

Don't Look Down

Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961) was a Swedish diplomat who became the second Secretary General of the United Nations (1953-1961). He practiced what he called 'preventive diplomacy' and is remembered particularly for his work in the Middle East and the Congo for which he was posthumously awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He was on a UN mission to the Congo when he was killed in an airplane crash in 1961.

Many people do not know that Hammarskjöld was also a devout Christian. In a brief piece written for a radio program in 1953, Dag Hammarskjöld spoke of the influence of his parents: "From generations of soldiers and government officials on my father's side I inherited a belief that no life was more satisfactory than one of selfless service to your country - or humanity. This service required a sacrifice of all personal interests, but likewise the courage to stand up unflinchingly for your convictions. From scholars and clergymen on my mother's side, I inherited a belief that, in the very radical sense of the Gospels, all men were equals as children of God, and should be met and treated by us as our masters in God."*

Hammarskjöld kept a kind of diary from the age of 20 (in 1925) until his death at age 56. In a cover letter to his literary executor

Hammarskjöld said the entries constitute "a sort of White Book concerning my negotiations with myself - and with God."¹ *Published in 1963 with the title, Markings, the journal was an instant bestseller and is now a Christian classic.*

In the journal, Hammarskjöld describes an overwhelming sense of God driving his life toward an ultimate purpose. "In a dream I walked with God through the deep places of creation," he writes in one entry.

Alluding to his experience as a hiker and mountain climber he writes: "Never look down to test the ground before taking the next step - only he who keeps his eyes fixed on the far horizon will find the right road." Elsewhere he speaks of the need for perseverance saying: "When the morning's freshness has been replaced by the weariness of midday; when the leg muscles quiver under the strain, the climb seems endless, and suddenly nothing will be quite as you wish - it is then that you must not hesitate." He describes the risks of faith saying: "Really, nothing was easier than to step from one rope ladder to the other - over the chasm. But in your dream, you failed, because the thought occurred to you that you might possibly fail."

*walking with God,
keeping our eyes fixed on the horizon,
never hesitating
believing we cannot fail...*

Sounds like a word for the church, doesn't it?

Peace and joy,