

PRESIDENT'S LECTURE SERIES

"Death of God"

by

The Reverend John Courtney
Murray Professor of Theology
Woodstock College
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Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a very particular pleasure for me to be here at the University of Connecticut, not least because it gave me an opportunity, I'm afraid all too brief, to renew an old friendship with your President, Homer Babbidge. And I'm grateful to him for his invitation, and it was he that suggested, as a matter of fact, the subject of tonight's lecture -- this radical theology of the Death of God, I think we call it in professional circles.

I presume you'll not expect me to give a descriptive and evaluative account of what the Death of God theologians are saying; Van Buren, Altheiser, Hamilton, Bahameon, the rest of them. It is much too complicated a theme to do in one lecture. As all of you know, they differ greatly among themselves. It is also rather difficult to know what they have in common. Only that there is an illuminating note in one of the essays of William Hamilton, to the effect that what they have in common really is a response to what he calls an American vocation to theology, which interests me very much. It also interests my students very much as a matter of fact. And this perhaps is the thing that explains why these fellows are all so cheerful. They are very cheerful theologians -- and there are very few of us left, so I welcome them to our company. They are also rather difficult to read, a trifle obscure. If you'll forgive somewhat perhaps a trivial analogue; when I read these Death of God theologians as something like when I watch occasionally the television program called, "The Man From UNCLE;" I'm altogether sure that there is something terribly exciting going on here, but I'm not quite sure what the hell it is! I don't mean that disrespectfully, but it's just an analogue.

Moreover, I don't suppose you'll expect me to give a genetic account of

the Death of God theology, although this is quite an important thing. You always have to ask of a theologian or of a philosopher, "Where did you come from?" Everybody always comes from somewhere. And I don't know who you are until I know where you came from. What influences shaped your thoughts? What lines are you pursuing? What are you in reaction against? In a word, what is your location in the history of thought -- in our case the history of theological thought. What makes you think that you represent a development of any kind? This would be a very complicated thing because these men owe, as all of us do, multiple debts.

To understand the Death of God theology, you'd have to certainly bring in Bonnhfer, a great name among young people today, isn't it; I suppose also at the University of Connecticut. I'd be surprised if he weren't a name around here. They owe a debt to my friend, Paul Tillish. They owe a debt to my new-found friend, Carl Bart, whom I met in Rome for the first time last September. They owe a debt to Bootman, in a sense sort of reverse -- that is, in a sense they are in reaction against these things.

I can't pursue this subject, but I would like to make one general remark. You see, these Death of God theologians come out of the Protestant theological community, fraternity. They certainly do not speak for any of the major traditions of Protestantism -- Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican or even Free Church. I don't think they are really in the line of the Protestant protest, as such. Nonetheless, they do intend consciously to speak for the Protestant voice, and to follow a line that was inaugurated by the Protestant reform. They repudiate, to their credit, all negativism and again, to their credit, they repudiate all polemic.

But here, in order to illustrate where they come from, I would like to quote

(I have to quote at least once, because otherwise nobody would believe I was a scholar -- I have to have a footnote somehow.) You know this book, I suppose, this collection of essays, co-edited by Altheiser and Hamilton, called "Radical Theology and the Death of God." In this essay of Hamilton, he says this, "Today we may indeed need to look at the reformation in a third sense " -- he's mentioned two others; we won't go into them -- "no more or less true than the earlier approaches, but perhaps needing special emphasis just now and fitting new experiences in both church and world. This approach is more ethical than psychological or theological, and its focus is not on the three personalities or on justification by faith." Those were the two previous points. This is the third.

Of course there is no specific event in Luther's life that can be so described. But the movement is there in his life, nonetheless; and it is a movement we need to study. From cloister to world means from church, from place of protection and security, of order and beauty, to the bustling middle-class world of the new university, of politics, princes and peasants. Far more important than any particular ethical teaching of Luther, is this fundamental ethical movement. Here I touch some of Altheiser's concerns. But I am not anxious to recover the sacred since I am starting with the definition of Protestantism as a movement away from the sacred place.

I think this is a very illuminating statement, and I think my Protestant colleagues would agree that it's true. Protestantism did move away from the sacred place, from that cloister as a symbol of the sacred place, into the world. We would pause perhaps to consider whether this movement moved away from the sacred place -- the cloister -- was part of the Protestant protest and flight from idolatry,

in the form at least of the localization of God in some particular sacred place.

For our theologians, however, this thing has a positive meaning. They begin with a positive affirmation of the world and of worldly men, and from a positive affirmation of the American world. They are not alienated from society. They are not among that group today which we find among young people who want somehow to opt out of American society -- heaven knows what they want to opt into -- but they apparently want to opt out of whatever it is that's going on in American society. These men do not; they are moving into the world. And if I understand them correctly, what they are saying is something like this: If God is to be found, then he must be found in the world and in the world just as it is. William Hamilton is rather insistent upon this. God must be found in the world that Harvey Cox describes -- thoroughly secularized, urbanized, technologized -- the bloody world just as it bloody well is! This is where you have to find God if you're going to find him at all.

They are saying, I think, that if there are any sacrednesses in the life of men, they have to be found in the historical life of man just as it is. They are saying that if the Christian gospel has a message for the world today, it must be a secular message. They are saying if Christianity is to have any validity in the world today that it must be a secular version of Christianity and only this version can be preached if Christianity is to be meaningful to the man of today. In a word, the true Christian today is the secular man. It is along this line of movement from the cloister to the world that they come to their atheism -- their new style of atheism, which they call, especially Altheiser, Christian atheism, as they spoke the gospel of Christian atheism. And they proclaim this atheism under the slogan of The Death of God.

Now, notice first what you doubtless know, that their atheism is not the conclusion of an argument. Atheism, I would maintain, never is the conclusion of an argument. On the other hand, their new style of atheism is not a postulate as it was in the case of Marx, for instance. They seem to present their atheism as the product of an experience and as an attempt to speak to the experience of today. They don't agree on very much, these men. But they do seem to agree that contemporary man is not simply troubled about the question, how do I conceive God? What should be my concept of God? Or under what images should I present God to myself or to others? They want, therefore, to move beyond Bishop Robinson, who belongs among those whom Hamilton calls the Soft Radicals. These men want to be Hard Radicals. They are saying that contemporary man is convinced that God has gone out of the world, that contemporary man knows God is simply not here. He's not to be found. And that, I take it, is what Hamilton means by hard radicalism.

Therefore, the movement of these men from the cloister to the world in the line of the reform has brought them, is a movement to atheism to say "yes" to the world is to say "no" to God. If the true Christian is the secular man, then the true Christian is the godless man, because the secular man today is godless.

Here I'll quote Hamilton in a well-known passage -- doubtless you've heard it before. He says, "It is really that we do not know, do not adore, do not possess, do not believe in God. It is not just that a capacity has dried up within us." We do not take all this as merely a statement about our frail psyches, we take it as a statement about that nature of the world -- mark that -- a statement about the nature of the world, and we try to convince others, God is Dead.

We are not talking about the absence of the experience of God, but about the

experience of the absence of God. And here, I think, we get pretty much to the bottom of their thought. It is on this experience of the absence of God that the radical theology of the death of God is erected. And it is to this experience of the absence of God that these theologians undertake to speak. And this experience of the absence of God is reached at the term of a movement into the world and as a product of the affirmation of the world as it is today.

Now this I know is a rather inadequate account of the genesis of this so-called radical theology of the Death of God. But I'm afraid it will have to do for our limited purposes tonight. It is a limited account for our limited purposes.

I should say here that this movement of Christianity into the world, this affirmation of the world, is not exclusively proper to the theologians of the death of God; these men of today. It is certainly not exclusively proper of Protestant Christianity. It has always been a characteristic of Christianity, throughout its history in a whole variety of ways. The primitive church moved into the world, complicated world, of the transition of the Judaic to Hellenic culture. The patristic Christianity moved into the full-blown world of the Hellenic culture of the third, fourth and fifth centuries. The later church moved, the early medieval church, for instance, moved into the vacuum in the world created by the destruction of the Roman Empire. The Gallican church moved into the world of the absolute monarchy. Lutheran Protestantism in its origins moved into the world, the German world of the princes and the peasants, and so on and so on. The church's Christianity has always moved into the world. This is nothing new. Early on, Christianity moved into the world in such wise as to create what is called today the Constantinian Era. And I suppose you agree we've come to the end of the Constantinian Era. Right? Don't you hold this at the University of Connecticut? I hope. I hope you're all

rather cheerful about it. It's rather a good thing that we've come to the end of the Constantinian Era.

Therefore, this movement of Christianity into the world is no great new thing in a way. The whole sense of the Vatican Council, too, speaking from a Roman Catholic point of view, was precisely to renew this movement, historic movement of Christianity into the world. I won't pursue the subject, but if you want to look it up, the best book would be by E. E. Wyhales called "The Revolution of Pope John." He is the British historian of the Papacy of the 19th Century -- extremely good writer and a very perceptive historian.

A lot of things happen at Vatican Council, too. But the climactic document of the whole Council was the pastoral constitution on the church in the world today. And everything else that was done at the Council was a prelude and a premise to a renewal of the great historic movement of the church's Christianity into the world.

Now this Roman Catholic movement into the world, of course, has its own premises which are spelled out in that constitution. In its own way, it involves a process of secularization of the church, desacrilization in many senses (this is a whole subject in itself which I will not pursue). The only point I want to make is that we Roman Catholics, like the Death of God theologians or like anybody else, discover that if you move into the world today, you encounter atheism. This was recognized by the Council which dealt with the problem of atheism in the pastoral constitution on the church in the world today. It is commonly recognized, and therefore, I'd like for once second to pause on this sheer fact.

I might as well say right offhand, my own opinion, I don't really think that these Death of God theologians are terribly significant, for what they have to say.

I would agree with Harvey Cox, for instance, writing in -- was it the Christian Century or the Herter Correspondence -- I don't remember. But he said that these men have no great future. It is very hard to see how in this theology on the Death of God that there are any great possibilities of development. Where do they go from here? It is very hard to see how they'll ever succeed in gathering themselves together into some coherent pattern of thought that would really base some dynamic mode of life. Even their very slogan, the Death of God, as uttered by them, is not prophetic. In fact, I rather hold it against them that they have cheapened the great prophetic slogan of nature -- they've cheapened it, because in his mouth, it was prophetic. When the madman ran into the marketplace proclaiming the death of God, he was a prophet in an obscure way because he added to the people, "And you are they who murdered him." An obscure utterance, but all prophetic utterances are obscure.

I don't catch any great ring of prophecy in their use of the slogan. It was a very great slogan in its time. Therefore, I think that part of what I'm trying to say tonight is that these men are not terribly significant in what they have to say; but they are vastly significant because they have called attention to a particular phenomenon -- the phenomenon on which they are basing their whole theology of the death of God, largely, the phenomenon of contemporary atheism.

They begin from man's contemporary experience of the absence of God. They say that this is man's contemporary experience. I suppose one should pause here to analyze what is meant by the experience of the absence of God. I'm very much afraid that to do this adequately one would have to do a whole phenomenology of contemporary life. Therefore, I'm going to undertake to say only two rather

obvious things, which need to be said precisely because they are obvious and might, therefore, be missed.

The first is this: that to many today God seems to have become inaccessible. All the traditional routes of access to God today seem not to be the open, broad highways that once they were thought to be. Not to be misunderstood, I think these routes are still open. I'm saying they are not the broad, straight highways that once they were thought to be. Now they've become rather narrow, devious, twisting streets.

It used to be that men could find access to God through the reading of the Bible, through the exercise of reason, through religious experience, through the contemplation of nature, and through this experience of society and community. Right? Weren't these the sort of classic ways that people got to God? And it isn't so simple today. In the good old naive fundamentalist ways, all one had to do, for instance, was to open the Bible and you find God. Only, the Bible has been subjected to a multiple critique, the higher criticism of the 19th Century, the subsequent historical criticism, literary criticism, source criticism. And the Bible has become a vastly complicated book -- far more complicated than our fundamentalist forebears thought it was.

And we now know that I have through the Bible access to God only through the mentality of the primitive Hebraic people and of the primitive Christian church. And that trouble is that this is not my mentality -- I am not an ancient Hebrew, and I am not an early Christian -- awfully sorry, I am a 20th Century man. And how do I get to God through these ancient mentalities? Moreover, nowadays people have begun to understand what St. Thomas Aquinas always knew: that the proofs for the existence of God don't prove the existence of God at all. I set off to find God along

the route of reason, only because I've already found him by faith, and the value of my proofs is not that they've proved the existence of God; they merely prove the reasonableness of my faith. Aquinas knew this quite well. And we have suddenly discovered that it is true.

Nature . . . nature . . .nature -- God's creation. Our forebears thought that they could encounter God in God's creation; in an idea as old as the sage who wrote the Book of Wisdom in Chapter 13; as old as St. Paul writing to the Romans in Chapter 1. Men used to think that they could encounter God in nature -- in God's creation. This isn't so easy any more. Because look around you and what do you encounter? All you encounter is artifice, technology. Between man and something called nature, God's creation, has been another nature interposed, which is man's own creation. Therefore, man's experience of the world is simply an experience of his own creation. It is not an experience of God; it is only an experience of man.

Can't you remember when we talked about the starry skies above and the moral law within as bearing witness to the existence of God. But these starry skies above today -- what are they? Just another area of human exploration by the techniques of science and theology. The firmament no longer declares the glory of God as it did to the presence of God as it did to the sonnets. It merely says there's another Everest and you go and climb it. Why? Well, just because it's there. Go out and find out what's out there.

As for the moral law within, well you know as well as I that's the whole trouble with so many today. And the moral law is only from within. It's man's creation. Man is the author of the moral law. Man stands in a situation, and depending on whether your situation is in the Continental style or in the Anglo-Saxon

style -- take your choice, maybe you have taken your choice; have you? -- you stand in your situation and you do either what freedom dictates, if you're a Continental European; or what love dictates, if you're an Anglo-Saxon. This is it; this is the moral law within.

But God has nothing to do with the whole thing. And as for religious experience, well, you can look at it as a source of comfort if you will; but please don't tell us it is the source of knowledge. And as for society, the human community, there is no consensus there about God certainly today. Modern communications have brought it about that there is no tradition that holds sway. Everything is questioned by somebody, and everybody demands equal time on the air. Therefore, it is not only that doubt and dissent are widespread; they are also respectable. There is today no obligation to conform for the simple reason that there is nothing to conform to. There are no universally accepted standards, and the believer today finds himself in a situation of the non-conformist. He refuses to conform to a climate of doubt and dissent.

This is my first point -- that too many (not to me, mind you, I'm speaking for myself -- I'm trying to talk phenomenologically, descriptively) for many today God has become inaccessible.

The second thing is that for many today God has become irrelevant, and this assertion implies a two-fold, implicitly a two-fold affirmation. First of all, that God is not needed. Above all, what we don't need is that which was so dear to the 17th and 18th Centuries, what was called the God of Explanation; the God who filled the gaps in our knowledge; the God who solved the problems that we can't solve; the God that met the needs that we obscurely feel. Now, this God is irrelevant

today. We'll fill the gaps in our own knowledge; we'll solve our own problems and such needs as we have; we'll see that they get satisfied all by ourselves; which brings in a second affirmation. Namely, that in the order of action, God is irrelevant because man is sufficient unto himself. The world has come of age, in Bonhoeffer's famous phrase, and so to has man. The man today has defined his human goals; roughly, broadly, they are concerned to putting an end to misery in the world. The tasks of man today are secular tasks, human tasks. Man today believes he has the resources which are adequate to perform these tasks. He believes that success is within his reach. And with regard to all these tasks, God is irrelevant.

So far the contemporary statement, insofar as it bears upon our Death of God theologian friends, they don't take the third step (to which I'll return later); the great, the really great, affirmation of the century which is to say not simply that God is inaccessible, or to say that God is irrelevant; but to say that God is the antagonist; God is the enemy -- they don't go this far. We'll have to go that far later on. But for the moment, would it be fair to say that when these men are talking about man's experience of the absence of God, what they're really talking about in positive terms is man's experience of the presence of man who has come of age. I think they are. That's what they're talking about. And they are right. Man today has come of age. There has come about an enormous alteration in man's relation to the world. In the older day, the religious effort was to make this world bearable by cultivating belief in another world. In an older day, the philosophic effort was to make this world somehow intelligible, to explain this world. And along came Marx, and whether they acknowledge it or not, everybody owes a debt to him. The impulse today is not to make the world bearable, not to make the

world intelligible, but to change the world in order that it may be more human and more habitable.

And this alteration in relation to man and his world has come about, I think, in large part (speaking in very general terms, as you understand I must) in consequence of two great discoveries.

First of all, man has discovered history. And from this has come a previous, very myopic view of time that man cultivated. In those old days, man used to think that somehow or other the status quo was something given; perhaps even divinely established, perhaps something that was somehow sacred and immutable. Not today! Today we understand that the status quo at any given moment is simply a happening. It's something that came about in the course of time. It was the result of man's achievements and perhaps, even more importantly, of man's failures. And today we believe that that which came about in time can be changed in time, and we are determined to change it.

The second great discovery, of course, was science, and this would open an enormous subject. I merely want to say here tonight that the discovery of science meant the discovery of the creativity of human intelligence. It used to be thought, especially in the platonic tradition, that the function of intelligence was simply to contemplate the real, the given, the eternal essence of things, those ideas you remember which dwelt in the great heavens. Now today, we take a much more pragmatic view of intelligence, and a much more pragmatic view of the tasks of intelligence. The task of intelligence is not to contemplate the real, but to shape the real, in order that the real may be a more adequate reflection of the rationality of man himself; in order that man in the real, shaped by himself, may recognize

himself as created. The real we hold today is not an originality -- it's an eventuality. And intelligence is not a contemplated function -- intelligence is to be the active participant in making the world.

This is a very new attitude toward intelligence. Mind you, I suppose you'll grant that it's less a theory than a lived experience. Philosophers have tried to spin a theory, notably John Dewey, who's done rather well with his new idea of intelligence.

But as always in human life, theory lags behind life. I think it was Eric Fromm who pointed out that the great theoretical, philosophical task of the moment (and I'm sure at the University of Connecticut at the moment you're furiously engaged in it), the great theoretical task of the moment is, the reintegration of man in all his subjectivity and freedom with objective nature, in such wise that through this reintegration of man with nature, man the human person, may achieve wholeness and self-fulfillment. I suppose that's what you're all about here, isn't it? If you're not, I'd be very disappointed.

You see, we're moving today beyond an ancient oscillation between the objectivism of the ancients and the subjectivism of the moderns, with medieval philosophy as sort of a half-way house; because there the idea of personal fulfillment was cherished, but personal fulfillment for the medieval philosopher of the ancient was to be accomplished through man's relation to God. Whereas today, personal fulfillment must be achieved through man's fulfillment of man in his relation to nature, to the world. Now this great theoretical problem has by no means been solved (I suppose you'll grant me this, you philosophers here). Oddly enough, as I said, life is way ahead of theory. This integration is being accomplished in experience. Today, man is becoming one with the world, not through objectivist

conformity to the structures of the world, which would mean the negation of his selfhood, but through his own creative transformation of these structures, in which acts of creativity, man achieves his selfhood without quite knowing it. As we used to say, old scholastics, he achieves it in Act II, Ex _____ (I have to get off a Latin tag sometime this evening!) Man achieves oneness, wholeness, precisely through a contemporary act which is the act of creative transformation of the world in which we live.

Now here the issue, I suppose, begins to appear, does it not? Does this new stance of man towards nature; that is to say, the stance of man who understands his own intelligence to be created? Does this new stance of man towards nature leave man open to God, or not? Is the contemporary experience of man the experience of myself with the others in the world, which is, I suppose, the briefest summation of human experience -- myself with the others in the world? Is this contemporary experience susceptible of a theistic interpretation or no? Perhaps this contemporary experience of myself with the others in the world leads to the affirmation of the friends we began with tonight, the Death of God fellows, to the affirmation that God is dead. Perhaps contemporary experience needs to be interpreted and can be interpreted only in terms of a humanism which is atheistic.

Now, this as you see, is simply a philosophical problem. I leave it with you. If you'd like to figure it out, I suppose you'd have to start with the notion of transcendence -- the transcendence of man to nature. And then you'd have to decide, argue, then decide whether man's transcendence is self-constituted or whether God is constitutive of man's transcendence. A very nice question which I leave in this great forum at the University of Connecticut.

The trouble is that this is only philosophy. This is just an issue of thought

and today, I think what we're confronted with is not simply an issue of thought, however important that would be or is. And I myself attach enormous importance to it. We're confronted with an issue of action, conduct, life; and life is something greater than thought, isn't it. We're confronted, in other words, if you perceive this line of thought, with Marx. He said, and this is a quotation doubtless familiar to you, "A being does not regard himself as independent unless he is his own master, and he is only his own master when he owes his existence to himself. Atheism is a negation of God and seeks by this negation to assert the existence of man."

Now our radical theologians of the Death of God have not raised this issue -not at all. They're theologians. They're engaged simply in the world of understanding the interpretation of experience, the experience of the absence of God. They're not activists. They're not certainly engaged in the Marxist enterprise, as set afoot by Marx himself, in the famous statement that he made that philosophers have hitherto undertaken to explain the world; we undertake to change it. No, their aim is not to construct a new humanism that will be godless, because godlessness is the necessary premise of any real humanism. These men still will to be Christians, but in a manner that they consider meaningful to man today, in a manner that will accommodate itself to what they say is the experience of man today; namely, the experience of the absence of God.

I think one could validly ask them the question whether or not they are simply pausing in a half-way house along a road that has already been traveled. They call themselves radical theologians. Are they radical enough? I would turn against them the same question that they turn against poor old Bishop Robinson. He's not radical enough for them. I confess they're not radical enough for me. Is it enough

today to proclaim simply that God is dead, and then to be a Bonnhfer and live acse Deus non director, as if God were not? Oh, I think the issue has been made much more clear, and has been stated in much more radical terms; in terms of Marx, Marxism. It's not that God is dead -- God must die, in order that man may be the master of himself and of the world and of history.

This leads me to my conclusion which really is three propositions; really two, but I'll tack on a third one, if you don't mind.

It seems to me that these worthy gentlemen are still caught in the 19th Century religious and theological problematic. That sounds pretty damning doesn't it really? Imagine being caught in any kind of 19th Century problematic; especially when you maintain that you're being very radical!

Well, let me spin this out a bit beginning with a rather silly story which you have undoubtedly heard, of the pastor who put outside his church a placard which read, "Our God Is Alive And Well, Thank You. Very Sorry To Hear About Yours." It sounds a little flippant, doesn't it. Perhaps it is. Nonetheless, it raises the question which Kenneth Hamilton has raised in a recent article in the December issue of *The Reform Journal*, Lutheran journal (Kenneth Hamilton, this is the Canadian, not William who is one of the Death of God fellows. Kenneth, the Canadian, from Toronto, is one of the best, most perceptive critics of the Death of God movement, especially in his book, God Is Dead, The Anatomy of a Slogan, and then another book which I haven't read, I must say, is more recent than that). The question which is the title of his article is, "Who Is The God That Can Die?" And he points out as others have pointed out, and I'd like to point out, that these Death of God fellows have a very peculiar notion of God. Peculiar in both senses of the word; namely, that first it's special and secondly, it's rather odd. This is

a God who alternates between living and dying.

If you happened to have lived in an earlier age in the world, you would have found that God is alive. You happen to live today, I'm awfully sorry, but God is dead. But . . . but . . . if you live long enough, perhaps you will find that God is alive again! I'm serious -- this is Hamilton, simply put, but this is Hamilton. You see, he distinguishes his atheism from traditional atheism precisely because it contains an element of hope. God is indeed dead, but maybe not forever. He may come to life again. Today, indeed, God is experienced as absent, and therefore is proclaimed to be dead, but the hope remains.

In other words, in simple words, God dies when he is not to be found in the world, and He rises again when He is found once more. Now I suppose they want this to be taken seriously, and I do take it seriously. Therefore, I have to say that the God who thus lives and dies intermittently is bound up with and dependent on man's consciousness of God. God comes into or goes out of the world simultaneously with our belief in Him, with our experience of Him. And this is why I said it seems to me that these men are back in the 19th Century. They're putting it indeed in a new way, but this seems to be substantially 19th Century liberal theology, the so-called theology of experience, which most of us had thought we had done with. Whether or not you think that God is dead, I would certainly think that this type of theology is dead. It was murdered, killed, not by Christians, but by the positivists, by the empiricists. Now, let's not pause on that. But let's see if I can spin out the analogy here. You see, this older liberal theology, Protestant liberal theology of the 19th Century, had its source in a subjectivist epistemology of the word of God. The word of God was not something that come to man from the outside, an historical reality, as event or as utterance -- no, the word of God was identical with its

impact on me. It's not that the word of God had an intelligibility that was given, intrinsic, inherent in it; no, the word of God says to me only what I hear. In other words, the word of God is my experience of the word of God and the whole revelation of God is simply a matter of what was later called revelatory experiences.

But isn't this pretty much what our radical theologians of the Death of God are saying? They seem to be saying that the reality of God is tied to our human consciousness of God. God lives when humanity attests his being. God dies when humanity ceases to attest his being. Now if you'd like, you can accept this problematic -- fine, go right ahead, feel free -- that's our motto today. But please do try to understand that it's a 19th Century problematic.

Once, indeed, it was considered enormously radical, now it seems to me it's the oldest of old hat, something we are finished with, finished with. Why are we finished with it? Why? Oh, there are lots of reasons. I'll give you one, and this is my second proposition. Namely, that a new religious experience, or if you will, a quasi-religious experience, has become available to man in the 20th Century. This experience has become available because it has been had by some, and here I would apply what I would hold in philosophy that high philosophies are to be measured by the degree to which they incorporate and develop the platonic insights -- you know what that was. Against the sophists, Plato maintained that man is not the measure, there is a measure of man, a measure transcendent to man, not created by him, which measures man in his thought and in his action. Now once Plato had this insight, this insight was forever available, and if you fall short of it, you -- a philosopher -- then you cannot do high philosophy. And that's why Rechevsky, the Dominican who wrote the history of philosophy (not chronologically, but in terms of a hierarchy of philosophies) puts a man like Bertrand Russell right down to the bottom.

You'd look in vain for the platonic insight in Bertrand Russell, and in lots of other s, too.

Now, as with the philosophical experience, so also with religious experience, and I submit, ladies and gentlemen, that the 20th Century experience is not the experience of the absence of God or the absence of the experience of God. These two experiences are characterized with far too much negativity. The experience that is available today is much more positive, much more affirmative. It is the experience deposited in Trudante's famous dictum, Homo homoni Deus. Man for man is God. For man, man is God. God for man is man. Turn it any way you want. This is the 20th Century experience. And from this experience, you move on; not to traditional atheism, certainly not to this rather ambigious Christian atheism of the radical theologians of the Death of God.

It was Robert McAfee Brown who rather severely said to Mr. Altheiser's most recent book, The Gospel of Christian Atheism; first, it's not a gospel; secondly, it's not Christian; and thirdly, it's not atheism. Regardless of that, to be serious for a moment, from this newly available experience which has been had in the Marxist tradition, you move to anti-theism, to an anti-theistic anthropology, or if you will, to a humanism that is consciously and programmatically atheistic anti-theistic. It is not only merely that God is inaccessible, or that God is irrelevant; it is not just that God is a hypothesis that lies beyond verification and therefore can be disregarded; it's not merely that God is not needed to solve our problems and fill the gaps in our knowledge; no, no, the point here is that God appears as the antagonist of man. God is conceived as a logical possibility, mind you (here's where the Marxist atheist splits off from traditional atheism for which God was incon-

ceivable and absurd -- not even a logical possibility). The Marxist admits that God is a logical possibility, entirely conceivable, and his whole effort is to deny this possibility any actuality. He maintains that the reference of the idea expressed under the word, God, is to be barred from all influence on the life of man. Why? Because God is destructive of the life of man. This is a new thing. I admit that it's not the American thing. And our American theologians, therefore, don't cope with it. Maybe someday we'll have to. Maybe it's a question of just simply a good old cultural lag.

Be that as it may, I think myself that this new thing is the thing that offers the radical challenge to Christian belief; this new experience of man as God for man; this is not adverted to by the radical theologian, and I find nothing in their theology that would enable them to cope with this new experience which is the 20th Century experience. They're still stuck in the 19th Century.

I suppose I have to add a third proposition here because you might ask me, it's all very well for you to say that these fellows are trapped in the 19th Century problematic. Well, if you're so smart, tell us, Murray, what is the proper problematic in which to conceive God, or deal with the problem of God? I'd have to say that it is a difficult problematic. I'd have to add that paradoxically, it's not a modern problematic precisely because it is Biblical; that is to say, it is trans-temporal in its validity. You see, the Old Testament knew the absence of the experience of God. It's the experience of Elijah the Prophet; the experience of God being silent, of not speaking and there is no prophet heard in the land. The Old Testament also knew the experience of the absence of God.

But, from the experience of the absence of God or the absence of the experience

of God, they did not conclude to the non-existence of God. What did they conclude to? They concluded simply to the fact that God is God. His absence and his presence were linked somehow in their minds to the divine purpose. They were linked indeed to the very being of God, to what and who God is; one who is sovereignly free in the manner of his entrance or departure from the life of man. But his entrance or his departure have nothing to do with whether or not he is, because He always is the living God.

I say therefore that the Biblical writers did not conclude from the experience of the absence of God to the postulate of his non-existence, to his death. On the contrary, they thought that this was precisely the mistake of the fool., as they called him. The fool finds that he can disobey God with seeming impunity, and therefore he concludes, he infers, that he can ignore God completely, and say "God is not here. God is dead." This is the way he theologizes -- out of his own experience.

It seems to me that this is uncomfortably similar to the mode of theologizing proper to our radical theologians. I'm not, indeed, saying that Thomas Altheiser, William Hamilton and _____ Bahameon are fools, whether in the Biblical sense or in any other sense. I'm merely saying there seems to be some similarity, if you will -- analogy, between the way they theologize and the way the Biblical fool theologized. You see, they want to adopt a creed, to construct a creed that will be meaningful to contemporary man, that will speak to the experience of man in our day and age. Well, dear me, this is an impulse with which I feel the utmost sympathy. I try to do the same thing myself, I hope. However, the danger comes when this impulse comes down, gets translated downward, as it were, and what you hear them saying is simply, "Well, why don't you just believe what you feel like believing. You have your experience, don't you." If the experience, if you will,

of the absence(end of tape)

. . the contemporary experience is somehow normative of belief. Well, now, is it? Just a moment. They indeed try to erect a theology on the experience of the absence of God. I'm afraid that this is not the way I myself would like to proceed. I would like to investigate and do try to investigate the scriptural theology of God and from there, proceed to an understanding somehow of what it means to say that God is absent or that God is present. And then in terms of this understanding acquired from the Scripture, to return upon my experience and to judge my experience in the light of my theology, and not to construct my theology on my experience. Awfully sorry, I'm not a man of the 19th Century. I'm a man of Biblical times, and for that reason, I hope, a man of contemporary times.

Well having done this, I would like then to move on to the real issue -- the real issue -- which these men don't touch, but is one that deeply concerns me, I must say. Let me state it this way. Is the departure of the living God of the Scripture the maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Is the departure of this living God necessary in order that man may be man? You could put it in terms perhaps of a two-fold imperative. One is the Biblical imperative: Seek ye the face of the Lord. And you know what the image, face, meant to the Hebrew -- it meant the presence. Seek the presence of God. And behind this imperative, seek you the face of the Lord, was the premise; namely, thus you will become a man. The other imperative is being issued today. You must flee the presence, flee the face of the Lord, because as long as you stand in the presence of God, you cannot be a man.

This is a rather brutally simple reduction of the issue, but I think it is the issue today; and perhaps some fine day, if I were ever invited back to the University of Connecticut, I might undertake to discuss it,