

## Smoke of the Mountain

For many contemporaries God has dwindled into a noble abstraction, a tendency of history, a goal of evolution; has thinned out into a concept useful for organizing world peace—a good thing, an idea. But not the Word made flesh, who died for us and rose again from the dead. Not a Personality that a man can feel any love for. And not, certainly, the eternal Lover who took the initiative and fell in love with *us*.

Is it shocking to think of God as a pursuing lover? Then Christianity is shocking. If we accept the supernatural only as something too weak and passive to interfere with the natural, we had best call ourselves materialists and be done with it—we shall gain in honesty what we lose in respectability. Here's a test to tell if your faith is anything more than faith-and-water. Suppose that tonight the Holy Spirit lifts you high into a space, speaks a message to your conscience, and then invisibly tucks you back into your safe little bed again. Will you consider the possibility that this experience is genuine? Or will you conclude at once that you must be crazy, and start yelling for a psychiatrist?

And there's a more practical test—since, in all probability, very few of us will be lifted from our beds tonight. Do you think that Christianity is primarily valuable as a means of solving our real problem—i.e., how to build a permanently healthy, wealthy, and wise society in *this* world? If you do, you're at least half materialist, and someday the Marxists may be calling you comrade.

So strong is the materialist climate of opinion that even convinced Christians sometimes feel compelled to defend Christianity against the charge of “Otherworldliness”—to slight its value as a passport to heaven in favor of its usefulness as a blueprint for remodeling earth. Yet we must not blame our earthliness entirely upon Western scientific progress, as if materialism had waited for Edison to invent it. By no means. The Rome of Lucretius, the Athens of Epicures—even the Israel of Ecclesiastes were without their materialists philosophers. Devotion to the prince of this world is one of the ancient temptations, and perhaps our remote ancestors had no sooner invented the slingshot than they reared back on their hind legs and proclaimed that their technical progress had now enabled them to do without religion. The choice before us today is just what it always was—whether to be worldly or otherworldly; whether to live for the unloving self or to live for the love of God.

From Joy Davidman. *Joy on the Mountain: An Interpretation of the Ten Commandants*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953.