

ETERNAL LIFE
in Some Recent Theology

by
J. Basil Adams

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Introduction

One of the great concerns of modern man is that of finding meaning in life. The inability to find a satisfactory meaning in life leaves man with a deep sense of insecurity. Some seem to feel that anything beyond man and the universe they know is so uncertain that they cannot believe in God or a life after death. As a result they search for the meaning of their existence in the life they now live. They do not expect to live beyond death. The only immortality they look for is that they might be remembered as they know that they remember others. They know that they are influenced by great men of the past, so they conceive of immortality in terms of continuing influence, but not a continuing life.

Others, perhaps, because they have not been able to understand and cope with the injustices and evils of this life, look for the meaning of life beyond death in another life in which they believe that all the injustices will be reversed, or at least corrected. So they tend to pay less attention to life here, and more to life beyond death. They seem to conceive of the goal of life as "going to heaven" when they die.

Many people find life so much of a problem, so full of disappointments, so painful, that they look to death as a release. They count on death to bring a merciful end to what has been an unhappy life.

Many people seem to have the idea that Eternal Life is a condition of idleness, and thus it has no appeal to them. It is natural that young people should concentrate on the life that is before them here, but they too are faced with the death of a parent or friend and so must ask, "What happens

after death?" The question, must to some extent, concern all people whether atheist, agnostic, Christian, or of any other religion.

It is because man has a great concern today for a meaning of life which can include the meaning of death and what may lie beyond, and because one's belief as to what happens beyond death has a great bearing on how one lives this life, that I would like to add my study to the many that have gone before.

In Biblical quotations I used the Revised Standard Version for Old Testament passages and the New English Bible for the New Testament passages because I preferred that translation.

Chapter One

Man's Need, His Predicament, and His Search for Meaning

A. Man's Question and His Search for Answers

Man could be called the animal that asks questions. He asks where he came from, where he is going, and what is the meaning and purpose of his life. The Psalmist asks the question, for which man in every generation seeks an answer, "What is man?"¹ Job asks another question which is the one we shall be examining in this thesis, a question which has apparently not been satisfactorily answered for modern man, "If a man die, shall he live again?"² These questions are, in essence, the same question, because when we have answered the question, "What is man?", we shall also have answered the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?"

The question is asked on at least four levels; the emotional, the moral, the intellectual, and the existential.

(1) On the emotional level man asks, "Will I see my loved ones after death?" Personal relations, especially on the family level, form so strong a bond among the persons involved, that when one is taken by death, the ones remaining find it difficult to believe that they will never see that person again. It is on this level that man hopes that beyond death he will be re-united with his loved ones.

(2) On the moral level, man questions the justice of life, of whatever Fate or Providence may seem to determine life, if life is cut off

¹Psalm 8:4 (RSV).

²Job 14:14 (RSV).

before it is apparently completed. The question is especially raised when children, young people, or people in the prime of life, are cut off by death when they want so much to live, grow, develop, and contribute to life. Man finds it impossible to consider it just that life is given, with high hopes and potentialities, then cut off by disease or accident before that life is completed. But this question arises also on at least two levels. Man first of all questions justice when life is ended abruptly, before its apparent natural termination. And then, even when a man lives out his natural span of years, but has not been able to see his hopes and dreams realized, justice also asks that man have opportunity the other side of death to see his purposes fulfilled.

(3) On the intellectual level, man seeks answers to his questions. Of course, these levels are not absolutely distinct, but rather tend to run together. Man wants an answer on the intellectual level, even if the question is first asked on the emotional level. The fact is that man desires to understand. He simply would like answers to the many questions that arise in life. Man would like to know, "Will I see my loved ones again after death?" "Will I live on after death, and if so what might my destiny be?" But man does not simply want answers to his questions, he wants to understand the relation of questions to each other, and the relation of answers to each other, so that they may be fitted into a harmony. Only thus can a man have a philosophy of life. It is not always that a man verbalizes the need for a philosophy but the development of a philosophy is his great need even if it is unconscious, or preconscious. To ask for answers to questions, however, is not necessarily to demand proof for what he holds on faith. But it is necessary that faith be shown to be reasonable and at least point to the possibility of the fulfillment of the man's life. If faith points to this possibility, then that

fact makes a great deal of difference in this life. It is our contention that it is impossible to live life fully unless one understands whether life continues after death, and what relation that life bears to the present life. If life after death is in any way a continuation of this life, then that fact alone becomes important for this life. It would seem impossible to live this life effectively without knowing whether the destiny of man is in this life or beyond it. If it is beyond this life, then we begin to prepare for that destiny now. As Dr. William Temple puts it, "For man's moral and spiritual life is in this world a baffled and thwarted enterprise; and the scene of our endeavour is slowly becoming uninhabitable, so that even though men labour for a remote posterity, yet if this life only is permitted them, it will one day make no difference whether we have striven or not for noble causes and lofty ideals. An earth as cold as the moon will revolve about a dying sun. Duty and love will have lost their meaning."³

(4) The fourth level is the existential level. It is on this level that the question ceases to be academic and becomes very personal. Because the question here is, "Will I live on after death?" "What becomes of me?" It is not here simply a question of my contribution to a Utopia, but a question of me. "Do I cease to exist when my body is buried in the grave?" "What is my destiny?" This level also includes all the others. "Will I see my loved ones again after death?" "Will I find justice is done to me and to mankind?" I am concerned about questions and their answers, about a reasonable faith, a philosophy of life. My life depends upon it.

Today we live in an age when it appears that the answers which suited a former generation are no longer satisfactory. It does not seem

³William Temple, Nature, Man and God (London: Macmillan, 1934), p. 452.

enough today to repeat to a man, for example, the words of Jesus, "I am the resurrection and I am life. If a man has faith in me, even though he die, he shall come to life; and no one who is alive and has faith shall ever die."⁴ We live in a scientific age. If a scientist could show that life survives death many today would probably believe it, although they would not be persuaded by the words of Jesus as recorded in Holy Scripture.

A word of caution is contained in the reminder that the question does not provide the answer, it only asks for it. Man tends to believe that what he cannot achieve in this life, yet yearns for, will surely be granted to him in the next. But this is simply "wish-fulfilment", and based neither on fact nor on reason. No adequate philosophy can be built alone on what man desires. Our hope must be based on what we have experienced God to be.

But since science, as yet, cannot create conscious life, nor show how life can survive death, and, since many today are not convinced by the religious, Christian or non-Christian, answer, they seek answers from some other source.

(1) One answer many can accept today is that one lives on in memory and influence. Abraham Lincoln is still remembered and is still a strong influence in the world today. In a sense, he lives on in our memories. But he is also a very present influence on us today. We read of his life, we recall his speeches, and we are influenced by what he was and did. In this way, it is considered that Abraham Lincoln lives on today as we remember him and he continues to have an influence on us.

⁴John 11:25,26 (NEB).

There are two problems with this kind of answer.

(a) If the time ever came when Abraham Lincoln were forgotten, and thus ceased to be an influence, then he would be considered to have ceased to exist. On this view, his continuance depends entirely on our remembrance of him, and the influence he has on us.

(b) This is not a personal survival. According to this view, Abraham Lincoln does not survive, only the memory of him in our minds and his influence on us.

For most men this is not enough. What men want to know is, "Do I survive, to live on and complete my life and to meet my loved ones?" "Is my life fulfilled in this world or the next?" Therefore this answer is not satisfactory for most men.

(ii) A second way of dealing with the question is best illustrated by the Communist philosophy. According to this view, the aim of man is to build up a Communist State which, when completed, would be a utopia. All human, historical, and social problems would be solved. All evil would be eradicated. All want and poverty abolished. Men would become brothers. Even government could be abolished as unnecessary. But until that time is reached each generation is to work toward it. The purpose of man is to help build Communism. Each man makes his contribution toward it. That is his destiny. His eternal life is what he has done toward the building of this utopia.

This philosophy has its counterpart in non-communist countries. Many feel that their destiny is to make the world a better place for succeeding generations. In one way this philosophy is very commendable in that a man is to live for others. But it does not answer the question, "If a man

die shall he live again?", except in the negative. But perhaps the main objection to this answer is on the moral level. Why should the final generation alone enjoy the utopia that all the former generations gave their lives to build? If utopia is for one it should be for all. Whatever destiny there is in life should be available to all and not just those living when the utopia is reached. If a man lives after death he will have the opportunity of sharing in the final state of things.

(iii) A third way of dealing with the problem, which it would appear many choose today is the attempt to push the question into the background. If science cannot provide any evidence that there is life beyond death, and if one is no longer convinced by religious arguments, then perhaps the best thing to do is to ignore the question for the time being and concentrate on this life, in the hope that if one can make a success of this life, the next will look after itself. The fallacy of this proposed solution is that if, in any sense, this life is a preparation for the next, unless we have some idea of what the next life is to be, then one has no idea of what to prepare for. If one can have some idea of what life is likely to be like after death, then one would know how to live this life. This consideration makes it important to seek for an answer.

B. The Validity of Statements about Life after Death

A word ought to be said about the validity or non-validity of what we say about Eternal life. It is likely that for many, the fact that life beyond death cannot be verified scientifically is the end of the argument. If it cannot be proven scientifically that life continues after death, then for them the whole question is pure speculation. For this reason many

prefer to concentrate on this life, not counting on any extension of life beyond the grave. In this present time, I believe, very little emphasis is given to the possibility that life can find its meaning and fulfilment only beyond the grave. Any talk of Eternal Life is suspect because it seems to deal entirely with a possibility that has no scientific support for modern man. But are we to remain content with this argument?

It is, nevertheless, possible to begin and continue with facts. We can begin with the facts of life and human experience. The fact that man knows that he lives, however, does not provide any explanation for life. This, science has not yet done. Science may be able to describe the behaviour of life, to discover that it operates by laws which can be defined. But when one asks why cells divide, or chemicals react in a certain way, or the reason for the evolutionary process, then there is no satisfactory answer. One might say that life responds to the requirements of the environment for survival, but then one may still ask why there is a response at all? One can attempt to explain life by "natural selection". But this does not explain what does the selecting or why, or how the process began. We can begin with the fact of life, we can learn a great deal about the evolution of life, and trace the steps of evolution, but this does not explain the transition from non-life to life, or from non-being to being. Nature is not a self-explanatory system. There are unanswered questions about the origin of life.

Nor can we say scientifically what is the meaning and purpose of life. But man, in his thinking and dealing with facts talks about what he experiences, or, as we might call them, historical facts. For

these experiences are facts in a very real sense. They cannot be tested or measured, or verified scientifically, but nevertheless, they are facts, experiences in the lives of men. In this sense they can be examined on a level with scientific facts. J. A. T. Robinson refers to Alan Richardson's concern to vindicate theology as an empirical discipline, "Its data, he insists, are as objective and indisputable as those of physics or biology—namely, the facts of 'Christian existence in history and today,...all that appertains to the believing and witnessing Christian community...both in the past and in the present...Like any other science, theology deals with facts of human experience; it does not (as many apparently suppose) deal with hypothetical objects, or things about which there is a reasonable possibility of doubt.'

"The Christian theologian's material is historical fact—namely a persistent community of faith owing its existence to a series of events in history interpreted as acts of God."⁵

When a theologian studies the life and teachings of a Church or any other body of belief "he is doing exactly the same as any other scientist who formulates a hypothesis to co-ordinate and explain the phenomena he is investigating. His hypotheses must submit themselves to precisely the same test of verification in the light of the total evidence, and will possess the same provisional authority."⁶ A church or other community may formulate a dogma of its beliefs about life, God and the Last Things. These do not necessarily represent the truth. Even

⁵ J. A. T. Robinson, In the End God (New York, Evanston, London, 1968) (Paperback), p. 37.

⁶ Ibid., p. 38. (Quoting Alan Richardson, Christian Apologetics, p. 50)

scientific findings are revised from age to age with new understanding of the universe. The task of the theologian is to submit the beliefs and dogmas to rigorous scrutiny, at least on the basis of logic and reason. The theologian could then account for the beliefs and experiences of the church and community in a logical system. It would seem to me that when theologians attempt to account for the data of man's experiences they become involved in studies which demand an answer to the meaning and purpose of life, or a doctrine of the Last Things.

A part of man's experience is the experience of God who has made him, and in whose larger purposes man finds the meaning of his life. This experience frequently is accompanied by an awareness that if God's purposes are to be realized they cannot be accomplished within history. And this awareness is expressed in doctrines about life beyond physical death. The full meaning of life, its hopes and disappointments, its evil and injustice, it is asserted cannot be adequately accounted for in this world; not even the full meaning of love can be found in this world. It can only be found in a time beyond history.

Man's religious experience, and the affirmations which accompany it, such as the expression of an individual's or a group's conviction about an "after-life" are facts. They are less tangible, certainly, than the facts with which the physical sciences concern themselves, but nevertheless they merit an impartial examination. And the capacity of the affirmations to throw light on man's total experience needs to be evaluated.

C. Life

Life is a difficult concept to define, and its origin, despite recent scientific research, is still mysterious. The fact that something is able to exist, to draw what it needs for perpetuating itself from its environment, to produce or procreate so that new life emerges, seems to qualify a thing to be called "living". It has the power to exist, to grow and to multiply.

Perhaps the clearest light is thrown on the understanding of life by looking back in an attempt to trace its evolution. Charles Darwin maintained that life has evolved from lower to higher levels. Looking back in this way one can build up some understanding of life. One can see how the basic elements of any level of life were contained in the preceding levels. Yet it would have been impossible at any stage to prophesy what the next level would be. But it is at least possible to see that life at any level developed from the possibilities contained in the level below. This is put succinctly and clearly by Austin Farrer when he says, "The scientific story begins with energy caught in elementary patterns and operating according to those patterns. It ends up with the same energy, caught in patterns of almost limitless complexity and operating as the physical instrument of Shakespeare's wit or Newton's genius. From beginning to end of the story there is no need to suppose that any addition has been made to the quantity of energy employed; but the addition on the side of operative principle or pattern is surely staggering."⁷ It is important to notice that there is always interdependence.

⁷Austin Farrer, A Science of God (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), p. 58.

What emerges on any level depends to some extent on the elements contained in the level below. Plant life needs the chemicals of the soil, and the energy of the sun. Animal life depends on the vegetable, and man, as we know him now, needs all, or almost all, the elements of the lower levels.

But in man a great new step forward has been taken. In man we find the appearance of "mind", of awareness of a sense of freedom and responsibility, and of comprehension. Life has taken on a new dimension. Man has created many terms to signify the new dimension of life in himself. He uses the term "being", as contrasted to "non-being". He uses such terms as "individual", "self", "soul", to denote the separate identity of man. He uses the term "person". But perhaps the most significant term used by man to describe himself is "spirit". One of the Old Testament words for **spirit** was "ru'ach" which meant "breath". Life was judged to be present where there was breathing. When breathing ceased, the life was judged to have left the body. It was thought that God "breathed" life into a body, and made it live. This is important for the theological understanding of Life. There is an animating principle in life that drives it forward and upward to higher levels. Science can say something about what appears at each level and how it functions. But theology asks about the nature of this animating principle which drives life on from the most basic gases, to the highest spirit of man, in an ascending scale of evolution. Theology has described this principle as "spirit", that energy which moves forward into ever higher expressions. Dr. Paul Tillich, for example, uses the term "ground of being"⁸ as a basis for an understanding of this principle. God is Spirit, expressing Himself

⁸ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 284.

in the manifold levels of creation. God is that which drives life into new forms and expressions, and relatedness, issuing in man. Man, as spirit, thus partakes of the nature of God who is "Spirit". It is in this sense that the Old Testament concept of "ru'ach" can be understood. Life in man is life that comes from God, animated by his Spirit in our spirits, driving them toward fulfilment of the potentialities in us. This does not mean that spirit is something different from life. Rather it is to be thought of as a quality of life, an energy within life, giving it direction and power to develop its possibilities. The use of the term "spirit" in relation to man asserts that in man life has taken on a dimension above the organic or animal. It suggests what it means to have mind, consciousness, awareness, freedom, responsibility; what it means to be human; what it means to be made in the Divine Image. Tillich describes spirit as, "the unity of the ontological elements and the telos of life. Actualized as life, being itself is fulfilled as spirit. The word telos expresses the relation of life and spirit more precisely than the words "aim" or "goal". It expresses the inner directedness of life toward spirit, the urge of life to become spirit, to fulfill itself as spirit. Telos stands for an inner, essential, necessary aim, for that in which a being fulfills its own nature...spirit is the unity of power and meaning. On the side of power it includes centered personality, self-transcending vitality, and freedom of self-determination. On the side of meaning it includes universal participation, forms and structures of reality, and limiting and directing destiny."⁹ This understanding of the relation of spirit to life helps one to guard against the error

⁹Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 249.

of the dualism of body-spirit. Spirit is not something over against the body. Life as spirit is the unity of body and spirit. It includes mind. Together they form a whole. Nor is spirit something apart from life, which can go out from and return to a living body.

A New Testament term for life is "soul". But as Tillich says, "The word 'soul' has been preserved mainly in poetry where it designates the seat of the passions and emotions...In any case, while the word 'soul' is alive in biblical, liturgical, and poetic language, it has lost its usefulness for a strict theological understanding of man, and his spirit, and its relation to the divine Spirit."¹⁰ Western man's thinking here has been influenced by the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Man's body was considered mortal while his soul was immortal.¹¹ Death came to be considered as a liberation of the soul from the body. According to this doctrine, the soul is not affected by death. This Platonic dualism led to the belief that evil arises in the body rather than in the spirit of man. "The answer of Plato" says Dr. Emil Brunner, "--and of all the idealists after him including Kant--is that only our animal nature, 'the dark horse of the pair' (Phaedrus), our sensuous or bodily nature, is responsible for moral evil. Moral evil is consequently not an act of man's spirit but merely an expression of the instincts which have not yet been tamed by the spirit."¹² It could follow then that with death, the evil, being in the body, is buried with the body, while the soul is immortal. This could amount

¹⁰Paul Tillich, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 24.

¹¹Emil Brunner, Dogmatics, vol. 3 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), p. 384.

¹²Ibid.

to the assumption, which has influenced many, that it is not I who do wrong, the wrong comes from my body.

But in the New Testament, body and soul are never set over against each other as though in conflict. Soul in the New Testament stands for the inmost life. There is a unity which Tillich describes in these words: "Life as spirit is the life of the soul, which includes mind and body, but not as realities alongside the soul."¹³ These considerations are important in a study of the term "Eternal Life", for in the being of man life is expressed as spirit.

D. Death

Having said something about the meaning of life we must now acknowledge that for all life the time must come when the life process appears to come to an end. This is the event we call death. It is becoming more and more difficult to define the term death. In the Old Testament it was believed that death came when the breath left the body. It was also believed that life left the body with the blood. It might be thought that a person can be presumed dead when the heart stops. But today, the exact moment when death occurs is not easily detected or defined. Successful attempts are made to revive breathing and the heart beat. When the heart has stopped beating and the person appears to be dead, then heart massage starts the beating again and the person is alive. The question that one asks is, "Was the person dead?" If a person can be presumed dead, with the cessation of breathing, and of the heart-beat, and yet is revived, the

¹³Paul Tillich, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 250.

question arises as to whether the person was in fact dead. Death, it would seem, to be final must involve the breakdown of a number of functions to the point where revival is no longer possible. Then the life process has ceased, and revival is impossible. Then the person is dead. For many this comes gradually and naturally with old age. In these cases the cessation of the life process is gradual until it ceases altogether and the person is pronounced dead.

But this is the very fact that man has questioned. In the Old Testament, what at first is a hope later became what might be called a demand, namely, that man will live on after death. The early Hebrews believed in Sheol, the underground abode of the dead. But it was a shadowy phantom-like existence which is not like life as we know it. There men are cut off from life and from any possibility of fellowship with God. The Psalmist put it thus, "For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?"¹⁴ and Isaiah, "For Sheol cannot thank thee, death cannot praise thee; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for thy faithfulness."¹⁵ Yet as the understanding of Yahweh grew so there arose the hope of life after death. The demand was expressed that man be not left in Sheol, but should continue in fellowship with God. "For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit. Thou dost show me the path of life; and in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore,"¹⁶ "Thou dost guide me with thy counsel, and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is nothing

¹⁴Psalm 6:5 (RSV).

¹⁵Isaiah 38:18 (RSV).

¹⁶Psalm 16:10,11 (RSV).

upon earth that I desire beside thee. My heart and my flesh may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever."¹⁷

It is Job who expresses more definitely the faith of Israel that God will not suffer him to be abandoned. "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then without my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another."¹⁸

A belief in life after death in some form, is a characteristic of almost all religions. Thus it has grown up over the years that many have come to believe that they live on after death in some form. But this is a matter of faith and not something that can be proven scientifically. Perhaps the nearest thing to scientific verification lies along the line of psychical research. Dr. J. M. Shaw believes that psychical research "has encouraged rather than discouraged belief in the possibility of the survival of consciousness after the death of the present body. Some scientists of note have, on the basis of investigations along the line of spiritism or psychical research, inclined to go further and hold that personal survival of bodily death can be actually scientifically 'proved' or 'demonstrated.'"¹⁹ In this Dr. Shaw says that he cannot follow them. Perhaps what is as helpful to man as scientific "proof" of eternal life, is a reasonable foundation on which the belief can be based.

¹⁷Psalm 73: 24-26 (RSV).

¹⁸Job 19: 25-27 (RSV).

¹⁹J. M. Shaw, Christian Doctrine (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1953), p. 310.

E. The Possibility of Life After Death

If we return to the idea that the conditions for a higher level of life are contained in any given level (p. 10) then the question arises, why should the life of any individual suddenly cease in death? And further, why should life cease for some while they are still infants, some at old age, and others at any given age in between? This would seem to be purely arbitrary. If life is a process, if it means growing and becoming, then it is potential. It certainly could not be said of a man that his potential has been fulfilled or actualized in him at death. Man can sense within himself potentiality which he does not fulfill but it requires courage to go forward. Man finds it easier to be content with what he knows than to go forth into the unknown. Most men feel that they would rather love than hate, do good rather than evil. Man would rather not do things that he would later regret, but before he realizes it he has done them. Man knows that he ought to share what he has with those who have not, but he continues to hold on to what he has rather than share it. Man believes that a world of peace and brotherhood ought to be possible, but still lives in a world of strife and suffering. But man becomes aware of the fact that he has potential for a great deal more than he achieves. Perhaps this prompts him to believe that if potential is given, then justice demands that opportunity be given for that potential to be fulfilled. This would involve life after death. Here a man asks again about his destiny. Is he destined to live a few short years and contribute to a society to be enjoyed by a few privileged people who come after him? Each man is destined to become truly man, to fulfill his potentiality. Here I believe it is impossible for man to define his destiny exactly. As it is impossible at any level of life to forecast the next

level, on the basis of that level, so I believe that it is impossible for man to say what God has in store for him eternally. But I believe that this does not preclude man from believing that he may have opportunity to fulfill the potential he experiences within himself. If a man understands anything, may not the time come when he can understand as he is understood?

If a man wills imperfectly, may not the time come when he can will perfectly? If a man can love at all may not the time come when he can love as he knows God loves him? If a man can feel the thrill, the joys of life at times, may it not be that some day he may know the full meaning of life and live in its ecstasy? The fact that man experiences his potential makes him dare to believe that that potential may one day be realized. This compels one to examine more thoroughly the term "death".

Two relevant questions about death are:

- (1) Is death a natural part of God's plan, or, is death due to sin?
- (2) Does life continue after death?

The statement is plainly made in Romans, "It was through one man that sin entered the world, and through sin death, and thus death pervaded the whole human race, inasmuch as all men have sinned."²⁰ And, "For sin pays a wage, and the wage is death, but God gives freely, and his gift is eternal life."²¹ But it seems obvious that St. Paul is talking here primarily of the death of the "spirit". It is against the Spirit that man sins. Sin is rebellion against God. Sin is man cutting himself off from fellowship with God. It is man cutting himself off from the "ground" of his existence. It

²⁰Romans 5:12 (NEB).

²¹Romans 6:23 (NEB).

is man cutting himself off from his destiny, which is eternal life with God and with mankind. It is man deciding to try to live on his own resources and cutting himself off from the rich resources of grace and life offered to him by God. If life, or being, is given to man by God, then it is impossible for man to sustain himself. Man depends upon God for the fulfilment of the potentialities of life. To cut oneself off from God is to surrender the possibility of the fulfilment of "being". Life, then, might be considered as a struggle between the "positive", and the "negative" forces of life. The positive is allowing oneself to be opened up to all the possibilities of life. It is acceptance of life, faith in a Creator, faith in a God who works in us toward our fulfilment. It is relatedness to all life. It is awareness, love, freedom.

The negative is the opposite. It is surrender to hate, to disbelief, to reliance on self, the desire to return to a former state rather than a courageous moving forward to a new and higher state. It is surrender to a possible death. In man there is an instinctive will to live. But we can overcome the will to live and actually will death. If "death" in these Pauline passages means the death of the spirit, then St Paul is not saying that death as the termination of our earthly existence is caused by sin. There is a "running down" process in man's body which seems to indicate that death, as a termination of our earthly existence is a natural phenomenon, and thus part of God's plan.

It still remains to enquire, however, whether what we call death is a final death. It is an inherent element of many religions that the person survives death. It is definitely part of, or perhaps one should say, the basis of the Christian faith that Christ has survived death and

has promised that those who believe in Him shall also. If this is true the person can still live after the bodily functions have ceased.

One method of procedure toward an answer to the question would be to begin with what we experience in ourselves. I believe that we would all admit that within ourselves the highest development is that of spirit expressed in "mind". The fact that we are aware, that we can think thoughts, that we can develop thought into a system is confirmation of this. We are aware that our lives are organized and guided by mind. It has become a principle of unity. With our minds we can distinguish between what is high and low, good and evil. We know that there is Truth, and that it is good to search for it. We know that Beauty is to be desired above ugliness. We cannot deny that goodness is superior to evil. It can easily be seen then that it is with the mind that man tries to visualize what his future, or his destiny may be. It is with his mind that he may decide to seek his destiny, or he may refuse to make the effort.

Man also knows, when it is a matter of the relation of mind and body, that the mind proves to be superior. Man discovers that the mind has power over the body. For mankind at present this is relative. For some the mind is a victim of the needs of the body. The needs of the body are actually allowed to control the mind. But for others the mind asserts control over the body. Disease is overcome or prevented and health maintained by the power of the mind over the body.²²

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In Indian mystics, this reaches an especially high degree of competence by which the mind frees the body from the sensation of pain, for example, when hooks are hung in the flesh, or a person walks barefoot over hot coals. This leads us to feel that perhaps we could all exercise a great deal more power of the mind over the body than we do. Certainly, we know that the mind is capable of a marked superiority over the body.

There is here an implication of tremendous importance, namely, if the mind can produce its own initiative, then our lives are not restricted to the physical. It is difficult to see how the physical universe, if regarded as ultimate reality could have produced mind. Mind does not come from a multiplication or division of cells. It is something absolutely new in the process of evolution. It is difficult to see how mind could come from anything not mind. In other words, only Mind could produce mind. If this hypothesis is accepted, it points to an explanation for the whole process. It suggests that in the beginning, Mind, or God, began to create the universe. Each step, or stage, of Creation is the result of what God required at that stage. Mind would become then the explanation of the process, rather than an episode at the end of it. This fits with reason. It makes sense, at least to suppose, that God developed the process which in turn produced mind, because Mind has been at work all along in the entire process. Thus nature itself is grounded in Mind.

The conclusion then, relevant to this thesis, which I draw from this argument is the discovery of a characteristic of mind which in the words of Temple "is its formation of 'free ideas' whereby it detaches itself from the course of the natural process and enters upon a realm of its own, where its conduct is determined, not by the impulsion of force, but by the apparent good."²³ Here is at least a logical argument for the possibility of life transcending death.

Tillich uses other terms and categories to say the same thing. I

²³William Temple, Nature, Man and God (London: Macmillan, 1934), p. 467.

refer especially to one term he uses, "self-transcendence".²⁴ He is expressing here the idea that when man allows his spirit to come under the control of the Divine Spirit, the possibility is opened up to him of becoming more than he could become on his own resources, or he is given the possibility of self-transcendence. Thus a possibility is opened up that man can share in the life of God, which, being Eternal, transcends death. If there is the possibility that life survives after death, then the meaning of death must be revised. It is not death in the sense of end, of finality. It is death only in the sense of death of bodily or physical functions, but new life for the person.

But this consideration does not dispose of the meaning of death. If man is free, he is free ultimately to reject God. Man is free to reject life, with all its positive aspects. Man is free to reject Truth, Beauty and Goodness. Man is free to identify with evil. The Christian conviction is that God wills the preservation of good and the destruction of evil. If then God is committed to the destruction of evil, man commits himself to the possibility of ultimate death by the rejection of God. But the importance of this consideration for this thesis is that ultimate death does not come with the death of the body. It does not come suddenly. If man identifies with evil, it pays its own wages, death. And the wages are paid out continuously as one feels the consequences of sin. Each time one feels the consequences of sin he senses a lessening of life. This is the process that leads toward ultimate death.

But there is another consideration here which I believe man has not

²⁴ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 3, pp. 31, 402.

really grasped. Life is a process which goes on, and must go on either to fulfilment or destruction. The man then, who assumes that he can end life through suicide is in error. He can extricate himself from the particular situation with which he cannot cope. But beyond the episode of death, which he can precipitate, presumably he still lives, and faces not only the consequences of the futile attempt to end his life, but also the knowledge that he must go on living with the same weakness that caused him to attempt to put an end to his life. This kind of consideration convinces one that life is something given and that the results of a man's reaction to it are unpreventable. Man cannot prevent evil from hurting him, and eventually destroying him. Man cannot change the nature of evil and its consequences. Man cannot turn evil into good. God has ordained the nature of life, and of what is good and builds up, and what is evil and destroys. Over this man has no control. Man may attempt to end his life, but he cannot. Only the evil he chooses can end his life, and this will be accomplished in the time it takes evil to destroy life, relative to man's acceptance or rejection of it, and not in the time man decides to end his physical life. Even if a man chooses evil and death, he presumably must go on living, even after death, until evil, in God's time destroys his life ultimately.

Man's predicament is that he is given life, is unable to end it, often unable to cope with it, and is not clear about his destiny. He is confused about what happens after death, he devises inadequate ways of dealing with the question, and he arrives at no answer which explains his life, his death and his destiny. Man is disillusioned with the picture of life after death given to him in the past. By many, it has been conceived of in

terms of "rest" in the sense of idleness. This picture appeals to the tired in spirit. It certainly has no appeal to the young. By them it would be interpreted as boredom. Nor has it any appeal to those who long for fulfilment of life. They do not want to "rest" from their labours. They want to continue their labours in order to see their goals achieved. They want to grow and to see society grow until, "wars shall be no more", until there is peace on the earth, and all want and pain overcome. They want to go on living, working and growing until they see the Kingdom of God realized. It must be admitted here that man has misunderstood the meaning of "rest". He has thought of it in terms of idleness, whereas its true meaning is inner tranquility in the midst of activity.

A further cause of disillusionment has been the confusion of the good with dullness, and of evil with "spice" or excitement. To some conventional ideas about Eternal Life suggest monotony. They long for a life with more excitement. Christianity, to some extent, has failed to give its followers a picture of Eternal Life which challenges and wins them.

Chapter Two

Some Answers to the Question of Eternal Life

I have already, in chapter one, indicated some answers to the question of Eternal Life. I have suggested that there are three possible non-religious answers:

- (1) That man lives on in memory and influence.
- (2) That man contributes toward a utopia.
- (3) That man should attempt to ignore the whole question and concentrate on this life.

But in this section I am more concerned to deal with the religious answers. Every religion has its own belief as to what happens after death. I shall deal here only with those religions which influence large numbers of people. One religion which influences the thinking of millions of Asiatic people is the Hindu, and the closely related Buddhist religion. The answer of the Hindu-Buddhist religion is reincarnation.

Reincarnation is based on the belief that all souls were created in the beginning. There is never a case of the creation of a new soul at birth, but it is the transmigration of a soul from one body to another.¹

Reincarnation seems to be based on two considerations:

- (a) The processes of nature are cyclical. If man passes from life to death, he also passes from death to life.
- (b) What we call "learning" is really "recollection",

¹See Encyclopaedia Britannica (Chicago, London, Toronto: William Benton Publisher, 1956), vol. 15: pp. 332, 333; also vol. 18: p. 54.

that is, being reminded of something. We often have the feeling that we have heard a thing before or have been in a certain place before.

Reincarnation was taught in ancient Egypt but is best known as it is held by Buddhists and Hindus.

The aim of the Hindu is liberation from this life and union with God. But since this requires a very high standard which is difficult to reach, one may not achieve it in one's lifetime. The theory is then that one is reborn on this earth, again and again, until finally liberation is reached. As a result, the fate of man is perhaps many reincarnations on this earth. If in a lifetime one's life is tainted with evil, one runs the risk of being reborn in a lower form and ultimately as an animal. If one in this life can improve on the last, one may rise to a higher form of life, that is, a higher caste, and ultimately break out of the circle of reincarnations and into union with God.

Attention to the sacred writings, to religious obligations, to justice and charity, to reconciling wrongs and to achieving a greater love for God, are among the things that assist one in rising to higher incarnations and at last to God. The goal is union with God, and the way to achieve it is to overcome all desire, all bodily senses and passions, through concentration on and contemplation of God. If one succeeds in purifying oneself in this way, one can achieve "liberation", "release", "salvation".

Some questions must be asked concerning this answer.

(1) I would agree with Tillich when he says, "The difficulty of every doctrine of reincarnation is that there is no way to experience the subject's identity in the different incarnations."³ There is no

³Paul Tillich, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 417.

known way whereby one can say who or what one was in the last or any previous incarnation. If reincarnation is thought of as another attempt to make a success of life, the whole purpose would be defeated if one could not profit by the experience of past incarnations. The fact that a person sometimes has a feeling of having been in a certain place before is not a valid proof of reincarnation. There are other explanations of this feeling. If one knew one's identity from one incarnation to another, this would be continuous life rather than beginning a new life over again. It may be true that certain Hindu mystics can "remember" something of their previous incarnations but if for most people this is not true, then there is little likelihood of their succeeding in being liberated from the cycle of reincarnation and achieving union with God in any later incarnation. It would seem then that man is condemned to an endless cycle of reincarnations on this earth, with little hope of breaking the cycle and achieving union with God. A further consideration would be that, as far as I know there is no way whereby a person could go back from being a mature person to become a child and begin life over again.

(2) A second objection to reincarnation is also suggested by Tillich when he says, "Therefore reincarnation must be understood-- similarly to immortality--as a symbol and not as a concept. It points to higher or lower forces which are present in every being and which fight with each other to determine the individual's essentialization on a higher or a lower level of fulfilment. One does not become an animal in the next incarnation, but unhumanized qualities may prevail in a human being's personal character and determine the quality of his

essentialization."⁴

It would seem impossible for man to reverse the process of evolution. If life evolves from lower to higher forms until man is possessed of mind and spirit, it is because man has developed his potential in obedience to the Spirit that creates him. But as man becomes aware of evil forces within him, he knows that they can hurt and eventually destroy him. But to reverse the process of evolution from man to animal and then back to man and on to God would seem to contradict the principle of cosmic and terrestrial evolution which is widely accepted in the physical and biological sciences today. The process of life is irreversible. Man either goes on to develop his full potential, or he identifies with evil forces which may eventually destroy him. If this is true, reincarnation loses any semblance of probability. Man is not reborn on a higher or a lower scale. The relevant and important fact is as Tillich says, that there are higher or lower forces at work in man determining his destiny.

(3) A third objection to reincarnation is what appears to be its basic aim. If the aim of Hinduism is "liberation" from this life and union with God, the main emphasis is "liberation". The import seems to be that once liberation is achieved man's concern ends. One is left with the question, does man as a person, as an individual, disappear in the union with God? It is significant that more seems to be said in Indian literature about reincarnation on this earth than about the experience of Nirvana. Union seems to be equivalent to disappearance as a drop of water seems to disappear in the ocean. This appears to offer

⁴Ibid.

little to the aspirations of Western man. If, after many struggles and reincarnations, man does not break the cycle and achieve union with God, then to all intents and purposes he disappears. Nothing is said about the fulfilment of one's life, of one's potentiality, or of being a person in union with God. This is a concept that is very important to one who values life and believes personality to be significant. Bishop Robinson in commenting on the typical Indian idea of man's end says, "...the spirit of man is a part of the eternal, universal, divine spirit, and is therefore by nature immortal...this doctrine never really succeeds in establishing a personal immortality. The end of man is always re-absorption, the overcoming of individuality, which is generally viewed as evil. When pressed to its limits in the religions of the East, the doctrine promises a state of bliss for the individual which is indistinguishable from his annihilation."⁵

(4) A fourth objection to reincarnation is the result produced in countries where these religions are predominant. Since there are about 500 million Hindus, it is difficult to generalize and speak of a mood, but I believe that this doctrine in India has had a negative effect. Whereas Christians look forward to the redemption of all things, a New Heaven and a New Earth, the Hindu seeks liberation from life and absorption into God. Thus the prevailing mood where this belief is predominant is one of being trapped, or condemned to a cycle of reincarnations. There is a fatalism involved here which discourages the individuals from trying to better their lot. There is a belief that one

⁵J. A. T. Robinson, In the End God (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 89, 90.

should accept one's lot rather than trying to improve it. This fatalism and pessimism robs people of incentive to work toward a goal of personal and social improvement.

Although reincarnation was held by Gnostic sects and by Manichaeans in the fourth and fifth centuries, it was invariably repudiated by orthodox theologians. It is a cardinal tenet of modern theosophists.

Among the more recent advocates of reincarnation is the well known Dr. Leslie Weatherhead. In his book, The Christian Agnostic, he has set forth why he believes in reincarnation. I will refer to some examples:

(a) He relates instances of people who, when they meet for the first time, recognize each other and, "who are convinced that they have known one another in an earlier life."⁶ But if Tillich is right when he says that there is no way to experience the subject's identity in the different incarnations (see page 26 above), then there is no way that people could have known one another in an earlier life. The feeling that they have done so must be due to other factors.

(b) He uses reincarnation to explain the unfairness and inequalities of life. "If", he says, "we accept the idea that all these inequalities

⁶Leslie Weatherhead, The Christian Agnostic (Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), p. 247.

are the result--in a cosmos of cause and effect--of earlier causes, the product of some distant past, the fruit of earlier choices, then our sense of justice is preserved."⁹

It seems to me that Weatherhead is here reaching far for explanations. He seems to feel that the cause of one's suffering must be one's own fault in order that justice be preserved. Is he not here ignoring our interdependence one upon another? It is a fact of experience that one man is the cause of another man's suffering as well as his own. The sins of the parents are visited on the children. If one is looking for justice, it does not exist here. It is not just that one suffers because of another. But this is a fact of life. Justice is not found among sinful people.

But we do have a right to be concerned about the justice of God. The great question has always been, "Is God just who allows the innocent to suffer, who allows this injustice to exist among his children?" We know, however, that it does exist. The believer in God finds an answer in the fact that the possibility of unjust suffering is the price that man has to pay for the inestimable gifts of freedom and responsibility, which alone make possible a personal relationship with God, who is himself free and responsible.

(c) He uses reincarnation to explain child prodigies, suggesting that probably in a previous existence they have been masters of the particular art, so that they do not have to learn it in this life, but simply to recall it. There is not sufficient evidence to show that a child prodigy requires any other explanation than that at an early age he may show unusual interest and ability.

⁹Ibid., p. 242.

(d) He uses reincarnation to explain the purpose of God. "God is working out a plan in the lives of all men and women,...the consummation of this plan will mean that His will is 'done on earth as it is in heaven'".¹⁰ I can only assume that he takes this to mean that the consummation of the plan must be reached here on earth. But the clause in the Lord's Prayer to which Weatherhead alludes is by no means necessarily to be understood in this way. In the context of Jesus' teaching as a whole it is more natural to understand him to mean that if we are ultimately to reach our destiny, we must begin to do the will of God on earth, as it is done in God's Presence. Our aim in this life is to do the will of God. This is not to assert, however, that the consummation is to be looked for in this world.

(e) He uses such passages of Scripture as Matthew 17:1-13, to support reincarnation. Jesus said that "Elijah has already come, and they failed to recognize him...Then the disciples understood that he meant John the Baptist." There is no justification for the assumption that reincarnation is involved here. The passage rather means that John the Baptist is one like Elijah.

(f) Another passage he uses is John 9:2f, concerning a man born blind. The disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents? Why was he born blind?" Weatherhead's comment is that "If this man could possibly have developed blindness through his sin, and yet have been born blind, then clearly the sin must have been in a previous life."¹¹ Jesus replied, "It is not that this man or his parents sinned." Weatherhead

¹⁰Ibid., p. 245.

¹¹Ibid., p. 238.

is attempting to locate the cause of the blindness in the man's own doing, and in a previous life. But Jesus' reply that the blindness is not caused by sin, either his or his parents, clearly refutes Weatherhead's assumption and it is difficult to understand how the latter can imagine that the passage supports the idea of reincarnation.

The idea of reincarnation, then, does not appear to suggest a plausible answer to the question of how man may progress towards the fulfilment of his destiny. Nor do the religious systems which employ this idea present us with a doctrine of the final purpose of man which does justice to man's experience, his sense of freedom and of the worth of his own personality and that of others. What we seem to have is a concept of absorption into ultimate reality to the loss of personal identity.

B. The Answer of the Christian Church

The faith of the Christian church is based on the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The great stress in Jesus' life was on the love of God and how God had sent Him to impart that love to men. Jesus so completely committed himself in faith to God, that He felt the power of God at work in Him. He closely related this power in Him with the Power that clothes the lily of the field, that makes the seed to grow, that heals the sick and raises the dead. Jesus saw God as Creator of life, the same power in nature as in man. He called upon man to have faith in God who watches over the sparrow and over all His Creation.

On one occasion the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, questioned Jesus about survival after death. Mark records Jesus as replying, "Now about the resurrection of the dead, have you never read

in the Book of Moses, in the story of the burning bush, how God spoke to him and said, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not God of the dead but of the living."¹² Jesus is here expressing the faith that if God called Abraham, Isaac and Jacob into fellowship with Himself, that fellowship is not terminated at their death. He is still their God, because they are still alive.

And after Jesus, having committed himself to God in this faith, was crucified, but was raised again to life, his disciples met him again in his resurrection appearances. Thus they became convinced that He had survived death and that He was alive for ever. More specific evidence of this as given by the Gospel writers will be given later in this thesis.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter, in his sermon as recorded in the Book of Acts says, "I speak of Jesus of Nazareth, a man singled out by God and made known to you through miracles, (who) when he had been given up to you...you used heathen men to crucify and kill him. But God raised him to life again, setting him free from the pangs of death, because it could not be that death should keep him in its grip."¹³ Peter is affirming here that the relationship between God and Jesus could not be broken because lawless men had killed Jesus. Death was not able to sever this bond of fellowship. Peter relates this faith to the Old Testament hope which he had found in Psalm 16, "Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades nor let thy loyal servant suffer corruption."¹⁴ Paul later, according to Acts

¹²Mark 12:26f (NEB).

¹³Acts 2:22-24 (NEB).

¹⁴Acts 2:27 (NEB).

13:38, uses this passage from Psalm 16 for the same purpose.

So in the New Testament what had been a hope in the Old became a deeply rooted conviction. Man had hoped that God would not leave him after death in Sheol. The conviction was that in Jesus God had raised a man from the dead. The Christian faith in Eternal Life is based on the conviction that death is followed by resurrection to new life. The Gospel writers do not feel it necessary to explain the Resurrection, they simply proclaim it. Some of them had met the Risen Christ, but all of them had experienced Him. It was St Paul who offered an explanation of the Resurrection. In I Cor. 15, for example, he uses the analogy of the new life which arises out of the death of a seed of grain and the new life which will arise from the death of the body. But he also stakes his entire faith on the Resurrection when he says that if Christ is not raised then man's faith is futile and he has no hope of Eternal Life.

But taking the Biblical witness as a whole, faith in Eternal Life is based on the nature of God. God is steadfast love, "his righteousness endures for ever."¹⁵ If God calls men into fellowship with Himself, that fellowship cannot be broken by death. The love of God must be eternal as God is. The fellowship which God initiates must also be eternal. The love of God must be stronger than death. Thus the faith of the Christian Church in Eternal Life is based primarily on the nature of God as men have experienced Him, and was sealed by the Resurrection of Jesus.

It is, however, when we attempt to go into more detail about how man inherits Eternal Life that we find a wide divergence between the answer of the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Church.

¹⁵Psalm III, 3 (RSV).

C. The Roman Catholic Answer

When we turn to the Christian religion to discover its answer to the state of man after death, we find that Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines require separate study. "The Teaching of the Catholic Church, a summary arranged and edited by Monsignor Canon George D. Smith D.D., Ph.D." and published in 1948 is chosen as a representative presentation of the Roman Catholic position. It is summarized in what follows:

In the Roman Catholic Church the hope of Eternal Life depends, for one thing, on the "power of meriting". The kind of life a person leads, his obedience and devotion to his Church, his religious life, his works of charity, enable him to store up merit. However, the power of meriting ceases at death. But if a human soul at death is in a state of "perfect charity", it will enter "heavenly bliss" without delay. In heaven a soul will have a degree of rewards corresponding to the merits he acquired during his life. If a soul be a believer in God, yet is not in perfect charity, then admission to heavenly bliss is retarded. The hope of the soul for perfection lies in a process called "purgatory". In purgatory discarnate spirits, being purged and purified also receive the "benefits" of the intercessions of all other Christians. The idea of purgatory is based on the word "purgare", which in Latin means "to pay the full amount of punishment due".¹⁶ In purgatory suffering is assigned by God, based on the amount of **penalty** to be undergone for sins not fully paid for in this life. Man's fate is decided

(I have been assured by a Catholic priest that these views have not been officially altered by Vatican II.)

¹⁶
p. 1130.

at death. If he has rejected God he is cast forever into "exterior darkness". The reasons given for suffering in purgatory are:

(1) Atonement to God. Man owes a debt to God for the sins he has committed against His Divine Majesty. This debt can only be paid for by suffering.

(2) A means of remaking the soul. Suffering purifies and rebuilds the soul. The soul in purgatory longs to suffer that it might be clean in order to reach God and make amends to Him.

At the general judgment all souls that are to go to heaven will be reunited to their bodies and enter into their everlasting reward.

We see here what is not necessarily a wrong view, but it is a doctrine in which the emphases are misplaced. It is true no doubt that man owes God a great debt for the way he has sinned against Him. It is just that man should suffer for his sins, but it would seem that this emphasis in Catholic theology on the debt man owes God overshadows a more fundamental Christian belief about man's relationship to God, namely that God desires of man not simply payment of a debt but growth and development. If it is true that man's end is to grow into the likeness of God, then the main emphasis in any theological affirmation about the state of man after physical death should be on this positive notion rather than on the negative notion of purgation through suffering. This would be consonant with the teaching of Christ in which the emphasis is on the joy of the Father over the return of the lost.

The aim of Catholic theology seems to be that one should live the kind of life that assures one of going to heaven. Little hope is held out for those who are not believers at death. Life, as far as growth in love

toward God is concerned, is fixed at death. It can neither increase nor decrease. There is no hope of growth after death. There is only the hope of being purified of whatever is displeasing to God.

Particularly objectionable is the strong emphasis which the Roman Catholic theology of purgatory gives to suffering. Suffering can make one aware of how much he has failed and hurt God, and it can be a powerful agent in causing one to turn from sin to seek God's forgiveness and help, but in itself it cannot take the place of positive growth. The desire of believers to attain the end of fulfilment with God will open one's life to the power of God's spirit which is the changing agent. Tillich's assertion that "it is a theological mistake to derive transformation from pain alone instead of from grace which gives blessedness without pain"¹⁷ indicates that he does not believe that suffering should play as predominant a place as Roman Catholic theology would give to it.

One finds no evidence in the life of Jesus to warrant such a stress on suffering. Jesus did not appear to seek out suffering for its own sake. When suffering came, He accepted it and was made perfect by it. The emphasis in Jesus' teaching seemed to be a positive one of love and forgiveness, of seeking to know and do the will of God, rather than the idea of seeking out suffering to "burn away" unworthiness.

It is because this view is too negative and gives no place to growth after death that I find it an inadequate answer to the great problem of how man enters into Eternal Life.

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Paul Tillich, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 417.

D. The Protestant Answer

The Protestant answer is less easy to state since it is not one answer but many. There is no clearly defined dogma in the Protestant Church on this question. With the freedom which is characteristic of Protestantism each theologian defines the answer as he sees it. Part of the problem is the seeming paradox of the Biblical teaching on the subject.

On the one hand we are assured that God's steadfast love endures for ever, and that He loves all men, without exception. Jesus gave mankind the great assurance, "I have come that men may have life, and have it in all its fullness."¹⁸ There are many New Testament passages with the same message. Among them are: "The Son of Man has come to seek and save what is lost."¹⁹ "Through him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself."²⁰ Before his death Jesus expressed his faith in God's power and love, "And I shall draw all men to myself, when I am lifted up from the earth."²¹ The first letter to Timothy says the same thing of God, "whose will it is that all men should find salvation and come to know the truth."²²

This is one side of the New Testament picture, the assurance that God's love is for all. On the other hand, if God is just He must save what is good and destroy what is evil. Once again numerous passages

¹⁸John 10:10 (NEB).

¹⁹Lk 19:10 (NEB).

²⁰Col 1:20 (NEB).

²¹John 12:32 (NEB).

²²I Tim 2:4 (NEB).

of scripture warn man that evil will be destroyed. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned, "I tell you, unless you show yourselves far better men than the Pharisees and the doctors of the law, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven."²³ Again, "Anyone who nurses anger against his brother must be brought to judgment. If he abuses his brother he must answer for it to the court, if he sneers at him he will have to answer for it in the fires of hell."²⁴ Also, "If your right leads you astray, tear it out and fling it away, it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for the whole of it to be thrown into hell."²⁵ Jesus made very plain the two ways, "Enter by the narrow gate. The gate is wide that leads to perdition, there is plenty of room on the road, and many go that way, but the gate that leads to life is small and the road is narrow, and those who find it are few."²⁶ "Not every one who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of my heavenly Father."²⁷ God's judgment is expressed in the following, "As the darnel, then, is gathered up and burnt, so at the end of time the Son of Man will send out his angels, who will gather out of his kingdom everything that causes offence, and all whose deeds are evil, and these will be thrown into the blazing furnace, the place of wailing and grinding of teeth."²⁸ The story of the rich man and Lazarus also illustrates God's justice in respect of the uncaring.²⁹

These two contrasting sets of texts, on the one hand hold out the certainty of God's love for all, but at the same time warn us that all evil

²³Mt 5:20.

²⁷Mt 7:21.

²⁴Mt 5:22.

²⁸Mt 13:40-42.

²⁵Mt 5:29.

²⁹Lk 16:19-31.

²⁶Mt 7:13,14.

(All from the NEB.)

will be destroyed. One must conclude then, that if it were possible for a person to identify himself completely with evil, God must destroy him.

Theologians have attempted to find a satisfactory answer to this dilemma. One solution was the "double decree" of John Calvin. Brunner quotes Calvin's Institutes, "All men are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation",³⁰ which says Brunner "is a shocking caricature of the Christian message which can be explained only as the result of a retrospective inference from the supposedly clear scriptural doctrine of a twofold issue of world history to a twofold will of God as the cause of this twofold result. But by this the meaning of the whole message of Christ was obscured."³¹

What seems lacking in Protestant theologians is a systematic presentation of the Christian answer to the question of life after death. Theologians deal with the crucial issues involved and present their answers. But the emerging answer of Protestant theologians lacks the clarity and straightforwardness of Roman Catholicism or the Hindu-Buddhist answer of Reincarnation. It may be said that it is one of the strengths of Protestantism that it allows diversity of opinion and expression, and does not demand a unified answer. But it could also be said that the failure of Protestantism to provide the Christian Church with a more clearly defined answer to what man may expect after death, based on what God has revealed to him, has caused the Protestant Church to lose interest in the whole subject and concentrate more on life in this world. But man is not satisfied

³⁰ Emil Brunner, Dogmatics, vol. 3 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), p. 416 (quoting from Calvin's Institutes 21:5).

³¹ Brunner, Ibid.

to leave the matter there. He feels that there is a very real possibility that he lives on after death. He probably no longer believes in hell, but neither has he been given a view of Eternal Life that he can comprehend and use as a goal for his life which will better help him to understand the real issues of this life, and gives some ultimate answers to them.

Dr. John Baillie in And the Life Everlasting, rejects the doctrine of eternal evil and punishment. He also rejects the "conditionalist" view that the image of God may be finally effaced from man. "But", he says, "if we decide for universalism, it must be for a form of it which does nothing to decrease the urgency of immediate repentance and which makes no promises to the procrastinating sinner."³² It may be agreed that the universalist ought to make no promises to the procrastinating sinner, except that God will always be with him. But Baillie does not spell out what are the consequences to the man who fails to recognize the urgency of immediate repentance. Why is immediate repentance a matter of life and death? Is Baillie here inclining to the view that if a man dies unrepentant, no further opportunities are given to him after death? He is not explicit here. He says that "there can be no complete consummation for the individual until there is consummation also for society."³³ He does not say, however, how the procrastinating sinner may finally come to see God as He is and accept the life which God offers him.

One finds Brunner also vague. He discusses the main issues of Eternal Life but leaves one with no clear idea of what happens in "The Age

³² John Baillie, And the life Everlasting (Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 189.

³³ Ibid., p. 192.

to Come". Brunner makes a great leap from death to consummation. The time involved for man to reach perfection is very short, and man's part in this is greatly minimized. From reading Brunner one gets the picture of man at death, summoned into the Presence of God. There he recognizes that he personally is summoned, that he confronts God, and that this confrontation persuades him to accept Eternal Life. "Only in the full revelation of His glory, when we stand fully in His presence, shall we also be perfectly changed into His image.

"This last change, which will happen through the coming of the Lord in glory, will one day happen radically without any co-operation or imitation on our part; solely through God's act of new creation."³⁴ "The change from the 'being unto death' into a 'being unto life' takes place in concealment, just as death is at work in a hidden manner in human existence."³⁵ Righteousness is "bestowed" on man. "...because the place of our missing righteousness is taken by the righteousness of Christ."³⁶ "But God does not reach His goal, as we men imagine, through our own achievement of righteousness, but by bestowing upon us what we strive after all our life long and yet do not attain, and only through this gift revealing fully that we receive all things from His hand and are dependent upon Him alone."³⁷ "The eternal life for which man was destined from his creation, but which he has forfeited through his revolt from God, will be bestowed again upon him and at the same time consummated through God's act, His perfect self-communication."³⁸

³⁴ Emil Brunner, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 411.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 412.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 420.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 421.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 436, 437.

Brunner is rightly concerned to affirm that Eternal Life is a gift of God bestowed on man, and that the place of our missing righteousness is taken by the righteousness of Christ, but he seems to emphasize the personal to the neglect of the social element in man's life. He suggests that when confronted by God all will accept Eternal Life, but surely this cannot be achieved without regard for man's social development. How can a concern for one's fellowmen which is a Christ-like characteristic be bestowed on man, "without any co-operation or imitation on his part"? Surely man must become aware in his own heart of his hatred or his indifference toward his fellowmen and repent of these attitudes before he can enter into the life of the Kingdom of God. This has to take place horizontally, in a personal relationship among men, and not simply vertically, between man and God. Brunner neglects an essential element in man's personality, namely, his relationship with others. This is something that cannot simply be bestowed but, although inspired or revealed by God, has to take place and grow consciously in man. Man must change his attitude toward others and thus know that as a result he is more Christ-like. The motivation and the power to do this come from Christ but man must actually change his attitudes. Brunner appears to give little attention to what is needed for the growth of man between death and Consummation.

William Temple is the opposite of Brunner. Temple takes more of a heart-felt or emotional attitude to the problem. He is much more concerned with the social attitude. "How can there be Paradise for any while there is Hell, conceived as unending torment, for some? Each supposedly damned soul was born into the world as a mother's child, and Paradise cannot be Paradise

for her if her child is in such a Hell."³⁹ Temple stresses strongly the sin of self concern. "If", he says, "my main concern in relation to things eternal is to be with the question what is going to become of me, it might be better that I should have no hope of immortality at all, so that at least as I look forward into the vista of the ages my Self should not be a possible object of primary interest."⁴⁰ He holds out hope for all. "At long last, we may hope, every sinner--even Judas Iscariot and every traitor with him--shall be so purged of self-concern by the very shame which his offence has caused to that same self-concern, that he in utter humility will thank God that his vileness has become a further occasion of the divine triumph."⁴¹

Tillich's theme is "essentialization", considered as "elevation of the positive into Eternal Life."⁴² The dynamic of the process is that "God, so to speak, drives toward the actualization and essentialization of everything that has being."⁴³ Essentialization is "universal participation".⁴⁴ This means that the salvation of all is involved in the salvation of any. "In the essence of the least actualized individual, the essences of other individuals and, indirectly, of all beings are present. Whoever condemns anyone to eternal death condemns himself, because his essence and that of the other cannot be absolutely separated. And he who is estranged from his own essential being and experiences the despair of total self-rejection must be told that his essence participates in the essences of all those who have reached a high

³⁹William Temple, op. cit., p. 454.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 457.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 472.

⁴²Paul Tillich, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 409.

⁴³Ibid., p. 422.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 409.

degree of fulfilment and that through this participation his being is eternally affirmed."⁴⁵ Tillich suggests that a more complete and adequate answer is required which "must deal with the relation of eternity and time or of transtemporal fulfilment in relation to temporal development."⁴⁶ Tillich speaks of the dynamics of change and fulfilment as "essentialization", and asserts that this process involves all men together and not as individuals. But like Brunner and Temple, he leaves one wishing that a more complete picture could have been drawn of how this involves each one of us.

J. M. Shaw, while indicating that he believes that men should have further opportunity after death for repentance, yet warns, "Of the doctrine of 'future chances' beyond death, or of 'future probation' as it is usually called, there cannot be said to be any definite indications in Jesus' own teaching."⁴⁷ But he goes on to say concerning I Peter 3:17-20; 4:6, "The writer felt that there should be an opportunity given to all to hear the Gospel with a view to possible repentance and salvation, and that where men have not for whatever reason come fairly face to face with the Gospel in their earthly life a further period of probation should be granted them on the other side of death."⁴⁸ Shaw believes that "at death the believer or Christian becomes 'clothed upon' with the spiritual and immortal body which is the gift of the Spirit or of the working of the risen, living Christ."⁴⁹

This, as we shall see, conflicts with the views of J. A. T. Robinson who believes that the body of the believer is only complete at the Last Day

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 409.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 418.

⁴⁷J. M. Shaw, Christian Doctrine (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1953), p. 354.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 354-5.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 328.

when the whole Body is complete. Shaw believes "that the life of the believer after death will be a life of progressive development in character and service."⁵⁰ This would seem to conflict with Brunner's idea of "radical change". Shaw believes that "The resurrection which the Apostle has in view throughout this chapter in I Corinthians (15) is the resurrection of believers only, of those who have received the gift of the Spirit."⁵¹ Shaw favours the theory of "conditional immortality". This does not mean that "those who die in an unsaved or unrepentant condition pass at death to final perdition or destruction. No: the opportunities of salvation and of coming into saving fellowship with God, it is acknowledged, are not exhausted in this life."⁵² Shaw's ideas do not seem to be entirely consistent. He holds that the resurrection of believers takes place immediately upon death. He does, nevertheless, allow that for others there are opportunities for repentance and salvation after death, which implies that for unbelievers who avail themselves of these opportunities, resurrection occurs at some later stage.

Shaw is one of the more thorough-going theologians in working out a scheme of the process of attaining Eternal Life, yet his theory of Conditional Immortality compels him to admit that many may miss Eternal Life, even after future chances, while in his heart he hopes that all will have Eternal Life.

J. A. T. Robinson provides a discussion of all the issues involved in the question of Eternal Life. In contrast to Shaw who concedes scriptural evidence for a resurrection of believers only, Robinson says, "all will be

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 331.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 352.

⁵²Ibid., p. 356.

raised to a life-in-relationship, to a life from which no escape from God is possible."⁵³ He says, "Resurrection is his destiny for every man, whether he is worthy of it or not, whether he likes it or not. For it depends on God's unconditional love."⁵⁴ Robinson also disagrees with Shaw on when man achieves the resurrection body. "St. Paul", he says referring to 2 Cor. 5, "quite definitely asserts that the condition of the dead until the day of the Lord is one of nakedness, of disembodiment (verse 8), though that dismal state is more than compensated for by their closeness to Christ. Bodily resurrection is something that does not and cannot occur till the last day."⁵⁵ Robinson does not seem to attach importance to the individual resurrection body. "Individuality does not depend on the body: it rests in the individuating Word of God. The body represents solidarity; and the denial of its redemption and restoration immediately upon death stands for the great truth that no one can fully be saved apart from his brother, or indeed apart from the whole creation. It is only in the last day when all things are restored that the new corporality will be complete."⁵⁶ But one can question whether Robinson is justified in laying so much emphasis on a particular exegesis of 2 Cor 5:1-10, and in speaking of the condition of the dead from death until the day of the Lord as "nakedness", or as "disembodiment". If, as St. Paul suggests in I Cor 15, the new body is a spiritual body, and one may assume that the new body is closely akin to personality, then may not the new body be building within us now? At death, then, man

⁵³J. A. T. Robinson, op. cit., p. 93.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 94.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 108, 109.

would still possess "spiritual" body (this degree of essentialization, to use Tillich's word), and could not properly be spoken of as disembodied, except perhaps in respect of the physical body. Robinson suggests that the "spiritual body" of I Cor 15:44 is more than the private possession of the individual, and makes the attractive suggestion that it is to be identified with the Body of Christ which will be complete when all men are brought into the "solidarity of his Body". But this does not necessarily **imply** that the individual man at death is deprived in any way of what he may have contributed to the "building up of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12).

Robinson, once again, in contrast to Shaw, believes that all will be saved. He cannot accept Shaw's theory of "conditional immortality". He believes that eventually, "As far as the final issue of God's purpose is concerned, there can only be one outcome. All things must be summed up in Christ, because in principle all things already are."⁵⁷ "This love will take no man's choice from him; for it is precisely his choice that it wants. But its will to lordship is inexhaustible and ultimately unendurable: the sinner must yield."⁵⁸

The two failures I see in Protestant theology generally are:

- (1) To give a whole view of what is involved in man's attainment of Eternal life, and,
- (2) To show how this takes place in man's relation to man, as well as in man's relation to God.

Temple, Tillich and Robinson do this to some degree, but not sufficiently. Theologians discuss vital aspects of the problem such as death,

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 130.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 133.

resurrection, freedom and consummation, but tend to do so in the context of the relation of the individual to God. Some recognize the difficulty of conceiving of a heaven for some, whilst there is hell for others, but are not conspicuously successful in providing a coherent theology of what this involves. One implication is that the consummation is reached not by individuals in isolation, but in relation to mankind as a whole. It is the relation of man to man, as well as of man to God that must be made whole. This, of course, in no way minimizes the basic Christian doctrine of the worth to God of every individual.

This negative evaluation of recent theology does not mean that I reject the theology in question. On the contrary I use many of their ideas as source material for my thesis. I am simply saying that, in my mind, no theologian has yet given a sufficiently complete picture of the concept of Eternal Life.⁵⁹

⁵⁹The little booklet, Life and Death: A study of the Christian Hope, prepared by the Committee on Christian Faith of the United Church of Canada, and edited by A. G. Reynolds, 1959, is a very thorough statement on this subject.

Chapter Three

The Significance of Eternal Life

A. Life in Man

Man is potential. That is, he is in the process of becoming. Man is thus led to believe that there is some destiny toward which he moves. Life is the process by which the potential moves toward the actual. What man is capable of becoming can also be called the essential. Man moves toward his essence through the historical and existential situation. This is why Tillich, borrowing a term from Schelling, calls the process "essentialization". "Essentialization", says Tillich, "can also mean that the new which has been actualized in time and space adds something to essential being, uniting it with the positive which is created within existence, thus producing the ultimately new, the 'New Being', not fragmentarily as in temporal life, but wholly as a contribution to the Kingdom of God in its fulfilment."¹

The movement of the life process is called growth. Life is an energy which drives forward. Whether this process is "blind", and based on "chance", or whether it is "directed", by a Higher Power, is a continuing debate. Life does demonstrate, however, a remarkable degree of interdependence, interrelatedness, and harmony. The Christian maintains that it also shows a sufficient degree of purpose to allow the hypothesis that it is driven by an Intelligent Power. The interdependence of life

¹Paul Tillich, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 400-401.

shows that each new dimension of life is dependent on a set of conditions out of which it arose. This does not mean that the set of conditions was capable itself of producing the new dimension. It rather indicates that the "Creative Power" used that set of conditions to produce a new dimension. Thus, from our vantage point, it is possible to look back and see how at each stage of the development of life, life moves forward toward an end. It suggests that the Creator had an "end" in view when He created the beginning, and that each step along the way contained the possibility of going on to a new dimension, on the way to the end. The organic developed out of the inorganic, animal life out of the organic, and finally man.

In man, one new dimension not contained in previous levels is "spirit". The Spirit of God creates spirit in man. The author of Genesis puts it thus, "And the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters ...then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'" ² Robinson adds "Spirit (pneuma) is not a department of human psychology: it is a relation of God towards man." ³ The Spirit of God is the power or energy of God in life driving toward the making of man. This creates a whole new dimension. This Spirit creates spirit in man which possesses a mental capacity called "mind". Thus life in man takes on the dimension of the "mental". Man achieves consciousness of himself and his surroundings. He becomes aware, is able to reason, to will, and knows that he has freedom and responsibility. Thus man achieves a "centre" within himself,

²Genesis 1:2,26 (RSV).

³J. A. T. Robinson, op. cit., p. 96.

which is what Tillich calls a "union of power and meaning", out of which he knows, thinks, acts and reacts. He knows that others are also similar centres, and that all centres, or persons, are related to each other, and this is life at the human level. But central to this thesis is the problem of what happens after death. It is certain that the bodily or physical functions cease at death. Does this mean that the mental or spiritual functions also cease?

It would seem that a case could be made for the belief that, theoretically, life is possible after death. On pages 20f. above, we saw that life develops into mind. Temple seems to believe that the mind, being a creation of Mind, can achieve some independence of the physical sphere.⁴ He explains that the mind has the ability to transcend the process out of which it arose and to exert considerable control over the body. Thus mind, by its increased control over the body achieves more and more independence of the body as part of the natural order. Here is indicated the possibility of life for the mind independent of the physiological functions of the organism. Man is thus, in theory, capable of immortality.

Tillich uses such terms as "self-transcendence", and "New Being", to indicate the possibility of life after death.⁵ He suggests by this that the divine Spirit enters into the human spirit and drives it toward fulfilment. Thus God creates the "New Being". Tillich sees man as "potential", which has the ability to become actual. But man becomes actual through the experiences of his existence, "finitude", "estrangement", "conflict"

⁴William Temple, op. cit., pp. 467f.

⁵Paul Tillich, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 112, 138.

and so on. In this existential situation man's life becomes ambiguous, a conflict between the "positive" and the "negative" elements. But God drives man out of this ambiguous situation into "New Life" above the gap between essence and existence.

B. The evidence of the Christian Church

The yearning for a faith in Eternal Life is contained in the Old Testament. This yearning was based on a belief in the goodness of God. Since God had proven that his faithfulness endures for ever, the hope was engendered that he would not leave his loved ones in Sheol; but that they would rise up and see Him, that life which had begun with so much hope would not end in the grave.

But what was in the Old Testament a hope became a reality in the New, for the Resurrection of Jesus convinced his followers that the bridge of death had been crossed, and that there is life on the other side. The Christian faith is based on the conviction that death is followed by resurrection. This is the process whereby man is brought into Eternal Life. The teaching of the early Church was based on the tradition of Christ's resurrection, and contained definite accounts of the appearances of the Lord after his resurrection. The preaching of the early Church proclaimed the resurrection of Christ as the basis of the gospel. St Luke records what purports to be speeches of St Peter in Acts 2: 14; 36; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43, in all of which the resurrection of Jesus is the central point.

Alan Richardson reminds us of two of the earliest examples of

the Church's teaching on the Resurrection of Christ:⁶

(1) The first is found in I Cor. 15:1-9. Here Paul reminds the brethren in Corinth of the terms in which he preached the gospel to them. He reminds them that it was not his gospel but was based on a common tradition which he had also received (v3). It tells how Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, then to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all to Paul himself.

(2) The second example of the Church's tradition is found in Mark 16:9-15. This passage records an appearance of the Risen Lord to Mary Magdalene who told it to the disciples but they believed not; an appearance in another form to two disciples as they walked into the country, but neither were they believed (contrast Lk 24:34); and afterwards he appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, yet he commanded them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

The early Church understood the body of the Risen Christ to be a "glorified" body. It is clearly set free from the limitations of mortal bodies. St Paul says it has "put on incorruption and...immortality" (I Cor. 15:55f KJ). It enters a room where all doors are closed (John 20:19), yet it is a real body which can be seen and has real wounds which can be touched (Lk 24:29, John 20:27).

⁶Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1958), pp. 193-197.

The early church accepts these mysteries without attempt at explanation. These are not natural events which can be explained scientifically. "Scientific explanations", says Richardson, "cannot be given for events in the eschatological order."⁷

But perhaps the most cogent evidence of the Risen Christ was the fact of the early Church. The Church was founded on the belief that something significant and unique had happened in their midst. A Man had lived, preached, healed, suffered, died, and had risen from the dead. They believed that they experienced his Presence in their midst. In his Name they gathered for worship and the breaking of bread. In his Name they preached and healed the sick. In his Name they endured persecutions. In his Power the fellowship of the Church grew and spread. In fact, jealous Jews described the effect of the Church as having "turned the world upside down".⁸

It is significant, furthermore, that that fellowship still exists in the Church today, especially when the Church is undergoing such a period of change and self-examination as in these days. The Living Christ is at work in the world today.

The argument of St Paul in I Cor 15 is not only that Christ was raised from the dead, but that his Resurrection is the assurance of the resurrection of all men. Christ is "The first fruits of the harvest of the dead. As in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be brought to life."⁹

⁷Ibid., p. 197.

⁸Acts 17:6 (King James Version)

⁹I Cor 15:20-22 (NEB).

St Paul uses the same argument in Romans: "The whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth. Not only so, but even we, to whom the Spirit is given as firstfruits of the harvest to come, are groaning inwardly while we wait for God to make us his sons and set our whole body free."¹⁰

If one adopts the thesis that there is life after death, then death can have two meanings.

(1) If one goes on the evidence of the early Church that the dead are raised to life, then death is a transition from one mode of life to another. The statement of St Paul, "For sin pays a wage, and the wage is death, but God gives freely, and his gift is eternal life, in union with Christ Jesus our Lord"¹¹ has led to considerable controversy. It has caused the debate as to whether death is part of the plan of God, or whether, as St Paul seems to suggest, it is a result of sin. On the one hand physical death is attributed to sin. This could be understood from St Paul's words, "the wage of sin is death". This idea could also be attributed to a misreading of the Genesis story. Here it seems to be suggested that God intended man to live eternally with him in a Paradise, but man was driven from the Paradise because of his sin, and that death is a result.

(2) But on the other hand, death can be seen as a very natural event in the natural order. The human body ages and wears out. Physical death can be seen as a normal experience for man that he may enter into a higher order of life. To accept this thesis is in no way contrary to the Christian

¹⁰Romans 8:22,23 (NEB).

¹¹Romans 6:23 (NEB).

faith. It is still true that the wage of sin is death, but spiritual death and not physical death. According to the Christian faith man is raised from the dead. It is by overcoming death that he enters into Eternal Life. There is a final death, but it is a spiritual death. This is not a natural experience. If man accepts the life God offers him he escapes the final death and has Eternal Life. It is even possible that all men escape the final death.

C. Final Issues Not Determined at Physical Death

It has been assumed by many Protestant Christians that at death man goes either to heaven or hell. But is it in fact reasonable to suppose that one's final destiny should be decided at death? May not death be but a point on a long journey from birth to fulfilment? Does the teaching of the New Testament suggest that physical death determines the final issue? If we take seriously the words of I John 3:2 "We shall be like Him", to go to heaven directly at death is impossible because we know that at death we are not like Him. If we are to become like Him obviously it will require further opportunity for change. Similarly it is declared in Rev 21:27 "but nothing unclean shall enter" the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. We know that at death we are unclean in our motives as well as in other ways. Thus we are not fit for the Kingdom of Heaven, and much change will need to take place before we can enter. If heaven is a destiny, a fulfilment, we know that we are, none of us, no matter how long we have lived in this world, fulfilled at the time of death.

The idea, moreover, that a man may be destined to hell at the time of physical death, at however early an age this may occur, is not

easy to reconcile with the Christian concept of God as essentially a God of love. If life is a process, and is given to man to fulfil, then the responsibility of man is to accept the destiny given to him by God or to reject it. If he accepts it he sets out on the way to Eternal Life. But if he rejects it, he rejects the Spirit and the Power of God to give him Eternal Life, and instead he chooses the negative power of evil. If the individual resolutely chooses the negative, or evil forces, they are capable of destroying him in the natural course of events. As disease, unless conquered, slowly but surely destroys the earthly body, so evil destroys the inner life. But can it be supposed that this process is completed at the time of physical death? Can the issue be finally decided then--even though it may be at the age of twenty years? Man learns slowly. Today he experiences a truth which is new to him, and he wonders why he hasn't learned it before. One cannot say why he gains new insights at certain times and so slowly. This would seem to be the way man learns. If we today grasp a new insight into what God is, and the possibility that we may be 'like Him', we nevertheless know that this cannot occur overnight. It will require time. We change slowly. Our moral and spiritual growth is slow, and we may have confidence that God provides for this.

Again, we should ask whether anyone, however depraved, deserves what has been conceived as hell at the moment of death. Perhaps our very concept of hell, which may be rooted in our desire to see evil punished, reveals our lack of understanding of love and the will of God. Baillie has put this very clearly, "The later doctrine of hell...is made suspect by much of its history. Vindictiveness and hardheartedness have undoubtedly had some part in the fashioning of it. Had the doctrine been worked out,

from the beginning and steadily, in terms of what its proponents felt themselves to deserve, it would have to be taken very seriously; but in fact it bears the taint of having been worked out in terms of what its proponents felt to be the deserts of their neighbours, or rather of their enemies. Many, it is true, have feared hell for themselves, but many also have wished it for others. And except when we begin to reflect on our own merits, our human thinking is never so prone to err as when we begin to reflect on our neighbour's defects."¹²

The lot of man varies extensively in this world. Some have good teachers, good examples, and good opportunities to learn, while others do not have such advantages. Some live and die in hopelessness, bitterness and despair. Some are raised on atheism. Social, national and religious or anti-religious pressures tend to mould the thinking and behaviour of many.

God is known to us by faith and not by scientific proof. Many are not able to believe in God, perhaps because the witness they have received of Him has been confused. Or perhaps they have been made bitter by some experience. Justice would seem to require that further opportunity be given to man to make a decision unhampered by the unjust conditions and adverse environment which so often seem to be his lot in this life. If, having the same opportunity to understand clearly the issues of good and evil, he still rejects God and Eternal Life it will at least be with full knowledge of the alternative. The contention of this section is that a life span, which may be very brief, terminated by physical death is not sufficient for a final choice to be made and a man's lot determined.

¹²John Baillie, And the Life Everlasting (The Epworth Press, 1961), p. 185.

D. Eternal Life Through Resurrection

The process by which life survives death is called Resurrection. There are, however, many difficulties in connection with this concept:

(1) Firstly, there seems to be a conflict between the belief that man is raised immediately after death, and that all are raised at once at the General Resurrection. Shaw believes that St Paul represents both views in his writings. When Paul writes, "In this present body we do indeed groan; we yearn to have our heavenly habitation put on over this one--in the hope that, being thus clothed, we shall not find ourselves naked",¹³ Shaw takes St Paul to mean here "that there is for the Christian no interval during which the soul or spirit exists in an intermediate, disembodied condition, waiting for a general resurrection day. This is the traditional Protestant orthodox, theological representation, which we have seen expressed e.g., in the Westminster formulations, and in particular in the Westminster Shorter Catechism..."¹⁴

The other point of view is expressed in I Thessalonians: "We who are left alive until the Lord comes shall not forestall those who have died; because at the word of command, at the sound of the archangel's voice and God's trumpet-call, the Lord himself will descend from heaven; first the Christian dead will arise, then we who are left alive shall join them, caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air."¹⁵ This passage seems to suggest that the dead shall remain in their graves until the "end", or the general resurrection when all shall be raised.

¹³₂ Cor 5:2,3 (NEB).

¹⁴J. M. Shaw, op. cit., p. 326.

¹⁵I Thess 4:15-17.

Baillie says that "The orthodox teaching, both Roman and Protestant, is that until the last day the souls both of the blessed and of the damned remain disembodied, though already dwelling in what is to be their final place of abode; but that on the last Day there will be a General Resurrection whereby the souls of both are reunited to their old bodies."¹⁶ "But", says Baillie, "the true significance of the teaching comes out only when we are told that the spirits of the blessed, though now enjoying heavenly bliss substantially, will not possess it in the fulness of its accidental nature until after the Last Day; for the deepest reason of this delay is not that until then they will be disembodied, but that until then their society will be incomplete."¹⁷

I Thess suggests that the Resurrection will take place at the Last Day when all will be raised at once, while 2 Cor suggests that the resurrection, that is, when man assumes his spiritual resurrection body, takes place for each individual at death. There is no interval between death and entrance into the New Life. Shaw accounts for this seeming contradiction by saying that "There would seem to have been a development in Paul's thinking on this matter which is reflected in his letters."¹⁸

But Brunner suggests that the problem arises because of our misunderstanding of the terms, Resurrection, Parousia, Second Coming, Last Trump, etc. We tend to see them as separate events, happening at different times. Brunner sees "departing", the transition from earthly life, and the coming of the Lord, as one experience, which is analogous to the final

¹⁶Baillie, op. cit., p. 192.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸J. M. Shaw, op. cit., p. 327.

experience, the entrance of man into the Kingdom of God and the coming of the Lord of glory.

(2) The second problem is this. Shaw believes that there is no scriptural evidence for a resurrection except for believers. He believes that the teaching of the New Testament is that resurrection is only for those who are in Christ and moved by his Spirit.

And yet he ends his work with the words, "While thus with our reason inclining to reject the doctrine of Universalism and support the other alternative referred to, we yet with our feeling and sentiment cannot help embracing, as at least a devout wish or desire, the hope thus expressed by Tennyson:

'That not one life shall be destroyed
or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God shall make the pile complete.'"¹⁹

Yet Shaw underestimates the amount of scriptural evidence for a resurrection of all men. St Paul declares, "For I believe all that is written in the Law and the prophets, and in reliance on God I hold the hope, which my accusers too accept, that there is to be a resurrection of good and wicked alike."²⁰ Paul writes, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be brought to life."²¹ Even if, as Shaw says, the New Testament recognizes only a resurrection of the righteous, yet it must also be recognized that the general tenor of Jesus' life and teaching witnesses to his sense of mission to save all men. This sense of mission is rooted in

¹⁹Ibid., p. 362.

²⁰Acts 24:15 (NEB).

²¹I Cor 15:22 (NEB).

his awareness of what God is. It does not seem consistent with the love of God, as taught by Jesus Christ, to say that God has called us into existence with a certain relationship with Him, and then that He will deny anyone the resurrection which will make that relationship permanent.

Robinson is more definite than Shaw. He believes that all will be raised.²² Man's destiny is Eternal Life. The relationship with God is indestructible. Resurrection, he says, depends on God's "unconditional love".

We agree that at death all will be raised to continued life, to accept responsibility for themselves, and to continue to choose between life and death. Life is thus conceived of as continuous growth. At death man is not admitted to heaven by a sudden transformation by which he is made perfect, nor is he assigned to hell because he is imperfect. But after death and resurrection he is in a new realm, beyond the earthly. He remains himself, as he was before death, except for his body of flesh and blood. His continuing life is not to be regarded as disembodied existence, or a period of "Sleep" in the "grave", for he at once begins to receive a spiritual body. The process by which man, having shed the earthly body in the experience of death, takes on a new "spiritual" body, as life begins in a new realm, is in the Bible called Resurrection.

E. Resurrection of the Body

St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15, gives us assurance that after death man will not live a disembodied life, but will be given a new spiritual body. To explain this he uses the analogy

²²J. A. T. Robinson, op. cit., p. 93.

of a seed sown in the ground. As God gives the seed which dies a new body, so God will give man in death a new body "of his choice". St Paul is saying here that one could not tell from looking at the seed that is sown what fashion of body would come from it, except that it would be of the same kind (wheat from wheat). So he is saying, by way of analogy, that the body the believer will receive at the resurrection will be a richer and fuller body than the one sown. It will be a body fitted to give expression to a new dimension of life.

Robinson gives the term "body" a much wider and more inclusive meaning than is found elsewhere. He considers that the concept "body" is central to the whole theology of St Paul. He writes, "It is from the body of sin and death that we are redeemed; it is through the body of Christ that we are saved; it is into his body the Church that we are incorporated; it is by his body in the Eucharist that his fellowship is built up; it is in our bodies that the life of the Spirit has to be manifest; it is to a transforming of our body to the likeness of his glorious body that we are destined..."²³ St Paul, he says, except in one instance (I Thess 5:23) employs the Hebraic distinction of soul and flesh, in preference to the Greek division into body, soul, and spirit. "For the Hebrew, 'spirit' is not a part of man's make-up as such. It is the Spirit of God which comes upon, enters, and dwells in the human personality, bestowing on man the possibility of a supernatural life of which as part of nature he is incapable."²⁴ Spirit is supremely a relationship of God towards man. The body is the 'soma', "the whole psycho-physical unity of man as created

²³Ibid., p. 95.

²⁴Ibid.

for God."²⁵ A man's individuality lies in the fact that he is a spiritual being, a person, that he is a 'centre'. Man, in his earthly body is part of an interdependent universe. All men are dependent on the same substances, for example, air, sun, and soil. Thus since man in his earthly body is in solidarity with all levels of life and being, it must be said that in his resurrection body also he retains this solidarity.

If the term 'body' is to be understood as the whole personality of man, then perhaps the spiritual body will more closely resemble man's personality. If God is Spirit, then man, to approach likeness to Him, must exchange the physical for the spiritual body. And yet the spiritual must be in continuity with and express the man who is transformed. It must be "me" in my identity. It must express what I essentially am. It perhaps then corresponds to what we now call personality. This is what guarantees continuation between this life and life after death. As a physical body is recognized by its physical features, so the spiritual body is recognized by personality characteristics such as love, hate, charity, justice, etc. This preserves the certainty of recognition. We shall recognize each other by the spiritual body, the transformed man. And it guarantees that we as individuals can stand before God and each other. If we are to stand in the Presence of God, it must be as an "I" before a "Thou". I have to be myself before God. This contrasts with the Hindu concept of absorption into the Absolute.

It becomes more and more clear to us that we are to think in terms of continuity rather than in terms of radical breaks and clear

²⁵Ibid., p. 96.

divisions. Life is one continuous process of growth from beginning to end. From life in God, to life in the universe, to life in man here on earth, to Eternal Life is one process. It is not that we have one life here on earth and another hereafter. It is not exactly that we have one body on earth and another in the life after death. "For we know", says St. Paul, "that if the earthly frame that houses us today should be demolished, we possess a building which God has provided--a house not made of human hands, eternal, and in heaven."²⁶ St Paul's use of the present tense, "we possess", is perhaps significant. God is now driving man toward essentialization. What I am now as a person is some indication of what my spiritual body will be. At the Resurrection our spiritual bodies will be revealed to us. It will be made plain to us what we are. This seems to be the New Testament doctrine. Eternal Life is not something we have to wait to receive; by faith we have it already, potentially, in this life. Eternal Life is a new dimension of the life we know here. It is given to all, but can only be received and fully understood in the End. It is not something new added to us but rather a revelation of what we are and what we can become. But it does not necessarily follow that the body that we shall receive will be the final form of the spiritual body, just as the body we received at birth was not the final form of the earthly body. If there is opportunity for further growth after death, then we shall continue to be transformed until life is fulfilled.

²⁶₂ Cor 5:1 (NEB).

F. Judgment

St Paul says, "As in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be brought to life."²⁷ Robinson says, "All men will be raised; the relationship with God which makes humanity human is indestructible. But for that very reason all will be raised to a life-in-relationship, to a life from which no escape from God is possible. And for some that will be heaven, and for some that will be hell."²⁸ If St Paul is right, and "All will be brought to life", which Robinson expresses in the words, "No escape from God is possible", then the vital factor is man's acceptance or rejection of Eternal Life. This is the vital factor in this life. Man is either accepting or rejecting Eternal Life. It is the contention of this thesis that this same process goes on after death. On the other side of death man is still involved in the necessity to deal with his convictions, whether he can accept the life God offers to him or not.

Man today is in a period of transition between older ideas of heaven and hell which he can no longer accept and some more satisfying answer. As Geoffrey Ainger says, "There are not many who lose sleep today through living in fear of a Judgment Day."²⁹ It was possible for men in the past to be content with the assurance that they were going to heaven, and they were not unduly disturbed that others were going to hell. But this is no longer true. Man is searching today for a more

²⁷I Cor 15:22 (NEB).

²⁸J. A. T. Robinson, op. cit., p. 93.

²⁹Geoffrey Ainger, Jesus Our Contemporary (1967), p. 13.

just, humanitarian view of life now and hereafter.

Temple, writing between 1932 and 1934 said, "There has never been a period in which there was so little positive belief in this (Eternal Life) or indeed so widespread an absence of concern for the whole subject."³⁰ He believed that at that time they were at the end of a period of reaction from the Middle Ages. When the immortality of every human soul was assumed this would mean, for the lost, Hell; for the pardonable, Purgatory; for the saved, Paradise; for the unsaved children, Limbo.

But at the Reformation, when it was realized that the Scripture supplied no basis for the doctrines of Purgatory and Limbo, those doctrines were eliminated and the Protestant world was left only with Heaven and Hell. Only by faith in Christ could a man be saved. But if he had faith he could rest assured that he was saved and would enter Heaven at death. It was fear of Hell that drove men to seek salvation by faith in Christ. Thus, he says, the popular concept of God became purely vindictive.

But steadily the conviction grew that surely God could not cast any of his children to unending torment in Hell. Thus as man's understanding of God's loving nature grew, so his belief in Hell lessened. And since Protestant theology never did believe in Purgatory, man was left with the idea that all men when they die will go to Heaven.

But can man face the fact that perhaps Paradise or Heaven is not where he is immediately after death, but is still a goal toward which he strives? In any ultimate sense Paradise or Heaven can only happen when men have passed through judgment, when they have been changed and are

³⁰W. Temple, op. cit., p. 453.

become the kind of persons who make Paradise or Heaven possible. The Christian conviction is that God has created man that he might know the joy, and eventually the fullness, even the ecstasy of life. John even goes so far as to say, "Here and now, dear friends, we are God's children; what we shall be has not yet been disclosed, but we know that when it is disclosed we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."³¹ The word to be stressed here is "we". We have tended too much to think of salvation in individual terms as though I could be saved, individually, out of mankind. But the life process, to be complete, will involve fulfilment for all men, and thus require more opportunity than this earthly life affords.

We should note once more the significance of the concept "body", (dealt with above, pp. 66f). If our earthly body belongs to that which is mortal, and all things mortal comprise a corporate solidarity which will decay, so our new body belongs to another solidarity, the Body of Christ, which is immortal. The fact of relationship, in which all men are the children of God, is not always adequately grasped by Christian people. Man's first concern has tended to be for himself, and not for mankind. But if God's concern is that all be saved, how can He save one and not another? Certainly man has failed to follow the example of Jesus whose concern was for others and not for self. Eternal Life is the fulfilment of life, the actualization of man's potential, or essentialization; the making actual of the essence of man. Attempts to understand Eternal Life are essentially attempts to understand God, and to be 'like him'.

³¹I John 3:2 (NEB).

The fullest and clearest revelation of God has been given in Jesus. In Him we see in word and deed the will of God that all men be saved. Concern for others rather than for oneself is implicit in the words of Jesus, "Whoever cares for his own safety is lost; but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self."³² Jesus was able to see possibilities in a man whom others would condemn and kill.

The emphasis on concern for the well-being of others, and the suggestion that there can be no salvation for one without the salvation of all, can be illustrated elsewhere in the Bible. This is expressed in a family situation when Joseph wanted to keep Benjamin in Egypt. Judah pleaded with his brother Joseph on behalf of Benjamin in the words, "For how can I go back to my father if the lad is not with me?"³³

This concept could be broadened and made all inclusive. How can I go to my Father in Heaven and my brother, all my brethren, be not with me? The same concern, but on a larger scale is expressed in the letter to the Hebrews, "These also (the heroes of faith), one and all are commemorated for their faith; and yet they did not enter upon the promised inheritance, because, with us in mind, God has made a better plan, that only in company with us should they reach their perfection."³⁴ All must reach perfection together. St Paul is willing to go one step further. "For I could even pray to be outcast from Christ myself for the sake of my brothers, my natural kinsfolk."³⁵ St Paul says here that if he felt that

³²Matt 16:25 (NEB).

³³Genesis 44:34 (RSV).

³⁴Hebrews 11:39,40 (NEB).

³⁵Romans 9:3 (NEB).

he could inherit eternal life, but another could not, he would be willing to give up his right on behalf of others. And this is surely the essence of love.

If we are to follow these suggestions that Eternal Life is not conceivable in individual isolation, a fresh look at the concept of judgment is indicated. Mt 25:31-46 seems, at first, to suggest that God judges some men fit for heaven and some fit for hell; that He rewards the good with heaven and punishes the wicked in hell. But what the parable, on deeper reflection, shows, is that both the "sheep" and the "goats" now realize what they did not realize before, i.e., a re-evaluation of oneself. May not judgment, then, be thought of as a heightened ability to evaluate the real issues of life? Judgment may be considered to mean the ability to understand that there are what Tillich calls "positive" and "negative" forces in life. The essence of life consists of the positive forces, which are given by God as belonging to the nature of man. They are the forces that fulfill, or magnify life. The negative are the forces that are detrimental to life; the destructive forces which diminish, and fight against life. As disease fights against the health of the body, so negative forces fight against the fullness of life. The nature of life is that it responds to these forces. One might say then, as Tillich suggests, that Eternal Life is the overcoming of the negative forces by the positive. Judgment, then, is not something that takes place only after death. Judgment is always taking place. Every choice a man makes, whether consciously or unconsciously, is a judgment that he makes on his own life. The nature of life is given by God. Man can do nothing to alter that. The "end", or "fulfilment" of life is also given by God. Judgment, then, implies the ability to understand the nature of life as God offers it to us, and **accept**

or reject it. Man has the obligation to overcome that in him which denies him the fulfilment which is his destiny. Every moment of man's life now and hereafter is part of the judgment. The criterion whereby we shall be judged will be the life, teaching, and death of Jesus Christ. He is the full revelation of God. In him we see what is the will and purpose of God. The Christian should be in no doubt as to how he is to be judged. For in Jesus the judgment has already been shown to us. But what we have seen is a revelation which is known only to faith. "Now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face."³⁶ Here in this life it is possible to disbelieve. It is possible to be an atheist. That God is just and loving is impossible to prove to one's fellowmen here. That love will triumph over hate, and righteousness over iniquity is not clear to all men. Men argue over whether God exists, or whether man is self-existent. Belief in God and the triumph of His purpose is something that man holds by faith and not by sight. But in the Age to Come, the Parousia, when Christ is present and fully revealed, all men shall see Him "face to face". The revelation of God at the Parousia will not be by faith but by sight.

This event, the Parousia, is sometimes referred to as the Second Coming, or the Return of Christ. But this would be to suggest that between his Ascension and the Parousia, he has been absent. He is not absent. Matthew records that Jesus gave the disciples a promise, "And be assured, I am with you always, to the end of time."³⁷ John also records

³⁶I Cor 13:12 (NEB).

³⁷Mt 28:20 (NEB).

Jesus as saying, "I will not leave you bereft, I am coming back to you."³⁸ The early Church was certain that the Risen Christ was alive and at work in their lives. Thus it is not that Christ is away and will return, but rather that he is known to many only by faith, but will be known to all in a full revelation. Then it will be impossible to differ in opinion, or to argue, or to misunderstand. All that was blurred will become plain. Christ will stand before man fully revealed.

G. The Life of the Age to Come

The word "life", although frequently used by Biblical writers of the life of creatures on earth, is also used with a wider connotation of the life of the Age to Come. The Bible opens with the story of Creation, and speaks of man being placed originally in the "Garden of Eden", in the midst of which is "the tree of Life".³⁹ Here the writer is attempting to depict, by use of myth, God's intention that man should live in a paradise in fellowship with Him. But man rebelled against God and was driven from the garden. Paradise became impossible. "He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."⁴⁰ Thus return to the paradise was rendered impossible.

The New Testament speaks of Jesus, who himself, was in perfect fellowship with God, and who came that men might have life, died a sacrificial death and rose that men might be saved for eternal life. In the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, John sees "a tree of life, which yields

³⁸John 14:18 (NEB).

³⁹Genesis 2:9 (RSV).

⁴⁰Genesis 3:24 (RSV).

twelve crops of fruit, one for each month of the year. The leaves of the trees serve for the healing of the nations, and every accursed thing shall disappear."⁴¹ Thus the word "life", runs through the Bible from Creation, through historical existence, through death and resurrection, into the life of the Age to Come. The very last chapter of the last book in the New Testament returns to the theme of "the tree of life". But now we hear not simply of life, but of Eternal Life, or of the life of the Age to Come. But the Biblical theme is that the same life, originally given by God, comes to the fulfilment intended by its giver.

Mark records Jesus as using this term in response to Peter's question about the reward for giving up all to follow him. "I tell you this: there is no one who has given up home, brothers or sisters, mother, father or children, or land, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will not receive in this age a hundred times as much--houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and land--and persecutions besides; and in the age to come eternal life."⁴² The letter to the Hebrews also speaks of the time, "When they (men) have experienced the goodness of God's word and the spiritual energies of the age to come."⁴³

In the New Testament Eternal Life means the life of the World to come. It is synonymous with the Kingdom of God. And yet it is repeatedly pointed out that the Kingdom of God is already here, revealed in the life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Robinson says, "The Parousia cannot be pictured simply as an event in the future:

⁴¹Rev 22:2 (NEB).

⁴²Mark 10:29,30 (NEB).

⁴³Hebrews 6:5 (NEB).

it takes, as it were, a cross-section of the universe at every age."⁴⁴
 John records Jesus as saying, "In very truth, anyone who gives heed to what I say and puts trust in him who sent me has hold of eternal life, and does not come up for judgment, but has already passed from death to life."⁴⁵

Thus we see a 'whole' view of life reinforced. What one does from birth to Parousia is all of one piece and all important. Eternal Life is in the making at any and all points of a person's life. It is not that one life ends at death and another begins. It is the same life in another dimension. When a man becomes aware of his destiny he has a basis by which he can judge the meaning and purpose of the daily events of his life here and now.

H. Man's Freedom

Eternal Life must be freely chosen. It is our understanding that God wills that all men be saved and that they have Eternal Life. And yet Jesus warned that many will choose death. An awareness of the importance and reality of freedom is necessary to understand the seriousness of choice. If one is assured of salvation and heaven when he dies, why bother any further about anything? If man feels that he is destined to go to heaven or hell, what happens to man's freedom? Tillich suggests that "both have to be denied--the threat of eternal death and the security of the return."⁴⁶

⁴⁴J. A. T. Robinson, op. cit., p. 80.

⁴⁵John 5:24 (NEB).

⁴⁶Tillich, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 416.

Freedom must be understood in the total framework of man's life. God has given to man his nature. In man's world some things work for good and others for evil. These things are given by God and man has no freedom but to accept them. Man is not free to make negative forces into positive ones or vice versa. Man is not free to neutralize the consequences of wrong doing. Man's freedom is limited by the nature of life and its consummation. It would seem then that the only choice left to man is to accept or to reject the life offered to him. But Robinson seems to deny man even that freedom. He says, "All will be raised to a life-in-relationship, to a life from which no escape from God is possible."⁴⁷ But if man is bound in a relationship to God from which no escape is possible, what meaning can be given to the concept of freedom? Perhaps its real meaning is that man is free to reject Eternal Life, but that he is not free to change the consequences of that choice. Man is neither able to save nor to destroy his own life. This is suggested by Tillich's belief that "Everything as created is rooted in the eternal ground of being. In this respect non-being cannot prevail against it."⁴⁸ If man were able to destroy himself he would obviously destroy the freedom by which he makes the choice. Freedom only remains so long as man chooses the destiny offered to him by God. To quote Tillich again, "Freedom and destiny in every individual are united in such a way that it is as impossible to separate one from the other as it is, consequently, to separate the eternal destiny of any individual from the destiny of the whole race and of being in all its manifestations."⁴⁹ Tillich explains why it is difficult to teach

⁴⁷Robinson, op. cit., p. 93.

⁴⁸Tillich, op. cit., p. 415.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 408-9.

that all may be saved. He writes, "The threat of 'death away from eternity' belongs to the ethical-educational type of thinking which, quite naturally, is the basic attitude of the churches. They are (in the case of Origen and of Unitarian Universalism) afraid that the teaching of apokatastasis would destroy the seriousness of religious and ethical decisions. This fear is not unfounded, for it has sometimes been recommended that one preach the threat of eternal death (or even of everlasting punishment) but hold, at the same time, to the truth of the doctrine of apokatastasis."⁵⁰

Perhaps one could say that so long as man rejects Eternal Life, he lives "toward death". Even if the final destruction of life is impossible, the state in which man lives is "unto death". Similarly, if a man chooses Eternal Life, this alone does not give him the certainty of it. He opens himself to allow God to create that Eternal Life with and in him. But in the meantime he lives "unto" Eternal Life, and in the humble hope that at last it will become a reality.

The idea of freedom must take into account the belief that in this life God "veils" himself, in order that we may be free to choose. If it were obvious that man had no choice but to believe, then his choice would lose its meaning. We may perhaps at least say that the effect of God's veiling of himself gives us the opportunity to believe or not to believe. The man of faith does not so much need sight as understanding, in which he will rejoice in being able to know as he is known, to understand as he is understood.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 416.

I. Life Beyond Time

If Eternal Life is, as we have been saying, a consummation for all, and not for individuals apart from the whole, then we are forced to consider the question of time. What happens between the time of one's death and resurrection, and consummation? If we could think of Eternal Life as something that every believer inherits immediately at death, then this question of time would not arise. Or if we believed that the dead remain in their graves until the General Resurrection, when all the dead are raised together to join those still living at that time, then in that case also the question of time would not arise. But since we have adopted the position that life goes on after the Resurrection, and in a process analogous with the one in which we are now involved, then, if consummation is for all at once, the question of time becomes important. If we are able to assume that, in continuing freedom, man can be as intransigent after death as he is here, we must conceive of a condition of "waiting" for the intransigent to accept the love of God. The question arises, how long? Are those who appear ready for heaven required to wait for those who appear determined not to enter? Is it fair to delay the "saint" while waiting for the "sinner"? Here consideration of time is important. Perhaps the post-resurrection condition of life will be one in which words like "waiting" and "lapse" have no meaning.

Robinson enables us better to understand the problem involved here. He draws the distinction between time as "chronos", and time as "kairos". "Kairos is time considered in relation to personal action, determined by reference to ends to be achieved in it. Chronos is time abstracted from such a relation, time, as it were, that ticks on

objectively and impersonally, whether anything is happening or not. It is time measured by the chronometer not by purpose, momentary rather than momentous."⁵¹ This would seem to indicate that in the interval between death and consummation man, being more concerned with fulfilment of God's purposes, would not be as conscious of time in terms of years as he would in this world.

Tillich uses other terms to make a similar observation.⁵² Time, he explains, is the arena of the finite in creation, and eternity is the "inner aim, the telos" of the created finite, permanently drawing the finite into itself.

Baillie has yet another explanation.⁵³ It is the Christian hope, he says, that after this earthly existence, another existence awaits us in which we shall not be aware of the burden of temporality, but experience the uninterrupted enjoyment of the Eternal Presence. He quotes St Augustine on the same point, "'Mayhap when 'we shall be like him' our thoughts...will no more go from one thing to another, but in a single perception we shall see all we know at one and the same time.'"⁵⁴ History is the succession of events which begins and ends whether God's purpose is achieved or not. That the Consummation is a matter of kairos rather than of chronos is evidenced by the saying of Jesus as recorded by St Matthew about when the end would come, "But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor even the Son; only the Father."⁵⁵ The time of the

⁵¹J. A. T. Robinson, op. cit., p. 57.

⁵²Paul Tillich, op. cit., p. 399.

⁵³John Baillie, op. cit., p. 172.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 173, quoting Augustine, De Trinitate, xv. 26.

⁵⁵Mt 24:36 (NEB).

Consummation cannot be computed or prophesied in terms of years. It is when God's purpose is fulfilled. No one but God knows when that will be. Tillich attempts to illustrate the relation of historical time to eternity with the use of a diagram which he describes as follows: "I would suggest a curve which comes from above, moves down as well as ahead, reaches the deepest point which is the nunc existientiale, the "existential now", and returns in an analogous way to that from which it came, going ahead as well as going up."⁵⁶

Our contention then, is that life will continue beyond time after death and resurrection. This is not a reincarnation in which a life begins over again. Nor is it a purgatory in the Roman Catholic sense in which the emphasis is on punishment to pay for our sins, or even to purify us through suffering. Rather it is a continuation of life driving toward its fulfilment. We are aware that we must be "changed"; that we are to become more "like him". We still must choose between good and evil. All evil must be overcome. Life will be lived in a radically new dimension. Much of the doubt and uncertainty of this life will be removed. There we shall not see through a "glass darkly". "Faith", says Brunner, "is the reception of that which by its nature can have no ending, and it originates through the self-communication of the God who is above time, of Him who is Himself immutable."⁵⁷ In this life many can discuss Jesus as a mythological figure, as unhistorical, but in the End He will be seen as He is. There He will become a fact of experience, Someone we

⁵⁶Tillich, op. cit., p. 420.

⁵⁷Emil Brunner, op. cit., p. 379.

must face and about whom we must choose. Here we may, deep down, believe in the higher values, but for practical, immediate purposes and gain choose the lower values and thus confuse ourselves as to what are the real values. But in "the age to come", it will be clear what values are true, and what are false. We may question here whether God exists; we may question his nature, power and purpose. We may feel that He has failed to help us when we needed Him, or we may not be aware of anything that He has done for us, and be agnostic or atheistic. But there we shall see Him "face to face".

In the "Age to Come" we shall understand, feel and share so deeply in the purpose of God that we shall not be aware of the passage of time so much as the accomplishment of God's purpose. Our minds will be occupied mainly with two things: the concern that all men shall have Eternal Life and the ecstasy of that life.

To answer specifically then, the question raised (p. 79 above) as to what happens between the time of one's death and resurrection, and the Consummation, I would say that the process of life goes on in a way with which we are familiar in a different rhythm of time. We must be changed. Choices must be made and made freely. We continue to influence one another. I am suggesting that between this life and the Consummation, life goes on from where it left off in this life, in a process leading to fulfilment in the Consummation.

J. Consummation.

In this section of our study many ideas finally run together. The Consummation is the final bringing in of the Kingdom of God. It is

when God's purposes are completed. It is when we shall be "like Him". It is also when we shall be like unto his Son Jesus Christ who is the "image of the invisible God; his is the primacy over all created things."⁵⁸ He is the divine pattern of man. He is what man will be like when he has finally become man. Thus on the one hand the Consummation is when all that God wills is accomplished, but we must also say that it is when man has reached perfect humanity. "The humanization of man", says Brunner, "is the goal of God. This is what the Kingdom of God means. It is one with the Kingdom of perfect humanity. Man must attain in God the destiny for which he was created."⁵⁹

Tillich describes fulfilment as the conquest of the negative by the positive.⁶⁰ He sees the positive, that which is created in history, as not being lost, but as separated from the negative element. The negative element is eternally eliminated and the positive is elevated into eternity. He also uses such terms as "essence", "existence", and "essentialization". "Being, elevated into eternity, involves a return to what a thing essentially is; this is what Schelling has called 'essentialization'...That the new which has been actualized in time and space adds something to essential being, uniting it with the positive which is created within existence, thus producing the ultimately new, the 'New Being', not fragmentarily as in temporal life, but wholly as a contribution to the Kingdom of God in its fulfilment",⁶¹ is what Tillich

⁵⁸Col I:15 (NEB).

⁵⁹Emil Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 442.

⁶⁰Paul Tillich, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, pp. 400-401.

interprets essentialization to mean. On the personal side this involves becoming aware of the positive and negative influences at work in our lives; it involves coming to know as we are known. It means the uncovering of the unconscious drives. It means bringing to consciousness that of which we were previously unaware. It means, then, becoming transparent to ourselves and to others. It means becoming aware of the full depth of the meaning of life, the meaning of love, of concern for one's fellow men, for what happens to others eternally. It means to desire the "positive", that which belongs to our "essence", our nature as created by God.

This is both a personal and a social experience. The fulfilment of the New Being is the fulfilment of the New Body. This means not merely the body of the individual man, but as St Paul suggests in Ephesians, the Church: "He put everything in subjection beneath his feet, and appointed him as supreme head to the church, which is his body and as such holds within it the fullness of him who himself receives the entire fullness of God."⁶² This reaffirms the social aspect of Eternal Life. In the beginning man, Adam, is one with the earth, then by faith, being reconciled to God, and raised by Him, he achieves a new oneness, the oneness of the New Body which is the Church. The body of any one individual cannot be completed until the Body of the Church is completed, which means all mankind. As Tillich puts it, "Essentialization or elevation of the positive into Eternal Life (is) a matter of universal participation: in the essence of the least actualized individual, the essences of other individuals and, indirectly, of all beings are present. Whoever condemns anyone to

⁶²Ephesians 1:22 (NEB).

eternal death condemns himself, because his essence and that of the other cannot be absolutely separated. And he who is estranged from his own essential being and experiences the despair of total self-rejection must be told that his essence participates in the essences of all those who have reached a high degree of fulfilment and that through this participation his being is eternally affirmed."⁶³

One might wonder whether Tillich's idea of "essentialization" involves the merging of the "best" in each individual into some sort of composite whole (i.e., loss of individual personality). Yet Tillich does speak of the development of the individual in a way that would lead one to believe that the concern just expressed is unfounded. He says, "This idea of the essentialization of the individual in unity with all beings makes the concept of vicarious fulfilment understandable."⁶⁴ Again, "The whole personality participates in Eternal Life. If we use the term 'essentialization', we can say that man's psychological, spiritual, and social being is implied in his bodily being--and this in unity with the essences of everything else that has being."⁶⁵ The fact that he stresses the development of the individual in "unity" with others would lead one to believe that he does not contemplate loss of individual personality.

The life of the Age to Come, then, involves the coming together of all mankind. Those who have lived and died are now living in the "Age to Come". At death each one of us will join them. The contention of this

⁶³Tillich, op. cit., p. 409.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 413.

thesis is that life after death will continue as societal, with many of the same features that we know in this life, such as learning, growing, changing, feeling, and fellowship. Thus man enters into Eternal Life. It is suggested that man's experience of growth and change continue after death. If freedom and responsibility are essential to the nature of man as given by God, must we not assume that after death man is still free and responsible? It seems consistent with our knowledge of the life process, to assume that after death man will be required to complete what he began here.

Man in this life may know that ideally, he ought to love all men, yet that there are some he will not try to love; he may know that there are some he ought to forgive, yet will not do so; he may know that there are those he has wronged and with whom he ought to be reconciled, but will not; he may know that there are many evils and injustices in society which ought to be righted, but will not lift a finger to do so; he may assume that the "final solution" to these problems is death, and persuade himself that he can safely thrust them on one side. He may hope to evade responsibility in the expectation that death will close the book. But if the life process is to be completed, as the very nature of life as the gift of God requires, then man will continue after death to be involved in the process, and will participate in the resolving of these wrongs and in the fulfilment of life.

Life, as we know it here, is divided into "ages", or "generations". One person lives in one time and another in another time, but they never meet. We have read about Moses, Isaiah, Paul, Michelangelo and Beethoven, but have not had the opportunity of meeting them in person.

It is the argument of this thesis that after death, we shall join that more complete society, of all who have lived and died before us, and that those who live and die after us shall join them. We shall have opportunity of meeting all men in the Age to Come. Then we shall discover the changes that have taken place in them, in the nearer Presence of God. We shall be able to help each other to continue to fulfil ourselves. In this life we know that inter-personal relations are important, yet, we tend to choose the pleasant and steer away from the unpleasant. There we shall realize the possibility of perfecting our relations with all men. In this life we can ignore or disregard those we do not like, those we hate; if we can see that we are unable to tolerate certain persons, we can usually find room to pass them by and avoid them. Thus we try to solve our dilemma by avoiding a real meeting. But in the light of what has been said, this action does not avoid, but only postpones a meeting. If Eternal Life means the perfecting of relations among men with God, then this can be delayed but not refused. Thus, what we refuse to do now we must do eventually, for not until all men are reconciled to one another can anyone know the full meaning of Eternal Life. There can be no Eternal Life if there are to be some who do not share it. Eternal Life is the completion of humanity, and not simply of some individuals.

Are we assuming then that all will be saved? Many may persist in refusing God. Does this mean that God will give them up to final spiritual death? This seems impossible, if God be Almighty Love. Life, here and hereafter is confrontation, being asked to accept Eternal Life. It is choice and decision. If a man rejects Eternal Life he needs to face the full consequences of the alternative that he has chosen. But

then man finds that even, "If I make my bed in Sheol, Thou art there."⁶⁶ God cannot rest content until all men have the opportunity of confronting Him. Only then can man choose. Even after death God waits for man to make the choice, for God wants it to be man's choice. It seems impossible that finally man can resist the love of God. Thus it seems unnecessary to ask what happens to those who finally reject God. In the end, it is assumed God's love must win and no one can finally reject God's offer of Life.

How can this belief that all will be saved be reconciled with the idea of man's freedom discussed above (pp. 76f)? I do not believe that to hold this belief takes away man's freedom. Man is eternally free either to accept or reject life.

But if Tillich is right when he affirms that:

(a) "Non-being cannot prevail against it" (~~the~~^{the} eternal ground of being.),⁶⁷

(b) ~~the~~^{and} that "No individual destiny is separate from the destiny of the universe."⁶⁸ then man apparently is not free to destroy himself. He is presumably free to resist inclusion in Eternal Life, and thus his freedom is safeguarded. But he will at some time yield to the love shown to him both by God and his fellowmen. This decision also would be made freely. Thus if all men are saved, their freedom is not violated in the process. There is then, the hope, even the assurance,

⁶⁶Psalm 139:8 (RSV).

⁶⁷Tillich, op. cit., p. 415.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 418.

that all men will find fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. The desire of many that it should be so is strong. The Christian conviction is that it is the declared will of God. Eternal Life will be characterized by "joy". To see men changed, to know that none are lost will be pure joy. To be able to share Eternity with God, and with all men will be the supreme joy. As Brunner says, "The Consummation will be the perfecting of the presence of the love of God with man and the presence of man with God."⁶⁹

K. Implications for Today

If this is a valid picture of Eternal Life it has important implications for our present life today.

(1) It gives man hope for the future. Nothing that God has made will be lost. Being cannot return to non-being, although this is a constant threat, and a constant temptation. Salvation is neither to be taken for granted nor ruled out as impossible. It must always be an open question, until the Consummation. The possibilities of heaven or hell are always real to the chooser. A man will have hell as long as he chooses it. Yet, while universalism cannot be taken for granted, man must take seriously the strength of the love of God who wills that all shall be saved. This, however, remains still a personal matter, and must be freely chosen and accepted by all. It is strange that man so often interprets freedom as freedom "not to". Man seems to feel that freedom is only real when he rejects. But sometimes, slowly or suddenly, it must dawn on man, as an overwhelming experience, that even though he is a sinner he is

⁶⁹Brunner, op. cit., p. 439.

accepted by God. He is accepted as he is. This new state in which man finds himself accepted is experienced as something that has come to him from beyond himself. It is not because he deserves it or has earned it. It is granted to him in spite of himself, and all he has to do is to accept it. To accept God's acceptance of him, to borrow a phrase from Tillich, is to cease to rebel against God. And yet the man who experiences this knows no loss of freedom. He is free to accept or to reject God's acceptance of him, but it may prove impossible finally to refuse God's love. The more man learns of the love of God, the more he experiences God's acceptance and forgiveness, the more he realizes that his true freedom lies in acceptance of the New Life. Such a conviction can be a great source of hope for mankind.

This is in great contrast with the expectation of being condemned to recurring reincarnations or the negative suffering of the classical idea of purgatory. Rather it is a steady growth, in the same centre of life, but under new conditions, growing toward the one goal, seeking to enter into Eternal Life with all mankind. Here is a goal and a worthy hope to be set before every man; not that when he dies he will have contributed to some future generation, whilst he as a person shall cease to be; not that he will be saved while others are lost, or that he may be lost while others are saved; but rather that life will go on with its choices and struggles, but with increasing hope and joy and victory, until all have entered into Eternal Life. Seen in this light, what God is and wills for his creation becomes an invitation which it would seem impossible for man finally to refuse. What we begin here will be completed; what we take seriously here has eternal seriousness. Life is Eternal, it goes on to completion.

Such a conviction cannot but fill life now with hope and meaning.

(2) The second implication of this view for our present would be its impact, if taken seriously, on life today.

(a) This view exposes the self-centredness and inadequacy of the desire or willingness to be saved apart from mankind. Man would think of personal salvation in its true context, the salvation of all rather than of self.

(b) This view discloses the futility of evil. Evil is characterized by Tillich as the "negative". If Eternal Life, as Tillich says, "includes the positive content of history, liberated from its negative distortions and fulfilled in its potentialities,"⁷⁰ then the future of the negative is annihilation. This is not a new thought to man, but in this context it has a new significance. Evil has no future. Nothing unclean shall enter the Holy City. If it is true that evil has no future man today should at least be aware of the fact and, if he is content with this profit and pleasure of "evil" today, it should be despite the realization that it will not last forever. On the other hand man can, if he wishes, live the life of the Age to Come today. This is what Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."⁷¹

It is not that man does not know the difference between good and evil; love and hate. But he has lacked a total framework in which to see the importance of moral values and to see where life might be leading. He

⁷⁰Tillich, op. cit., p. 397.

⁷¹Mt 6:10 (NEB).

is aware of and has experienced growth and change. A realistic view of the destiny of man should help him today to reject what his destiny rejects and to choose what promises to be established in Eternal Life.

(c) This view of Eternal Life has strong implications for the personal life of man in society today. If Eternal Life is life together for all mankind, then this ought to be the goal toward which man works today. What God works in a man he works partly through other men. In this and other ways God binds men together. We have responsibility for one another. The conviction that none can be saved until all are saved will heighten this sense of responsibility and deepen concern for others. Yet even in the church today, its most loyal followers are often men and women more concerned for their own salvation than that of others. Man is concerned that he be justified, at least in his own eyes. Often when this is achieved he rests content. But acceptance of the view of Eternal Life which is here presented would engender concern for humanity, and for the quality of the relationships of men. We should be more hesitant about classifications such as "saved", "lost", "Christians", or "pagan". We should see man rather in varying degrees of fulfilment, and our greatest desire should be to share in the moving forward of mankind toward greater fulfilment. When the seer on Patmos wrote, "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple was the sovereign Lord God and the Lamb",⁷² he was asserting that society is to move beyond the divisions of "church" and "world". Man can do this now when he accepts all men as his brothers, all moving, whether we realize it or not, toward the same goal, Eternal Life. This

⁷²Rev 21:22 (NEB).

gives us a whole view of life, from its beginning to Eternal Life, one aim, one goal, one purpose; one life through death and resurrection into the Consummation.

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