

Eternity's New Look

By Peggy M. Brook

“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” These words of Paul are today ringing more and more true, though perhaps not in the way in which they have generally been interpreted. Paul wrote them to the Corinthians after his well-known prophecy that “we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” and shall “put on incorruption” so that death will be “swallowed up in victory.”

Men have thought of this metamorphosis as some miraculous event destined to come upon the whole world at a particular far-off moment in time. But this change is happening now and its location is in general world thought. A great mental and spiritual revolution is going on today more rapidly than ever. When viewed against the background of centuries of religious belief, it *is* taking place “in the twinkling of an eye.” Indeed the whole change involves a “breakthrough” into timeless, limitless, unconfined, concepts of man and the universe.

In science, in theology, in medicine, new discoveries, new revelation, new methods follow one another in rapid succession. “The old order changeth,” for men are constantly throwing off the shackles of bondage to past theories and are questing with open minds, receptive to consistent, reasoned, and provable truth. One might say that this has always been the case, for such seeking is the method through which progress or evolution has taken place throughout mankind's history. One of its outstanding characteristics today, however, is the speed at which new light is dawning in all spheres of human experience. Again, “time” in terms of slow development is being superseded by the perception of the ever-present possibilities of the “now.”

Today's concept of death

In this revolutionary period it is very natural that the concept of death should also have undergone a change. As the Bishop of Woolwich writes in his recent book, *But That I Can't Believe* (Collins Fontana Books, 1967) “Most of us today are not fascinated by death. Death has been defeated. Both the horrors and the hopes of anything beyond have lost their power....For many older people, everything turns on what happens after death...The modern young person just doesn't see it like this. In fact he regards such an attitude as positively immoral. What is true or right for him holds whether or not there's anything beyond....”

The Christian faith.... must either show itself to be true for this life, or not at all. Its truth can't *turn* on what happens after death." As Dr. Robinson points out later, this is surely what the New Testament teaches, namely, "this is life eternal"- to know God and His Christ, that is, to understand infinite good and its expression in our lives at this present moment. The Bishop says that this "is a quality of life-here and now-which death cannot touch. Death is put in its place, as powerless to make any difference."

A hundred years ago Mary Baker Eddy wrote, "Life is deathless. Life is the origin and ultimate of man, never attainable through death, but gained by walking in the pathway of Truth both before and after that which is called death." (*Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures*. Pages 487. Lines 3-6)

What is eternal life?

If eternal life is here and now (and this is what really matters to all of us), of what nature is this life? It is certainly not material nor physical, for the material and physical are perishable and not eternal. Such a life must surely have a qualitative, a mental or spiritual nature. Paul, in the first century AD, defined it in the simplest terms. He merely said, "To be spiritually minded is life." In our day, how near to this definition is the American architect, Buckminster Fuller, when he says; "Man is an abstract pattern integrity which is sustained through all the physical changes and processing." Very different words from Paul's -"To be spiritually minded is life" and yet one can feel behind both statements the eternal fact of man's being seeking to manifest itself.

So the life of man fundamentally must lie in his living expression of eternal qualities. Primarily he reflects these eternal qualities from his boundless and infinite source and he can be as aware of this as a musical composer must be of the unlimited principle of music inspiring him and using him to express endless melodies and harmonies. The composer knows that these melodies and harmonies do not originate in him, but he is used by them in proportion as he opens his musical sense to them. Similarly, as man exercises his *spiritual* sense, the qualities of his fundamental spiritual selfhood will come in, abide with him, use him, and in this way he will be living his true and eternal selfhood. This is the spiritually-mindedness that is life, as Paul declared.

What is death?

Then what is death? To most men it has appeared to be the greatest limitation that there is, the end of life. It is essentially limitation, but it can never end life, for life *is*, and "is" can

never be “is not.” Life cannot be touched by death. They have no connection with one another.

Paul writes in the same passage we have quoted before, “To be carnally minded is death,” and to be carnally minded is to conceive of man’s qualities here and now, in this experience, as limited to matter, to believe that primarily he thinks with a brain instead of having the Mind of Christ, that his mortal flesh can have power over his spiritual nature, that his body can imprison his immortal identity. To be carnally minded is also to believe that man can be cut off from his infinite Principle or divine source and be isolated or confined in a personality, to have a life that can one day be not life but death, to be a mortal with no dominion but swayed back and forth by all the restrictive suggestions of man-made theories, and to have a limited, small, fatalistic sense of man’s destiny instead of being aware of his eternally fulfilled place in an infinite plan. These limitations are death, and the more a man lives outside and beyond them, the more he *is* overcoming death, not as a limitation that he has to meet at the end of a human life, but now, right now.

The true man has the Mind of Christ, his nature is spiritual, his identity immortal. He is forever joined to his infinite Principle or Cause, his life has no beginning nor end, he expresses the true dominion over every man-made, restrictive theory, and he is irresistibly fulfilling a divine destiny which is good. It is true of this man that “on such the second death hath no power.” May not “the second death,” of which the Bible speaks, be the experience that we commonly think of as death? And “the first death” be the carnally mindedness that makes us put man and all his qualities into a material context?

Heaven here

In the traditional Apostle’s Creed one of the central mysteries of Christianity is “God’s promise of eternal paradise or perdition beyond the grave.” An article on **“Eschatology”* in an issue of ‘Time Magazine,’ though the writer says, “Millions of Christians recite the Creed as an affirmation of their faith. Yet many theologians are now attempting to redefine heaven and hell in this-worldly terms-not as places where humans somehow survive after death, but as states of mind and modes of being that begin here on earth.” This surely is nearer to Jesus’ sense of “life eternal.” Thought tends to go from one extreme to another, however, and in discarding the ethereal concepts of heaven and hell as “other-worldly” states and seeing them in “this-worldly” terms lies the danger of degrading the true life of man through conceiving of it as a mediocre mixture of Spirit and matter, or good on a merely moral basis. In this case no advancement would be made. We would still be living

with a “death” concept, a limited concept, for death is a material concept of the universe. So in accepting this nowness of life, let us see that it is the life that is Spirit, the life that never began as well as the life that will never end.

Jesus declared. “Before Abraham was, I am.” Because he saw his eternal origin, he could prove his eternal destiny. Neither birth nor death could limit him. He lived in the power of the nowness of spiritual existence, realizing the Kingdom of God within, and above all, that “it is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.”

Jesus walked right through the time concept and this is what thinking humanity is beginning to do today. Hence eternity is ceasing to be regarded as a long period of time in a heavenly estate to be experienced after a limited period of time imprisoned in a body, and is being truly seen for what it is; the infinite nowness of spiritual life in all its heights and depths made manifest in man’s increasing dominion over limited mortal concepts and eventually even over the general acceptance of “death” itself.

The signs of the appearing of this new consciousness of man’s life are all around us, but so often in a guise that is unfamiliar to our thought-patterns. Yet as finite symbols yield to the infinite Truth, the spirit of Truth common to all men will permeate existence, and we shall see “a new heaven and a new earth” as in the Apocalyptic vision. And it will not be visionary and in the future, but here and now in all the minutiae of a daily life transformed by a living consciousness of the spirit of Truth.

***Eschatology** [Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary] a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of mankind: A belief concerning death, the end of the world or the ultimate destiny of mankind. Any of various Christian doctrines concerning the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the Last Judgment

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Think not the faith by which the just shall live
Is a dead creed, a map correct of heaven.
Far less a feeling, fond and fugitive,
A thoughtless gift, withdrawn as soon as given.
It is an affirmation and an act
That bids eternal truth be present fact.
Hartley Coleridge

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