the remaking of the world. Beneath the conversation of ordinary men there flows an undercurrent of serious thought, sometimes of apocalyptic hope. And what we have got we must give; we who have found God in Christ must offer God to the people.

Is God at Work?

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND A. A. DAVID, D.D., BISHOP OF LIVERPOOL.

IN the *Listener* of October 29th, 1930, Professor Malinowski, speaking 'not as a specialist, but simply as a thinking and feeling man,' has said:

'Personally I am an agnostic. I am not able, that is, to deny the existence of God: nor would I be inclined to do so, still less to maintain that such a belief is not necessary. I also fervently hope that there is a survival after death, and I deeply desire to obtain some certainty on this matter. But with all that I am unable to accept any positive religion—Christian or otherwise. I cannot positively

believe in Providence in any sense of the word, and I have no conviction of personal immortality.

'Thus, as you see, I profoundly differ from the confident rationalist or disbeliever of the past generation or two. We all know the story of La Place and the discussion which he had with Napoleon the First about his system of Celestial Mechanics. The Emperor asked him, "What place have you given to God in your system?" "Sire," was the answer, "this is an hypothesis of which I have never felt the need." It is the proud answer of a

confident atheist, but it does not ring true to the humble agnostic. On the contrary, I should say that God is a reality and not a hypothesis, and a reality of which I am in the greatest need, though this need I cannot satisfy or fulfil. The typical rationalist says, "I don't know, and I don't care." The tragic agnostic would rejoin, "I cannot know, but I feel a deep and passionate need of faith, of evidence, and of revelation." . . . Modern agnosticism is a tragic and shattering frame of mind. To discuss agnosticism as an easy and shallow escape from the moral obligations and discipline of religion—this is an unworthy and superficial way of dealing with it.'

It would be equally unworthy and superficial to dismiss the new agnosticism as merely another case of that 'blind unbelief' which is 'sure to err.' Indeed the Churches may themselves have something to learn from the sincerity, the humility, and the reverence here revealed. The Professor speaks for a large number of thinking people. They are not hostile to religion. They cannot even be described as indifferent to it. To them religion does matter. And they suspect that it may matter supremely. But to its professed exponents they would say, 'What you tell us about God as you see Him in Christ may be true. And the hypothesis attracts us. But it seems to us that you present it mainly in terms of the past. You tell us what God has done in the world and wants to do for us. But is He doing it now? You declare that "history must come round to the side of faith." But we cannot wait for the final verdict of history. To us the matter is urgent. We earnestly desire to make our decision. In our suspended judgment we are not at ease. Show us clearly that God is active in this present world, and we will accept what we can of all the rest of what you say.'

Here is a demand for evidence which the Churches ought to be able to meet. They will desire to do so, not with the old dialectic of argument for victory, not with too keen an eye for this or that chance of confuting or confounding, but with the sympathy that understands. As they argue they will be prepared to learn as well as to teach. And their first lesson will be that in this very seeking, God speaks. That men and women are so deeply moved and yet so plainly unsatisfied is in itself an indication that the satisfaction actually exists. Even by the seekers this may ultimately be recognized as of evidential value. But it would not be fair to press it on them at the outset. For what

they declare themselves to need is evidence more direct and objective of the activity of God.

What kind of evidence? The question is bound up with another. What kind of God do they imagine they are seeking? For us there should be no such question. Jesus has answered it. We are concerned with none other but the Father He revealed. Our God is Christ-like, and in Him is no un-Christlikeness at all. Are we then to say to them, You must first accept the authority of Jesus and seek only such evidence as will confirm His conception of God? Shall we tell them that until they are ready for this acceptance we can go no farther with them; that they must seek their answer from philosophers and metaphysicians, and make the best of it? I could not so close the discussion. It seems to me that when our Lord asked His friends, 'Whom do *men* say that I am?' He expected an answer from them. He knew that in showing the Father He was presenting a problem which would inevitably involve differing reactions of observation, of reasoning and even of speculation. And of these reactions He wanted His followers to be aware and take account. In other words, He assumed that there was and always would be a stage in human search for God through which some must pass before they can give Peter's answer to 'whom do *ye* say that I am?'

But at least we can fairly explain that our Lord quite definitely excludes one kind of evidence, and why. It was the evidence of an irruption of power disturbing the ordered course of Nature, spectacular, incontestable. More than once He was asked for a sign. The request was always rejected deliberately and emphatically, once with indignation: 'An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign.' He saw something poisonous in their motive. Where was the evil? He had faced it in the Temptation. He had already decided that the supernatural power of which He was beginning to be conscious was not to be used to satisfy the material needs of Himself and His followers. He had also set aside the use of physical force. He was now faced with a more insidious suggestion. Might He not secure conviction and allegiance by some conspicuous act, inexplicable except upon the assumption that He wielded a superhuman power? After that no one could have questioned His authority. The suggestion was very natural, very attractive, and very dangerous. The danger was twofold. In the first place, the kind of belief He wanted then, and still wants, can be given only by men themselves, of their own free will and accord. He was dealing with men endowed and

entrusted with faculties of reason, of will, and of love. If He were to force belief upon them by an overwhelming interference of absolute power, prostrating their minds and subjugating their wills, He would paralyse the power of giving it at all. Their reason and their wills would cease to operate, and the way of love would be blocked.

But He had a further reason for excluding this kind of persuasion. It would have shown God's character to be other than it is. It would have contradicted what lies at the heart of Jesus' revelation of the Creator-Father, namely, that He made men to be free, and purposes to keep them free, at all costs to Himself as well as to them. If men once conceive the idea that God is treating them otherwise than as free beings, they will never understand His own nature, disclosed in the life and death of Christ. God treats men as men themselves treat others whom they love. He trusts them. He trusts Himself to them. He 'sent' His Son, that is to say, He offered Himself freely to free men. They could accept or reject Him as they would. They rejected, with awful consequence to Him and to them. But not with final consequence, because He trusts them still. And nothing must endanger their vision of a God who trusts.

On these two grounds Jesus refused to take the way of moral compulsion. It is quite true that He did use His divine power with startling effect in demonstrating His supremacy over sin and disease and death. It may also be that He relied upon His miracles as part, though not the chief part, of His credentials—'or else believe me for the very works' sake.' But these works (or signs as St. John calls them) are done in the ordinary course of His work. They were necessary to the declaration of God's Kingdom. They were a foretaste of ultimate victory over adverse powers which He would share with us. 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do.' His works were not done for display, to strike the imagination or to win supporters. Those who witnessed them were few, and some of them were already convinced. Often these were warned to keep what they had witnessed to themselves. What they had gained was not so much a fuller assurance, but a deeper insight into the range of God's concern and His methods of expressing it. Here, as always, it was to those who had that more was given.

What kind of God? Enough, and possibly more

than is necessary, has been said to exclude the demand for evidence of God's activity which might proceed from *tours de force* whenever it seems to us desirable that He should so demonstrate His concern in human affairs. But there are still many people who are subject to the unconscious pressure of such a demand, especially in times of widespread confusion and distress. Questions like, 'Why did not God stop the War?' or 'How can He allow His world, if He loves it, to fall into the present chaos?' will still be asked. They can be answered only through a previous question, 'What kind of God is it to whom you so appeal, and does He exist?'

The Report of the Lambeth Conference of 1930 reminds us (p. 76) that we have not yet fully faced the fact that in the Church itself are still cherished mistaken ideas of God. Among these ideas is that of a Being who is alone responsible for all misfortunes not quite obviously due to human agency, who 'sends' wars and catastrophes, plagues, and untimely deaths, for inscrutable reasons of His own. These must be accepted because they are 'His Will' unless and until our wills in prayer can induce Him to avert or withdraw them. Such a conception clearly arises out of a mistaken reverence for the Old Testament, which drives some people to an unintelligent and almost perverse attempt to find a place for every statement about Jehovah within our apprehension of the Father of Jesus Christ. And the confused result is often accepted outside the Church as characteristic of the Christian conception of God, so that 'people who should be attracted to the Church through the truth that is in Jesus are often actually repelled from it.' It is quite true that we have yet to establish the full apprehension of God in Christ, and to face all its implications, before we can make an intelligible Christian answer to the question at the head of this article.

In the meantime we must make it clear that the materials for our answer will be drawn, not from the conception of God's government prevalent in Old Testament times, but from that which our Lord substituted for it. To the chroniclers and poets and prophets under the Jewish dispensation His rule is obvious, immediate, and personal. They regarded it as parallel to the rule of the Pharaohs and other potentates of other Gentiles, and of their own Kings too. That was the highest and strongest form of human government of which they had experience. On that analogy they conceived the government of God, because they had no other. It was inevitable, therefore, that

they should make Him responsible alike for disaster and success. It was He who had led His people out of Egypt, who had given them laws, who rewarded obedience by plenteous harvests and victories over their enemies, and requited unfaithfulness by famine or defeat.

When we turn from the Old Testament to the New, we find that our Lord teaches a faith in the providence of God which is essentially the same, but with a difference. The world is still governed by God's laws, the mighty embodiments and guardians of His purpose in the destiny He offers to mankind. 'Think not,' He said, 'that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy but to fulfil.' He fulfilled the law by including it all under love. But the love that inspired and explains the law covers a range wider than men had ever yet been able to conceive. It involves not only the attitude of men to one another and to God, but also God's attitude to them. In Christ they were to learn that God submits Himself to the law He has made for man. No longer is He to be conceived as reigning above the law and apart from His world. He has entered into it, bringing with Him a love strong enough to bear its share of the consequence when the law is transgressed and the love rejected. But this fulfilment of the law does not weaken it. On the contrary, it gives fuller demonstration of a sequence of cause and effect which is inexorable. No nicely adjusted policy can avert it, and no prayer. Jesus Himself prayed that if it were possible the cup might pass from Him. It was not possible. He went to His death because the blindness and malevolence of men must work itself out on Him. But the consequence must fall also on them. Of this they had been warned. He had spoken of Himself as a stone, rejected by some builders, but established by the will of God. Then He said, 'And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but on whomsoever it shall fall it will scatter him as dust.' These are stern words, but from the lips of One who proved His acceptance of His own law for Himself they cannot convey a judgment arbitrary or vindictive.

It is only under this new conception of God's relationship to His world, although it be not yet fully established even among Christians, that we shall build up an answer to the agnostic's question. Since Jesus came, we are to look for the divine operation not only or even mainly in interventions *ab extra*, but rather in a continuous participation in the laws and conditions laid down for men and shared by God. His law for individuals and

nations is that they should live and work together as members one of another. We have not so lived. We have been driven, or we think we have been driven, into a very different life, national and international. Party against party, nation against nation, each seeking strength to use against the rest. The inevitable consequence is war and economic chaos. It is a consequence which falls upon innumerable people in all countries, some of whom have but an infinitesimal share of the responsibility, and many, so far as we can see, none at all. But they fall also upon Him. So by the stern logic of events is continually reinforced the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ.

But this revelation shows more than a God who is afflicted in the afflictions of His people and partakes with them in the consequence of their wrongdoing. He is in His world not only to suffer, but also to create, partly through the suffering, but equally through the constructive energy which He has given them to use with Him in the continuous re-creation of His world from within. May we not ask our questioners to consider the positive impulses at work in men's striving after beauty and truth and goodness? Why do men spend themselves in artistry, and research, and philanthropy, for no reward but the satisfaction of an impulse that lifts them towards an ideal? Can we account for their striving otherwise than by the hypothesis that their ideals exist in a Power which strives in them to realize Himself? God has given us a share of His power, both to destroy and to create. The pain of the one and the joy of the other are His as well as ours. And He shares with us the responsibility of both.

God and the Individual. At this point we can imagine that our questioners might say, 'We acknowledge that the more we look for God outside His world the less likely we are to find Him. With you we are prepared to seek for evidence of His present energy within human life rather than above it. But what you have disclosed to us so far is concerned with His relation to the totality of men and nations, or to whole movements of idealistic labour which may indeed be directed towards Him, though by no means all of the labourers seem aware of it. We admit that in this way and to this extent He may inspire classes of men with unworldly ambitions, and more or less effectively control their collective relationships one to another. But such evidence of His concern in human affairs is for us too general and diffuse. What we need is some indication of His concern with individuals. How may I be sure that this

mighty eternal Power, this Person if you prefer that word, takes any interest in me?'

To this we have two answers. The first will not be entirely convincing except to those who have made their vision of God out of the sayings and doings of Jesus. The records show clearly that our Lord had an intense personal concern in individual persons. He studied them separately, man by man, woman by woman. He penetrated into their secret lives, and all that He found there He understood. What He said to Nicodemus, to Peter, to James, to Mary of Bethany, to Mary Magdalene, was meant for them individually. We rightly apply His words to types of people they represented. But He was addressing Himself not to types, but to persons. As He spoke He was looking not over their heads but into their eyes. What He did for this leper, or that paralytic, or that other, driven half mad by fear, was done as a service special to each of them. It passed from Him as a personal gift. But it was given on His terms, not on theirs. It came not from a distance, but after a movement towards Him on the part of them or of their friends, that is to say, at a moment of personal relationship. It was when Christ and a man were close together, each intensely aware of the other confronting him, that things began to happen. To the human part in that movement and awareness He gave the name of faith. And He made it, or found it, the sole condition of His effective contact with them. There were exceptions, for sometimes He brought His help unsought. But normally He required it. A share in the establishment of that relationship must come from them.

Here some of our friends will say, 'Yes, that is a fair inference from the gospel story. It is quite clear that so Christ made Himself felt in contacts with individuals at that time. That is how He was at work in His world. And we realize His intention to show that this is how the Father will make Himself felt in our world and for all time. But does He do it?'

This brings the second part of our answer, which should be more acceptable as evidence, because it is more direct. It is drawn from an examination and a sharing of what is called Christian experience. By this we mean a personal conviction, founded on fact, of Christ's power to change

individual lives. There is abundance of it available, and in all manner of forms. Some is on record in books. And we might get a great deal more of it from one another. Obviously it is from one person to another now as then, that the knowledge must pass. 'Tell John,' said Jesus. 'Andrew telleth Peter, We have found the Christ.' But for us there are two special difficulties in the passage of this experience. It is often stated in terms which do not attract. The language is emotional and, as we suspect, exaggerated. It offends our taste, and we doubt whether we really desire experience so described. Moreover, we are very shy of sharing it at all, partly from a suspicion that it may not be authentic, and partly from fear of hypocrisy. It has been one of the greatest contributions of the Oxford Group Movement to demonstrate how this shyness can quite easily and naturally be dispelled even in those who have hitherto been specially subject to it, how an atmosphere can be created so clear and open that personal barriers disappear, and the experience of one becomes freely available for others. What has happened to some becomes to others credible and attainable. And there is no question that as the way opens from one to another of a group, so, and by the same process, the approach is cleared for all of them to Christ.

Of the effect of such contact there can hardly be a doubt. Now, as in the first days, character is changed, strength and patience are received, and hope is renewed by the touch of His power. Signal examples are known to most of us, not confined to particular Churches or groups, and so numerous and varied that they cannot fairly be ascribed to causes other than that which in all these cases is confessed. Apart from these are the unnumbered instances, less striking but equally authentic, in which personality is growing in vital power through contact with the Giver of Life, but without noticeable or measurable change. Of these there can be no human record. But facts enough are available to those who will seek them, for evidence which, tried by any normal test, is beyond dispute. And it is this mass of personal experience which in the long run will count for most in our estimate of divine activity in the world of men.

