

All Dressed Up and Somewhere to Go!

A Four-week presentation on Eschatology

By

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The End is Near!

The end crowns all,
And that old common arbitrator, Time,
Will one day end it.

- William Shakespeare

Facts about the Millennium:

We're off 3 – 7 years in our calculations about the millennium. We are celebrating the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Christ but he was really born around 4 B.C. That would place the 2000 year of his birth in 1997 so the millennium has come and gone and so has the predicted end of the world.

If you are a Muslim, this is the year 1419. If you want to become technical about it, consider this: since a millennium is a period of a thousand years, the year 2000 should be the last year of a millennium. Then, of course, there is the prediction that the end of the world would come at the end of a 1000-year period.

It is important to remember that the idea of using seconds, minutes and centuries is a late development. It was only in the 13th century that there was any notion of marking the end of a century. Pope Boniface VIII suggested a Jubilee Year, which we continue to observe.

Predictions abound. Some writers suggest that the year 2000 will bring chaos in terms of a blow to the economy, computers being out of whack because of the Y2K problem.

On a more serious note, the efforts of some evangelists to read the signs of the end times, goes back long before the present time. The ancient Persian-Zoroastrian religion envisioned the end of history after a final cosmic struggle between good and evil. The Hebrews scenario was cast in a succession of covenant renewals after divine punishments for disobedience.

Any millennium concerns that arise are flourishing mainly among fundamentalist religions, which are busy scaring people. Preachers show that they have correctly read the mysteries of the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation. They claim to be able to predict the day and hour of the Lord's coming. The believers will be snatched or "raptured" into heaven; the rest will be destroyed.

When things go wrong, people look for a reason, a sign that one epoch is ending and another beginning.

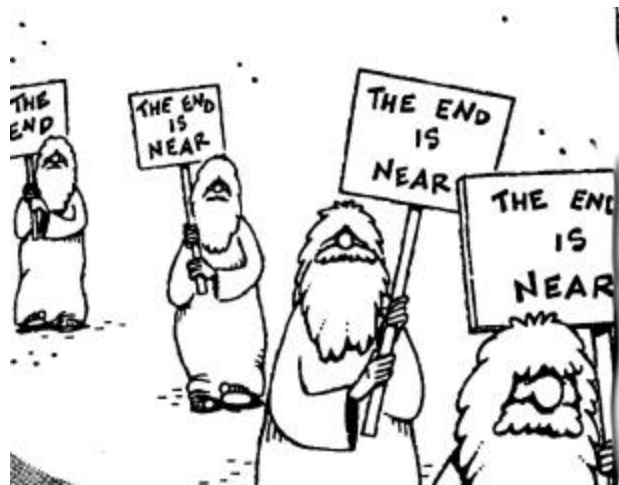
We must remember that apocalyptic writing is born out of crisis. Conflict is the engine that drives it, a conflict between good and evil. In apocrypha writing, someone always has a vision or is caught up to heaven and brings back secrets, especially secrets revealing the end times and who and who is not going to be saved.

Daniel in the lion's den, Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, and the story of Susanna and the wicked men, is a good example of this vision approach. Its message is that God is in charge and will achieve his purpose without any cooperation from human beings. Inevitably, when he will intervene becomes a preoccupation with people.

People have speculated about Daniel's seventy days or weeks or years. It is worth remembering that this Book was thought to be written in the 6th century B.C. at the time of the Babylonian captivity, but was in fact written 400 years later, around 167 B.C.

Apocalyptic literature is called "crisis" literature and if we look around today we can see all the tell tale signs of divine intervention: earthquakes, falling stars, confusion, wars, hurricanes, tornados, etc. people look for beyond-the-earth solutions to explain such: the second Coming of Christ, the invasion by UFO's.

The Book of Revelation or Apocalypse is the book most often used by fundamentalists who claim to be able to decode its symbolism as a guide to the end of the world, the book itself



and the spirit of the times in which it was written easily identifies the Antichrist as the hated Roman state.

Catholics proclaim their belief in the Second Coming in the creed, recited every Sunday: “He will come again to judge the living and the dead.” We also mention it in the Mass: “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.” Eucharistic Prayer #3 says, “Father, calling to mind the death your Son endured for our salvation, his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, and ready to greet him when he comes again.”

“Prophecies” of End Times:

156: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian taught millenarianism and some were advocates of the end time scenario.

1132: “Prophecies of St. Malachy” appear; a list of 112 popes identified by mottoes, which stretches from 1143 until the second Peter, the pope of the end time. This is attributed to Malachy, the 12th century archbishop of Armagh, Ireland. It is actually a 16th century forgery.

1169: Hildegard of Bingen, German abbess, recorded her visions of end times and they are filled with apocalyptic images of towers and fires.

1186: “The Letter of Toledo” warned people to hide in the caves and mountains because the world was about to be destroyed.

1194: Joachim of Fiore, after meditating on the Book of Revelation, saw harmony between the Old and New Testaments and history as developing in three ages, each one corresponding to a person of the Trinity. The last age would be the 1000-year reign of the Holy Spirit and it would begin in 1260.

1348: During the Black Death, all kinds of warnings and end time prophecies took place.

1420: The Taborites, a radical sect in Bavaria, led by defrocked priests, predicted that every city would be destroyed by fire and that only five mountains strongholds would be saved when Christ came. When He failed to appear, they claimed he came secretly.

1523: Nostradamus – real name, Michel de Nostedame, born in France of Jewish parents, converted; began making prophecies, which were published, in rhymed quatrains. Before he died, he burned his prophecies. The Catholic Church condemned these prophecies in 1781 but he continued to fascinate people.

1524: Thomas Muntzer led the peasants in a slaughter against the nobles. He said the Lord told him that he would catch any cannon ball shot by the enemy in his sleeve. He was mowed down.

1568: Archbishop James Ussher predicted the world would end in the fall of 1996.

1809: Mary Batement claimed she had a magic chicken that laid eggs with end time messages on them. He was eventually hanged for poisoning someone.

1843: William Miller, founder of Millerism, calculated the Second Coming would happen in 1843.

1910: The return of Halley’s comet was seen by some as a sign of the Second Coming.

1914: Charles Russell, founder of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, said that Jesus would return in 1914; then 1918, 1925, 1941, 1975, 1984, 1994.

1993: David Koresh and the Branch Dividians, indicated the world would end in 1995.

1995: An apocalyptic sect in Japan, the Aum Shinniko, released poison gas in a subway; claiming they were hastening the Second Coming of Christ in 2000 by using the gas.

1997: Sun Magazine reported that Noah’s Ark was found, containing 6 copper, gold and silver scrolls which revealed doomsday is set for 2001.

1997: Heaven’s Gate cult determined that the Hale-Bopp comet would eject a space capsule containing lethal pathogens and all life would be destroyed.

1998: The book, “The Bible Code” by Michael Drosnin, claimed to have found a hidden message in the first five books of the Bible, thus predicting World War III will start in 2000 or 2006.

2000: On May 5th, all the planets are supposed to be in alignment and this will cause earthquakes and other disasters, which are, to some, the biblical signs of the Second Coming.

Where do Catholics fit into all this talk about the end of the world?

There is an apocalyptic strand in some Catholic thinking. It shows itself in people interpreting appearances by Mary. These always seem to appear during periods of crisis. The earliest recorded vision was in the 3rd century when she appeared to St. Gregory the Wonderworker.

The message of Fatima (1917) fascinated many people. Some advocates say there are three children and that each represent a third of humankind: one-third, the spiritually dead; one-third stuck in human made religions and the final one-third who responded with openness. Some claim that the “Third Secret of Fatima,” locked in a drawer in Rome, was not revealed because it was too terrible to reveal.

Most of the modern Marian apparitions have taken on an element of hope; they remind us that the power of Satan will wane but we must repent. Such appearances have been officially discouraged by the Church.

What does the Official Church say about all this?

The Catholic attitude to millennialism was formulated in 431 at the Council of Ephesus, where it condemned it. Later, it issued several other condemnations. It never taught that the world would end in the year 1000 or even 2000

What are we to do?

First of all, we must remember that there will always be apocalyptic approaches around, no matter what era or year. Secondly, that Jesus said, “No one knows either the day or the hour” but our Heavenly Father. Sooner or later, the end will come. We are a people of hope, not destruction. We should anticipate rather than fear, see as a challenge and not a threat.

There is a plan. God is in charge. We are going somewhere. Justice will triumph. Life has ultimate meaning. We’re special and privileged, awaiting redemption and fullness of life.

Fundamentalism

1. Why is Fundamentalism growing?

Fundamentalism provides miraculous events and easy answers in an uncertain time.

"They grow because Americans are tired of change: numbed by the past twenty-five years of rapid change in every area of life; frightened by change which leads only to more change. Americans are buffeted by insecurity about money, about the meaning of life, even about existence itself. They are fatigued by crises in meaning, society and morality. Faith should give meaning, orientation and hope; certainly revelation and church should offer more than daily secularism and amoral liberalism."

-Thomas F. O'Meara

2. When did Fundamentalism Begin?

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, Protestant Evangelicals had played a leading role in American cultural life. One of the major differences between the American and French Revolutions was that in America, Evangelical Christians played an active role, whereas in France the revolutionaries were fiercely anticlerical and anti-ecclesiastical.

It began with a series of meetings at the end of the last century and the beginning of this century. A series of books were published. In 1909 they published twelve books called, "The Fundamentals." They were distributed free, thanks to California oil millionaires. These books stressed five points of doctrine from which orthodox Christians could never yield:

1. Virgin Birth
2. Physical resurrection of Jesus.
3. Inerrancy of Scripture
4. Christ's sacrificial atonement for sin.
5. The Second Coming of Christ.

Some modern fundamentalists have added a sixth: anti-Catholicism.

Later they selected J.T. Scopes - an obscure Tennessee school teacher and accused him of teaching the theory of evolution. This was called "The Monkey Trial." The Fundamentalists choose William Jennings Bryan as their defense while the School Board choose Clarence Darrow.

Central to Fundamentalist understanding of God is the appeal to the Bible itself, free of all later theological interpretations. Knowledge of God comes from God's word directly, and sophisticated intellectual and philosophical reflection often as been viewed as more of a hindrance than a help to understand God's word.

2. What is Fundamentalism?

Fundamentalism offers simple answers to complex questions. It flourishes in times of uncertainty because it offers instant and easy certainty.

Patrick Arnold defines fundamentalist "as an aggressive and marginalized religious movement that, in reaction to the perceived threat of modernity, seeks to return its home religion and nation to traditional orthodox principles, values and texts."

Fundamentalism has three characteristics:

a): It emphasizes the *location of God's power and plan in something. i.e. the Bible.*

For Christians, the Bible is inspired; but for the fundamentalist that inspiration is total, often appearing simplistic, unrealistic and magical in approach. Because it is inspired, it is not subject to any historical limitations, i.e.: critical biblical interpretation.

The Bible is God's word but it is also a collection of human writings. God speaks through them through their stories, literary forms, poetry, etc.

In fundamentalism, the location of the divine lies ultimately not in the Bible's text but in the preacher, especially in the evangelist's personal theology.

b): The Bible or personal conversion gives *easy access to the divine*.

For the fundamentalist there are not levels of divine truth and of divine grace, not different ways of viewing God or living out a Christian life. There is only one way. My preacher and I know it.

There are no gray areas. Everything is clear. To question or deny any part of the preacher's message is to reject all of Christian revelation.

c): God intervenes in a dramatic or theatrical way at the command of the leader, often acting in miracles, healings, voices and prophecies.

Everything that happens to the evangelist and through the evangelist is miraculous.

The devil also has a prominent place, working in extraordinary ways and is often used as an excuse.

3. How do Fundamentalists understand Inspiration?

The fundamentalist understanding of inspiration not only presumed divine authorship but it also de-emphasizes any role played by human reflection and human creativity. They do not believe that the Bible is a product of the human community. They maintain that it originated from God and was transmitted to the community through divinely chosen agents such as prophets and apostles.

Fundamentalists subscribe to the theory of verbal inspiration, which claims that both the ideas of the Bible and the words expressing these ideas were inspired. It attests to the absolute infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible, not only in its religious teaching but also in its scientific and historical detail. This understanding of inspiration is often known as "dictation theory," stressing the passivity or receptivity of the biblical authors.

4. Why do people become Fundamentalists?

a): Initial or sustained contact with a specific group may have come through an associate, friend, or spouse who is a member

b): Formation: narrow boundaries are set. Personal experimenting, and adapting to deal with particular situations and personalities are strictly limited. The norm, the way things are done, the modes of personal behavior have already been established. "Proofs" are often presented through fear or guilt-inducing tactics.

- c): Effect on a person's self-image: Both self-image and the mode of relating to others are shaped by the dualism of light and darkness, good and bad, right and wrong. Deliberation and discernment consume too much time and lead to unnecessary complications.

3. What is the psychology of Fundamentalism?

Generally speaking, people who are already well informed about scripture and theology do not become fundamentalists. Psychologically, fundamentalism is marked by a) a desire for certainty and b) a difficulty with diversity.

a. Desire for Certainty

The desire is to enter a special relationship with the Lord. Change, uncertainty, levels of truth or goodness bring about anxiety.

A fundamentalism is not open to different interpretations, to new ideas or practices. The objective of the fundamentalist is to convert, rather than discuss. The compulsion shows itself when fundamentalists cannot leave people alone, can't stop arranging their lives.

Knowledge can be dangerous. It complicates things for them. Yet, knowledge offers growth, diversity and richness.

b. Anxiety is to be avoided.

The fundamentalist fights off anxiety, avoids diversity or change. Change is an agent of diversity and is to be abhorred. To placate anxiety, phrases like, "Jesus is Lord" must be venerated; doctrines mustn't be interpreted; rituals must remain the same.

The fundamentalist becomes judge and jury; separates himself or herself from ordinary events which are seen as battlegrounds between good and evil; and humanity is getting worse so judgment, Armageddon, is coming. Also, other view or interpretations are blasphemous.

What Stimulates a Person to Question?

- a): Incident that breaches integrity or trustworthiness on part of leader etc.
- b): Approach to preaching, consistently stressing power, presence of evil and the uselessness of other groups.
- c): Internal: searching questions, degree of alienation or complete exclusion. Person gradually realized narrow boundaries of fundamentalism and doesn't get adequate answers to questions. Also included may be unfulfilled desire for greater clarity and understanding.

Have You Been Saved?

The Fundamental question, "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?" is often puzzling. Though Jesus undoubtedly addresses each person individually, it is always for the sake of the whole that he does so. And this is why Catholics say that salvation is found in the Church. The theodrama of salvation is carried out, according to Catholics, not on the bare stage of a one-person play but only on the delightfully crowded stage of a great opera or musical.

Fundamentalist: A Personality Type?

People link Fundamentalism with certitude, with the Bible, with odd miracles, with a central autocratic figure. These are phenomena but not religious principles. Three underlying theological convictions seem to be present:

There is a narrow and rigid location of a divine message and power in a thing: a text, a leader, a place, a revelation; this consequently gives a tight and certain means of controlling God; finally there is an inevitable elitism. The variations on how and when Jesus will come, attitudes toward the scriptures, the founders' relationships to eschatology - these are secondary, and the observer of fundamentalism will perform a service by finding out this thought forms, theological and other, of movements that break off, attack and withdraw.

Fundamentalists are not open to history or tradition but are centered on the self and the present moment. The causes for their religious positions, held with almost no information but with the most intense emotional grip, are psychological. Dropping out, rejection, anger at being tricked by what is modern, an egocentric determination of what is orthodox - these mark the Fundamentalist sensibility.

Why are Catholics attracted to Fundamentalism?

There are many reasons:

1. American mentality is very individualistic. Fundamentalism is highly individualistic. When a Fundamentalist asks, "Are You Saved?" that "you" is singular. While the Catholic Church is emphasizing community and commitment to peace and justice, some Catholics react against it and find fundamentalism attractive.
2. The poor quality of Catholic education leaves many Catholics susceptible to Fundamentalism. Because people's knowledge of the faith is rudimentary and largely external; this can attract them to fundamentalism.

Catholic Fundamentalists

Are there Catholic fundamentalists? Yes! Catholic Fundamentalists differ from Protestant Fundamentalists in that Catholics see the leadership of the Pope as primary, not a certain group leader. Also there is not as much concern with the millennialism and the End Time. In addition, the Bible as the inerrant word of God is not so much the standard bearer faith as would be the teaching of the church (which would include the Bible but may not include the teachings of Vatican II) On a parochial level, a Catholic fundamentalist would be very supportive of ritual worship and sacramental life, versus his or her Protestant counterpart.

For the Catholic fundamentalist, the Church of Vatican II sold its soul to modernity. Its response has been a call to return to the old paradigm of a classical worldview with a very narrow view of sacramentality. William Dinges, says "The transcendent is then understood as a reality that enters the world primarily in the form of miracles and special acts of revelation that are encoded in fixed creedal and dogmatic propositions and frozen in liturgical rites and other symbolic forms. These supernaturally guaranteed truths are 'inerrant' and 'unchanging' because they are taken as unconditioned by their historical, social or cultural contexts."

There is an array of religious directions that flow together as manifestations of the fundamentalist spirit at work in the Catholic Church. These directions include visions; cults of religious places and things from the recent past, fear of Vatican II's ideas and dynamic; suspicion of theological reflection and education; small and authoritarian groups alienated from the church; and reduction of the gospel to a few canonical lines, often from a past philosophy.

Who are they and how do we recognize them? It has two main forms:

a): God in Material Things

Certain customs surrounding statues, medals etc. borders on magic. e.g.: burying a statue of St. Joseph in front yard to sell a house. Statues and medals can become minor deities. Saints are important to Catholics because of their example and lifestyle. Statues are reminders of this lifestyle, not as dispensers of magic and miracles.

b): Authority

Human beings and communities need authority, otherwise there is anarchy. As far as authority in the Church is concerned, we need to ask two questions: Is every religious authority of the same style, infallible? Can there be a critique of authority in the Catholic church?

"Church authority for Catholics is not just the decisions of bishops acting as company officials, nor is it divine voices dictating easy rules and decisions. The human and the divine are both at work. The role of the community's leaders -- bishops and pope - are explicit and central. But there are also roles for others in the church -- for theologians, charismatics, various ministers, and others among the baptized."

- Thomas P. O'Meara

Catholic Perspectives on Fundamentalism in General

1): God is present in People and in Creation.

God is a Creator of good and he is committed to our good.

Fundamentalism sees the world as evil, something to be hated. It believes that people are basically sinful and that everything is basically evil or demoniac.

Catholics accept reason, freedom and the potential of good that resides in people.

2): Potential of Grace

God became one of us in the person of Christ. Grace is a power and reality in our lives.

Catholics differ from fundamentalists in that we see grace at work in the world, in people's lives. Fundamentalists demand the extraordinary. The miraculous proves things. For the Catholic, faith and religion are always about something real. Grace is available to all

3): Neurotic Religion

Jesus rejected superficiality, externals; demanding instead interior honesty and generosity. The Catholic Church's approach and sense of history has allowed it to have a more balanced approach.

4): Diversity in Life

Things are not simple - black and white. Different times, people, languages, expressions and art have expressed Christianity in different ways. Words cannot capture reality totally. Culture and science challenge us continually with new problems, which cannot have simple answers.

5): Sense of Humor

We need a sense of humor to laugh through the ambiguity of life. If human nature is corrupt, then humor has no place.

Summary of Differences:

1. Who is God and how does God act toward us?
2. Who are we? - basically evil? basically good?
3. How do we act through history under the influence of God's grace?

Fundamentalism and the Second Coming of Christ

How do Fundamentalists decide which parts of the Bible they are to take literally and which they are not? The Fundamentalist doctrine of **dispensationalism** provides the key.

There are 5 concerns:

1. Distinction between law and grace.
Under the law, the only way to salvation was through perfect obedience. Under Christ, God grants salvation as a gift to those who accept the atoning death of Jesus.
2. Bible speaks of “earthly” people of God living under the law: i.e., Jewish people. The “heavenly” people of God is the church, not as institution, but as spiritual reality and is made up of those people who have accepted Jesus as their savior.
3. Biblical prophecy deals with the destiny of the “earthly” people of God, i.e. Jews.
4. Before the millennium can begin, all the biblical prophecies must be fulfilled.
5. The Second Coming of Christ, which will inaugurate the millennium, can happen at any moment.

Dispensationalism divides the history of God’s dealings with human beings into seven epochs. During each epoch, God works out a phase of the divine plan.

1. Innocence (Garden of Eden)
2. Conscience (Genesis 3:23) Fall to Noah.
3. Human government (Genesis 8:20) Noah to Abraham
4. Promise (beginning of Genesis 12:1) Abraham to Moses
5. Law (Beginning with Exodus 19:8) Moses to Christ
6. Grace: From Christ’s death to the present, also known as the Church Age.
7. The Millennium (Revelation 20) Beginning of Christ’s return to earth, also known as Kingdom Age.

Critique of Dispensationalism:

The greatest appeal of dispensationalism is its confident assurance. While human potential cannot transform this world, Christ will make everything work out for the better. It guarantees that Jesus and those who accept him will triumph in the end.

The problem with dispensationalism is not so much its confident assurance but in its penchant to be cocksure. The over-confidence leads one to ignore the complexities and ambiguities of human experience. For fundamentalists, the divine plan is absolutely clear. The future holds no surprises. The Bible gives exact, precise teaching about the events that will soon take place.

What about the Rapture?

Even though the word “rapture” comes from the Fundamentalists, who maintain that their doctrines are purely biblical in origin, the word never actually occurs in the Bible. Rather, the word is found in a marginal note on a single passage in Paul’s 1 Thessalonians. The note is found in *Scotfield Reference Bible*, edited in 1909 by a minister, Cyrus I. Scotfield, but revised slightly as recently as 1967

The Pauline text is part of a teaching on the resurrection; it speaks of the Second Coming of Christ in the following words:

For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, and with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. (I Thessalonians 4:16-17)

The Scofield Reference Bible interprets the expression "caught up" as the church" for two reasons. As a verb, the word means "to seize, snatch," from the Latin, *rapere*, but as a noun, it also denotes ecstasy.

Hal Lindsey, in his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, sees the following five things in the passage from First Thessalonians.

1. The rapture is a mystery that is being revealed finally to true believers and it is intimately connected with bodily resurrection.
2. People who experience the rapture directly will not die physically, but they will be taken directly into God's presence.
3. All believers at the time of the rapture will be saved automatically.
4. All believers at the time will be transformed, receiving new spiritual, incorruptible bodies.
5. The rapture will occur instantaneously.
6. All believers will be reunited at this time and taken into God's presence.

Critique of the Rapture:

1. It takes the biblical passage out of context. The passage is meant to give encouragement because some in the community have begun to lose hope in the promise of Jesus for new life. Paul promises that the community will be reunited with their loved ones in the resurrection. He concludes the passage by encouraging them.
2. It also fails to take stock of the apocalyptic language, the symbolic language of hope. Images such as the trumpet blast, the archangel's call and being children of the light instead of darkness are all familiar in other apocalyptic literature. Such literature is like a brochure that promotes the joys that await the travelers in their final destination, not a roadmap of how to get there.
3. Another serious flaw is that according to fundamentalists, the bible speaks exclusively in a prophetic sense to our day. It is as if no previous generation were privileged to receive the prophetic word of God.

What should our approach be?

Fascination with the end time has been with Christianity since its inception. The rapture and the millennium are two of the fascinating aspects of what will happen during the end time, even if frequently misinterpreted. The coming millennium is no exception to this fascination.

Here are some simple, practical suggestions:

1. Christians need to remain a people of hope. We ought not become pessimistic about the events of our day. Of course, the world has serious problems, but are they necessarily signs of impending doom? Remaining hopeful means acknowledging that God ultimately is in charge of the fate of the universe.

2. Resist the temptation to speculate about the details of the Second Coming. We proclaim that “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again, reminding ourselves that Christ will one day establish fully the kingdom of God.
3. Don’t get involved in arguments over the nature of the rapture and related notions. Hardcore Fundamentalists are not given to dialogue. A person of such strong convictions is not likely to be persuaded by opposing views. Nor does arguing scripture, quotation for quotation, achieve anything.

Paul speaks of our hope, which should color our approach:

“Listen, I will tell you a mystery. We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” (1 Cor. 15:51-52)

Let Go of it All!

Let go of it all and see where it takes you!
 Let the money slide away and the tense entrepreneurs
 Who talk of conquests and security.
 Let the cars whiz by with their square jaws and unseeing eyes.
 Let go of it all and lie on the ground to taste the sweetness
 Of the dirt and make best friends with the protective fog.
 Toss the plans aboard the first breeze heading far north,
 And your ambitions on a breeze heading deep south.
 Let life descent upon you like lava and sunshine
 And let the clouds guide you as they will.
 There’s no mountain high enough to climb with final satisfaction,
 No ocean vast enough to cross with ultimate joy.
 There is only laughter and peace, your own breath singing
 In unison with the throbbing melody of the earth,
 Your own flight as aimless and transient as the birds.
 Let it all go and wash you like the rain!
 Let it all go and buffer you like the wind!
 Let it all go, and see where it takes you
 Until you are one with the earth and all its inhabitants,
 And finally one with yourself.

- James Kavanaugh

“An eternity is any moment opened with patience”

Eschatology: What's it all About?

Definition: Eschatology: a study of four last things: death, judgment, heaven, hell.
Eschatology is hope seeking understanding.

Changes in Theology and their effects on Eschatology

Our lives are immersed in the culture of science. Every time we switch on a TV set. Use a camera, turn on a faucet, drive a car, operate a computer; we are interacting with a scientific world. At one level, nothing is mysterious anymore; at another level, there is nothing but mystery.

1. Classical Approach

The classical approach to theology is characterized by 3 things:

- a): Cause and effect: I flip a light switch and expect a light to go on. Everything happens because something causes it to happen
- b): Determinism: Everything in the world is presumed to work in a predetermined and predictable fashion.
- c): Wholes are made up of a certain number of parts. A TV set up is made up a number of parts. If the set doesn't work, it is because some part is not working properly.

This approach to life is easy to understand. It is neat and efficient. We adopted such an approach until the 19th century when science came to the fore.

2. Modern World:

This began with the scientific revolution of the 17th century, continued with the enlightenment revolution of the 18th century, followed by the social and industrial revolution of the 19th century and continues through the scientific and technological revolution of the 20th century.

a): Change from Classical culture to historical consciousness.

This is a shift from fixed, timeless truths to an open, historical culture. Natural, social and political realities are not fixed realities but are continually changed by the progress, highlights, ever-increasing role human beings play in shaping the future.

Second Vatican Council (1963-65) also contributed in recognizing human autonomy, human freedom, religious freedom, importance of experience, hermeneutics.

b): Move from Modernity to Post Modernity.

This shows dissatisfaction with modern world, without, as yet, an alternative.

What is emerging is a new paradigm: inclusive, processive, organic, wholistic. This shows itself under the influence of feminism, ecology, process thought.

We humans are not the masters of creation, we are participators in a co-creative process that is much greater than us. Our interrelatedness with life is a learning process of mutual interdependence, rather than exploitation or combat.

How do such changes affect the way we think about Eschatology?

Issues:

1. Increasing consciousness of mass death: wars, mass suicides, etc.
2. Threat of nuclear war: potential for global destruction. Raises questions about Human and divine power also.
3. Ecology: depletion of ozone layer, deforestation, Earth Summits.
4. Crisis of language: expressions like, “life after death,” “eternal rest,” “saving my soul,” “resurrection of the body.” Need to rethink these expressions. E.g.: if we talk about “life after death,” the impression can be given that eternal life is a continuation of this life.
5. What does it mean to be human? Where did the world come from? Where is the world going? How long did it take to make the world? How does earth relate to other planets? Where are those who have died now?
6. Contemporary science: Origins of the universe. Big Bang Theory
7. Appeal of Christianity: its vision of what has gone before and what follows.
“Your Majesty ...In the winter when the fire burns warm and bright and the storm is howling outside bringing snow and rain, it happens... that little bird flies into the hall. It comes in one door and flies out through the other. For the few moments it is inside the hall, it doesn't feel the cold but as soon as it leaves your sight, it returns to the dark. It seems to me that the life of man is much the same. We do not know what went before and we do not know where he is going. If the new doctrine can speak to us of these things, it is well for us to follow it.”
- King Edwin of Northern England visiting Paulinus, a 7th century monk.

Human Experience and Eschatology

Traditional ways of talking about heaven, hell, judgment, and purgatory have collapsed, not because they are untrue or false but because they have been derailed from contemporary human experience.

Importance of Experience:

“I love you means I believe you will live forever.” Gabriel Marcel.

“When my idea of death met my idea of Charles it was my idea of Charles that changed.”

– C.S. Lewis on the death of his friend, Charles.

There will always be a need to reinterpret experience because the interpreter finds himself or herself situated within a certain time framework.

What kind of human experience does eschatology deal with?

1. **Becoming:** This is a fundamental characteristic of the human being; the inner capacity to become, the potential to grow and to develop carries within it a promise of fulfillment, the seeds of the future.
2. **Limitations and incompleteness:** we are vulnerable and finite. This highlights the need for completeness, for healing, for wholeness.
3. **Search for justice:** the concern to right the wrongs in society, to balance out life's ills and evils with goodness. This idea is very much part of the apocalyptic literature in the Bible.
4. **Move beyond our lackluster selves:** there are moments when we step outside the temporal, when we rub shoulders with another dimension of life whether we are in conversation with someone, listening to music, in a relationship, absorbed by the needs of others. Gabriel Marcel said, "When you say, 'I love you' means 'I believe

Eschatology should:

1. Be life-enhancing, affirming, challenging us to responsibility.
2. Be open to all kinds of possibilities, helping us move beyond cynicism, fatalism, and apathy. It should, instead, concern itself with improving quality of life in world.
3. Be a powerhouse in working toward justice, empowering people.
4. Be a mediator between both "the already" and the "not yet," of the Christ-event which opens up new possibilities for our world both now and in the future.

T.S. Eliot: We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of our exploration will be to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time."
- Little Gidding

Karl Rahner: "My ultimate purpose, in all that I have written, is but to say this one simple thing to my readers – whether they know it or not, whether they reflect on it or not, human beings are always and everywhere, in all times and places, oriented and directed to that ineffable mystery we call God."

Human beings come into the world graced by God. We are all called into communion with God. That graced relationship, from the beginning, is wounded by sin but that should not discourage us or distract us from our basic orientation towards God.

Karl Rahner.

Effects of Alternative Anthropology on Eschatology:

1. Eschatology completes or fulfills what is going on in history. It is the fulfillment of the promises implicit in human hope and the flowering of the human capacity to become. “Grace is glory in exile whereas glory is grace fulfilled” John Henry Newman.
2. Human capacity to be formed and nurtured by relationships as well as realization that we are embraced and loved by God.
3. Emphasis on the historical and developmental dimension of human beings. To be human is to be on a journey, on route. This raises questions about life, death, direction, completion, etc.
4. Solidarity of the human being with the whole of creation. Being independent, self-sufficient is being out of harmony with creation.
5. Emphasis on the human being as an embodied self. The trouble with such concepts as body-soul, spirit-matter is that they can be dualistic. The New Creation is not about survival but about transformation.
6. We are oriented toward life-in-community. We belong to a community of selves. We are social beings.

Death! Where is thy Sting? ... thy Victory?

Death is the question mark that hangs over life for everyone. It disturbs every easy answer to the meaning of life. It interrupts human hopes and calls into question the value of human existence. No matter how much the question is repressed or ignored, it has a way of coming back at us, either through the death of a loved one, a friend, a parent and ultimately our own death either through tragedy, illness or old age. It will not go away.

And so it stays just on the edge of vision
A small unfocused blur,
A standing chill
That slows each impulse down to indecision.
Most things may never happen: this one will,
And realization of it rages out
In furnace-fear when we are caught without
People or drink
Courage is no good; it means not scaring others
Being brace
Lets no one off the grave.

- Philip Larkin, *Aubade*

The issue of death ultimately raises the question of God and how we reconcile reconciling death with a loving God.

Changing Experience of Death

Shifts in Way View Death:

1. In the past, death was something we **experienced from outside**: disease, illness, and natural disasters, so called acts of nature. Coming from the outside, the experience of death was often seen and accepted as the “will of God” and often referred to as an act of God.
2. **Today** the cause of death comes from **inside**, we have seized control of death through modern medicine, ravages of war. Now people move from infancy through adolescence, adulthood to old age. Thus there comes a stage when death is not only natural but also desirable. We often hear of people “waiting to die.”
3. **Shift in actual conditions and circumstances of death.** Due to advances in medicine, dying often becomes undignified where many people are reduced to vegetation state through tubes and machines or through a loss of memory, consciousness, etc.
4. **Care of the dying has shifted from the community to other institutions.** Today, people die in hospitals, nursing homes or other institutions where people are protected from the privilege of being with people when they die. In the past, death was experienced as a local community and neighborhood affair where young and old were involved.
5. **The language we use also helps us to keep death at arm’s length.** We devise euphemisms to refer to death. E.g.: passed away, slipped away, lost, expired, gone to heaven. When we talk about death, we talk about it in hushed tones.
6. **Modern psychology** has also helped in putting death in the background. We deny the reality of death by emphasizing self-identity, self-realization, self-autonomy, self-emancipation. Through modern medicine, we labor under the illusion that life can be prolonged through organ transplants, cardiac surgery, etc.
7. **Shift in the focus of death.** In the past, the focus was on individual death and the discussion was on the destiny of the individual. In this century, the focus has changed because of certain influences: nuclear threat, ecological collapse, AIDS epidemic, ongoing slaughters in the Third World. In the past, death came from within, today it can come from the effects of human behavior. One positive effect of this is the growing awareness that the destiny of the individual is somehow tied up with the destiny of the whole world.

Because of these changes, some people no longer see death as a disturbing issue and often see belief in the hereafter as an escape from our present political and social responsibilities for improving the world.

For others, the traditional ways of looking at heaven, hell, etc. are no longer credible. Others see the beginning and end of life coming within the control and mastery of medicine: test tube babies, cloning, etc.

Another popular perception is the possibility of reincarnation or the idea that immortality means really living on through the lives of your children.

These perceptions of death have two implications:

1. Covering up death gives rise to death-denying culture
2. When death does strike, there is unbearable grief and crisis and so becomes an object of fear and dread that impacts life and living.

Common Responses to Death

1. **Classical Approach:** This involves the immortality of the soul. There is the assumption that the individual is composed of body and soul. Death is seen as the separation of the body and soul; only the body disintegrates; the soul survives and lives on in eternity.

Many commentators today are reexamining that concept and suggest that this concept goes against the fundamental unity of body and soul. They argue that what happens in death affects the whole person, body and soul. Death is seen as an intrinsic part of living.

2. **Stages of Death and Dying:** Kubler-Ross. There are five stages of death and dying which include: 1): the denial of death's imminence; 2): anger at the prospect of death; 3): bargaining about death with one's family, friends, doctors and God; 4): the onset of depression about death and 5): the final acceptance of death.

The first four stages are extremely painful, yet within them there is a gradual letting go, moving from reluctance to acceptance; a journey from darkness to light, denial to acceptance. The fifth stage becomes a moment of self acceptance, or maturity.

3. **Double Movement of Life** "*I Do Not Die*," by Roger Troisfontaines S.J. There is a double movement throughout life: the body is in diminishing decline and the human spirit is growing. This includes moments of tearing oneself away from one's structuring environments to a more liberating environment. The human spirit moves and advances upward through a series of separations. These begin at birth as we move from the womb through the tomb of death.

As the butterfly leaves the cocoon, as the fetus breaks the amnion at birth, so also when we step into the final stage of our destiny we leave this body which has been the primary condition of our personal ripening."

- Troisfontaines.

This understanding of death might sound attractive but it does not face the darkness of death.

All three approaches highlight a sense of continuity after death but they do not adequately recognize the darkness, destruction and disintegration that takes place in death nor does it take seriously the reality of human closure, historical finality and temporary conclusiveness that marks death itself.

Theologian, Karl Rahner points out that "death is the absolute end of the temporal dimension of a being of the kind to which man belongs."

How do we understand the Mystery of Death?

There is no adequate response to the mystery of death even though medicine assumes there is.

1. **Humility:** We need to approach death with humility; approach death in its awesome, transcendent and unknown dimensions. The experience of death brings us up against the limits of life: loss of friends, loved ones and this in turn raises the question of God.
2. **Hope:** Every person faces the finality of life. Hope arises as much out of darkness as out of light; out of negative experiences as well as positive; out of absence as well as presence.
3. **Self:** We ask, “What becomes of me after death?” This question plagues us. when we ask that question, it is an ego question, coming from a self that failed to recognize our indebtedness to others. We need to move from being lonely, vulnerable, autonomous, isolated selves to a process of relationships with others. We live in a world graced by God, a world that has been developing for millions of years. Our whole world and relationships are sustained by the gifts of a gracious and loving God.
4. **Moving from “culture of having” to “culture of being”;** moving from a world that is characterized by accumulating things and consuming them to one of relationality, solidarity and connectedness with others.

“If a man is centered upon himself, the smallest risk is too great for him because both success and failure can destroy him. If he is centered upon God, then no risk is too great, because success is already guaranteed – the successful union of Creator and creature besides which everything else is meaningless.:

- Morris West, *The Shoes of the Fisherman*

Hope: Crisis or Opportunity!

Because contemporary culture denies the reality of death, it has removed the need for hope. Also because of individualism, we have cultivated the idols of consumerism, growth and progress instead of hope. Thirdly, the language of hope, coming from a classical interpretation, is outmoded. Fourthly, we are confused about what we should hope for: some say a better life, others the next life, others immortality, etc.

Yet, hope is essential to life, to the human condition. It often is birthed out of a sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo, with the present.

We need to distinguish between hope and optimism and hope and despair: Optimism accepts the idea of growth, change but neglects the idea of pain, suffering, vulnerability which is also part of the human endeavor. Optimism carries out the attitude of “more of the same.”

Despair happens when hope is disappointed and becomes lost. It is the realization that “I am no longer on the way”; the future isn’t possible.

Trust is an essential element of hope. Without trust, there is no hope; the absence of trust brings about despair. Resignation is an attitude of accepting circumstances without leading to despair.

Aspects of Hope

1. As human beings, we know that life is lacking in wholeness and totality. We have a built in restlessness, a desire to see God.
2. Because we are relational beings, hopes comes from within a person after he or she has encountered other human beings.
3. Hope is built into creation. Progress, growth, movement is possible. We are moving toward fulfillment. We and life are filled with beginnings and endings, origins and destinies. The history of creation is much older than the history of human beings. God is working in and through creation and because he has created us, he will sustain us through adversity.
4. Christian hope is founded on the preaching and teaching of Jesus, more especially through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Christian God is a God who is involved in the world, rather than detached from it.

Consequences of such Hope

1. The God we believe in and hope in is a God who is immanent in the world; always present, always active in the everyday experiences of people. This permanent involvement of God in life is shown in Christ dwelling among us.
2. This God of Christian hope, revealed in a special and most powerful way in the Cross of Christ, has limited God's power in and through the gift of freedom to humanity.

One of the arguments that people make against the idea of hope is the existence of evil in the world. Why is there so much suffering and evil in the world? Its existence challenges our faith, hope and love in God. Is God apathetic? Does He really care? We will see some answers in the next section.

Hope in Judaism

God kept intervening in the lives and history of his people. He continued to make covenants with them, continuing to give them hope. The prophetic writings in the Old Testament are filled with challenges to the people to return to God. There are two basic challenges: conversion of the people to God and a recurring emphasis on "the day of the Lord."

The hope that is offered to the people assumes a certain detachment from the affairs of the world and a tuning into the promise that God constantly offers them through such persons as Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, etc.

When God appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-15), He promises that he is aware of the people's misery and will deliver them and secondly, that, when Moses asks his name, he replies "I am who am." Basically, by such a name, he is saying, "I will be there for

The idea of the covenant is taken further with the prophets when they speak out about injustice in society, how the poor are treated, how living up to the covenant means showing concern for the poor, those treated unjustly.

The Wisdom literature in the Old Testament raises the possibility of a destiny beyond death. The idea of “sheol,” a place where the dead live in a shadowy kind of existence.

Apocalyptic literature surfaced the idea of a time outside history where God would grant salvation to his people.

Hope and Jesus

We move from the Old Testament to the life of Jesus and how he preached about the future.

1. Jesus’ close association with John the Baptist. John comes preaching repentance through baptism, proclaims the coming of Jesus (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:17)
2. Jesus moves from the future to the present in his preaching. When John sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the one they awaited, Jesus replied by saying that the kingdom of God was already in their midst through the healings, exorcising, etc. that are taking place (Matt. 11:3-5). Jesus moves the people from a future tainted with doom and gloom to one of good news.
3. Jesus points out that the reign of God is immanent: “thy kingdom come” (Matt.6:10; Luke 11:2). Secondly, Jesus, at the Last Supper, talks about not drinking the fruit of the vine until he drinks it in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25). This is an indication, that in spite of his death, the kingdom of God will come in the near future. Thirdly, Jesus reminds his followers that many will come from east and west to recline at table with Abraham while others will be cast out (Matt. 8:11-12). Finally, in the Beatitudes, Jesus shows that the poor, the mourners, the hungry will have a special place in kingdom of God.
4. Jesus asks the people to be vigilant, refusing to specify the hour or day of the end of time. He also describes the final judgment. What is interesting is the way he highlights the practical demands required (Matt. 25:31ff)

Death and Resurrection of Jesus as Turning Point

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus, taken together as a single event, constitutes a real turning point in history. Let’s take some of the main ingredients during his passion, death and resurrection:

1. Darkness over the earth parallels the “day of the Lord’ idea from the Old Testament which is understood as a day of darkness and gloom (Zeph.1:15; Joel 2:2;2:10; 2:31; Amos 8:9-10).
2. Coming of Elijah Many expected Elijah to return at the end of time as a forerunner of the coming of God. (Mal.4:5-6)

3. Veil of the Temple. One of the functions of the veil was to shut the holy place off from the profane world. From now on, the light of Christ is available to all. Many would also see it as the Temple being destroyed by the Romans. It shows a turning point within Judaism.
4. Earth shaking. There are many references to such in the Old Testament, which is seen as a sign of divine judgment or of the last times (Judges 5:4; Isaiah 5:25,24:18). It is also linked with the day of the Lord (Joel 2:10)
5. Opening of the tombs. This recalls the prophecy of Ezekiel relating to the end of time: “I am going to open your graves and have you rise from them...” (Ezekiel 37:12)
6. Those who have fallen asleep. This is one of the positive signs of divine judgment resulting from the death of Jesus. Divine judgment has begun.

Resurrection of Jesus as Hope

The Resurrection of Jesus has been described in many ways: the fulfillment of Jewish hopes, the anticipation of the end of history, the dawning of a new age, the embodiment of the reign of God.

The Hebrews had no real theology of life after death. Those who died were confined to Sheol, a shadowy form of existence. Instead the Hebrews hope revolved around a transformation of the individual, society and nature.

Jesus, in his preaching, refers to the general resurrection of the dead at the end of time (Mark 12:18:27; Matt.13:36-43; John 5:28f, 6:52-59)

In talking about the resurrection of Jesus, we have to remember that the death of Jesus was a moment of crisis for the disciples. Their faith was shattered, their hopes dashed.

The early Church had its own credal statements about the resurrection of Jesus:

1. God the Father raised Jesus from the dead (Gal.1:1; Eph. 1:20; Col.2:12. 1 Pet.1:21)
2. God exalted him (Phil 2:9; Acts 2:33,5:31)
3. He was taken up in glory (1 Tim.3:16; John 17:1-5; Luke 24:25)
4. Christ died and lived again (Rom. 14:9; 2 Cor.13:4)
5. He ascended (Eph 4:7-10; John 20:17; Acts 1:9-11)
6. Jesus breathed on them...receive Holy Spirit (John 20:22; Acts 2:1-4)

1 Corinthians 15:3-6 contains an early teaching, a short credal statement, on the resurrection.

Other significant descriptions of the resurrection include the various appearances of Jesus; the empty tomb becomes an important reminder that it was the whole Jesus, body and soul, that was raised and that it wasn't just a purely spiritual or mystical experience and finally, the impact the resurrection had on the early church as well as the outpouring of the Spirit.

- Resurrection** - points toward the arrival of the end of time.
- Exaltation** - symbolizes Christ sitting at the right hand of God the Father, reigning.
- Ascension** - makes way for universal, life-giving Spirit.
- Glorification** - celebrates the triumph over shame of death.
- Pentecost** - outpouring on Spirit over humanity and creation.

Paul and Future Hope

Paul reminds us that if anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation. The old order has passed away; the new one has come (2 Cor. 5:17). The death and resurrection of Jesus affects, not just the destiny of humanity but also of creation. He talks about the whole of creation groaning (Rom.8:18)

Paul outlines four moments for the future:

1. Immanence of the Parousia; expectation that second Coming is about to occur. (1 Cor.16:22)
2. Shift of emphasis from Parousia to resurrection. He raises the possibility of us being reunited with Christ immediately after death.
3. 2. Cor.5:1-10 seems to suggest that resurrection will take place after death.
4. He speaks about walking in newness.

The Resurrection of Jesus: Our Hope

The historical facts of the Christian resurrection narrative are a subject of intense debate among scholars and theologians. What we have is the life-witness of a group of disenchanted followers, so transformed by the experience, that they gave their lives to its preaching and, secondly, we have spread the same conviction for 2000 years.

One of the ways of understanding the resurrection of Jesus is in the context of the Jewish hope of a general resurrection of the dead at the end of time. Paul mentions that when he say, “if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.” (I Cor.15:16)

1. The personal resurrection of Jesus is a prototype of the universal resurrection of humanity. Paul says, “For as all die in Adam, so will all be made alive in Christ (1 Cor.15:22)
2. In addition to the universal resurrection of humanity, there is the cosmic dimension of resurrection where Paul reminds us that all creation groans, awaiting some kind of redemption.
3. There is a strong emphasis on bodily resurrection of Jesus. It is the whole person of Jesus, body and soul, spirit and matter, which is affirmed by his appearances after the resurrection. So, the resurrection is more than the immortality of the soul, more than a spiritual survival, more than memory, more than a physical resuscitation, more than a re-animation of the dead body of Jesus, more than a return to earthly existence.

Consequences

“What is most gripping in the resurrection myth is its power to transform. At a personal level, it depicts the frayed, bruised, humiliated Jesus exonerated in his essential, human dignity. At the structural, systematic level, it signifies that the political, cultural forces of injustice and oppression do not win out in the end. And at the global (wholistic) level, it projects a world of unrealized possibilities, opening up into an eternal future. Resurrection elevates human yearning into infinite proportions and invites us to understand creation (the entire cosmos) as endowed with an eternal destiny.”

- Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Quantum Theology*

The death and resurrection of Jesus becomes the norm for understanding life, salvation and the future. We are challenged to undergo our own personal process of dying and rising, a movement toward centering ourselves on Christ, rather than on ourselves.

This process takes place on different levels: Morally, we are shaped by love; sacramentally by faith and future by hope.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus helps us to:

1. Appreciate how we can hold that the resurrection of Jesus has cosmic implications. If the whole Jesus, body and soul, etc. is transformed in resurrection, then it follows that part of the material creation has already been glorified in the resurrection of Jesus.
2. Because of that, we have new insight, namely that the bodily resurrection of Jesus symbolizes a point of arrival for humanity and the completion of creation.
3. It confirms our faith in God the Creator; the God who creates is a God who transforms in resurrection.

“We are made for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

- St. Augustine

History says. Don’t hope:
on this side of the grave.
But then once in a lifetime
the longed-for tidal wave
of justice can rise up
And hope and history rhyme.

- Seamus Heaney, Nobel Prize Poet

Varieties of Afterlife

Here are some of the views of an afterlife:

1. Death as the end. This is the idea that there is simply nothing left of a human being after death, and that when someone breathes his or her last and the brain waves die away, nothing more can happen. This is the Marxist view.
2. Human beings can find no evidence for life after death. Existentialist philosophers, most notably Kierkegaard, proposed this. They believe all knowledge comes from sense experience so, since they cannot break into the world beyond, there is no evidence.
3. Hebrew view of Sheol. They believed that the dead went to Sheol, a half-existence with practically no hope, no joy or meaning.
4. Shamanism: Immortality of the soul. The basis idea is that we have a soul, which is immortal, and that it is not entirely confined to the body in this life. The shaman is one who has acquired the ability to leave the body in ecstasy or trance.
5. Reincarnation. This can also be referred to as the transmigration of souls. According to this idea, the human personality has continued existence, but after death, the individuals belong to a bank of souls in an intermediate state known as *bardo*. At the right time, one's soul is given another go at this life. Those individuals who have done well in their former lives return to a higher caste and station. But if one didn't do so well, one returns to a lower caste or even to a lower form of life to try to do better.
6. Dead will sleep until the general resurrection at the end of the world. There will first be a final battle between forces of good and evil. The good will find a new heavens and a new earth; the bad will remain in hell.
7. Dante's Divine Comedy's view. Satan was frozen in a block of ice in the center of the earth and around him every kind of torment awaited people who were really wicked. For the good pagans and unbaptized Christians, there was a place called Limbo, which was much like Sheol, with no discomfort or joy. As far as others were concerned – those who were not bad enough for hell and not good enough for heaven, they were ferried to an unknown region at the foot of Mount Purgatory to begin a purifying climb and be transformed.
8. Eternal life, as the resurrection of our personalities, as the kingdom of God. Immortality is not enough. Humans need more, a continued process of transformation and resurrection.

All Dressed Up and Somewhere to Go!

In the dualistic approach to life, there was *this* world and the *next* world. This world of existence was seen as transitory, fragmentary, illusory, sinful, a place of pilgrimage to be endured until death when we can escape it. The next world was seen to be eternal, real and complete in every sense. It, too, had two poles: heaven, absolute happiness; hell, eternal pain and suffering. In Catholic theology, we added purgatory as an “interim” place of purification, in preparation for heaven.

In medieval times, the Western vision of the world, the whole of this universe had been created to bring forth human beings in the very center of it. This was what heaven was and deep in the earth was also the pit of hell, created when Satan was thrown out of heaven. As he fell, he fell toward the center of things and struck the earth with such a force that he left a great cavity in the regions under the earth’s surface.

According to this medieval idea, Jerusalem, was the actual center of the universe, and it was here that Jesus, came to rescue humanity from the domination of Satan. By meeting and finally conquering the Evil One on Golgotha, Jesus gave all people the chance to be liberated from death.

Is there Life After Death?

In various kinds of literature, we find stories of people coming to the edge of death, getting a taste of what it is like and then returning to describe the experience. The following are some elements in such experiences.

1. The experience was inexpressible. Words couldn’t capture it. The fact that we cannot express something makes us realize it was a genuine encounter, not something we thought up ourselves.
2. People knew and heard themselves being declared dead. Yet they don’t feel dead. They are perfectly conscious, though unable to move.
3. Sense of incredible peace. Any pain, suffering has suddenly disappeared; time of peace and quiet acceptance.
4. Hearing some kind of noise. Might be buzzing, roaring, sound of wind, ringing bells, beautiful music.
5. Being drawn into dark tunnel-like space; a funnel, narrow valley or cave; drawn out of one’s body.
6. Separated from body or disengaged from it. Some able to describe efforts to revive them. Often talk about “hovering,” “floating.”
7. Difficult to believe they are dead. They have what seems to be a body, but not a physical one. They can see and hear people in physical world but cannot make contact with them.
8. Meeting with friends who have already died. Many dead family members they have known greet them.
9. Presence of a “being of light.” A sense of direct, personal communication and feeling that this being of light is expressing love and concern for the person.
10. Seemed to be in a gray, dull and meaningless existence. They are uncertain where they want to be.
11. Feeling protected. A voice or light appeared and protected them. Often assurance was given that the time of death had not arrived, that they would survive the odds.
12. Point of no return. They came to a point of no return and found their way blocked. They could go no further.

Heaven and Hell

Theologian, Karl Rahner said that there was only one predestination within Christian belief about the future and that was the victorious grace of Christ, offered to the world. Of course, this does not mean that we eliminate the possibility of damnation; eternal loss always remain a disturbing possibility in virtue of the human freedom to reject God but it must also be remembered that such freedom is also surrounded and upheld by God's grace.

The basic difference between heaven and hell is clearly evidenced by the historical fact that neither scripture nor the Church has ever judged anyone to be in hell whereas both sources have confidently declared many people to be in heaven. In spite of this, hell has had a prominent place in preaching down through the centuries.

What is Heaven Like?

The central message of Jesus is about heaven. To the people who heard him, it was an amazing message. It was different from anything they had heard before in two ways: they knew about hoping for heaven in the future and trying their best to earn it and avoid punishment. But Jesus spoke of finding heaven within and around and among us, as well as in the future that is hidden from us.

While the Christian doctrine of heaven has its roots in the Jewish scriptures, it nonetheless acquires its own particular shape in and through the mystery of Christ. A number of images from the New Testament help us. Heaven is described as the coming reign of God. This involves right relationships in this life, which include God; of knowing Christ and the God who sent him. Heaven is also described as a wedding feast (Matt. 25:10); having a vision of God (Matt. 5:8)

Love is the first essential quality of God and his kingdom. Only, as we grow in love, do we find the doors of the kingdom opening to us. Part of that equation, is to love others. The second thing about heaven is its spiritual quality. It is a non-physical world, different from the world of matter. It has a spiritual realm that is complex, varied, interesting and mysterious.

The Beatitudes makes sense only if Jesus was describing the nature of heaven. Our world is driven by the ethic of success. It is interesting to note that Jesus often healed as he told people about the kingdom of God.

From the Middle Ages on, heaven was described, almost exclusively, in terms of the beatific vision. Pope Benedict XII, in *Benedictus Deus*, in 1336, stated that souls of the just "see the divine essence with an intuitive vision and even face to face without the mediation of any creature by way of object of vision, rather the divine essence immediately manifests itself to them plainly, clearly and openly, and in this vision, they enjoy the divine essence."

Our modern world seeks new ways of understanding the concept of heaven, in terms that are meaningful for today. Heaven, as a place where the saved go to gaze upon the essence of God through the beatific vision, has been replaced by a more dynamic concept of a state of continued growth as God, angels and human being lovingly interact to bring forth God's initial creation into ever-increasing beauty, harmony and unity.

Heaven is about sharing in the fullness and communion of God's life in a way that also incorporates the historical unity between the self, society and the world. This unity between God and the world has been established in the crucified and risen Christ who is the eternal Word of God made flesh. It opens up and inserts humanity into the eternal life of the Trinity. So, heaven is about participating in the eternal life of God in and through the glorified humanity of Christ.

Heaven is the ultimate experience of the life of faith that began with our baptism. It is a process of "further up" and "further in" into the heart of God who is the heart of all things.

A man, who, for most of his life, was a professed agnostic, a man who died young, wrote one of the most beautiful pictures of meeting and knowing God. He had almost nothing to do with organized religion during his mature years, but, before his unexpected death, he came to a different realization. He wrote:

“Dear Fox, old friend, thus we have come to the end of the road that we were to go together...and so farewell.

But before I go, I have just one more thing to tell you:

Something has spoken to me in the night, burning the tapers of the waning year; something has spoken in the night, and told me I shall die. I know not where.

Saying:

‘To lose the earth you know, for greater knowing, to lose the life you have, for greater life; to leave the friends you love, for greater loving; to find a land more kind than home, more large than earth –

- Whereon the pillars of this earth are founded, toward which the conscience of the world is tending – a wind is rising, and the rivers flow.’”

- Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*.

“The belief that heaven is a state of absolute happiness may be something of a misnomer, as indeed may be a view that God is incapable of experiencing pain and suffering. A sense of being eternally attuned to life does not mean escaping all pain and suffering, but rather being empowered to participate more wholistically in the mixture of agony and ecstasy which has characterized evolution from time immemorial.”

- Diarmuid O'Murchu

What is Hell Like?

No doctrine, taught by Christian Churches, has been so misunderstood as the past and present teaching concerning hell. Preachers had a great psychological hammer to pound their listeners into fearful submission. They preached about a place into which God, in his righteous anger, hurled millions of souls. There, their conscience, physical fires, fire and damnation tormented them. Parallel to that, the saved, rejoiced to see that justice was finally being done.

Tertullian, in the third century, wrote,

“at that greatest of all spectacles, the last and eternal judgment, how shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many proud monarchs groaning in the lowest abyss of darkness; so many magistrates liquefying in fiercer flames than they ever kindled against the Christians; so many sage philosophers blushing in red-hot fires with their deluded pupils; so many tragedians more tuneful in the expression of their own sufferings; so many dancers tripping more numbly from anguish than ever before from applause.”

- Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*

We know Jesus preached a hell of fire and punishment. He used imagery prevalent among the Jews of his day to describe the existence of hell as a place of eternal fire. He described hell in words and images that came from Persian and Jewish apocalyptic literature, current in his day.

What did Jesus mean when he used such popular metaphorical language? He was speaking to their conscience; leading them into a mystery.

Of course, that leads us to the question: How could God, who is merciful and forgiving, be so vindictive? We need to rethink the way we see hell.

As we learn more from psychology and the human behavioral sciences, we are beginning to rethink things. We see how our present choices and human relationships shape us; both in this life and in the life to come. God does not create a “place” where he punishes us with material fire, but Jesus reminds us of a greater self-punishment from within, because of our human choices.

God does not send us to hell. If we continue to make choices based on selfishness rather than self-sacrifice; we create a hell in our own hearts.

The theologian, Ladislaus Boros, says that:

Hell is not something that simply happens from the outside; it is not something that God imposes on us afterwards for our misdeeds...it is the mode of existence of a human being who is satisfied in himself, for all eternity; he has nothing more and desires nothing more than himself... There is no tragic grandeur about hell, because fundamentally there cannot be any ‘place’, which is hell. There is only a

- Ladislaus Boros, *We are Future*

Hell becomes a symbol of a state of existence that Jesus warned us about. It begins when any human sets up a pattern of self-centered living and is outside God’s loving communication.

What do we learn about Hell from Scripture?

First of all, we have the Jewish idea of *Sheol*. When the idea of the immortality of the soul and resurrection surfaced, *Sheol* or *Hades* was divided into two distinct parts: the upper part reserved for the righteous who awaited final resurrection; the lower part, *Gehenna*, received the wicked who were tormented with terrifying punishments.

Gehenna, or hell is mentioned seven times in Matthew; three in Mark and once in Luke and once in James’ epistle. Hell is a place of punishment (Matt 5:25f). There will be weeping and grinding of teeth (Matt. 8:12). The worm does not die in hell (Mark 9:48) since it is an everlasting punishment (Matt.25:46) The Book of Revelation has its own imagery (Rev. 20:10; 21:8)

The principal case for hell in the teaching of Jesus is to be found in the parable of the sheep and the goats. (Matt. 25:31-46); the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) and the reference to the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit which carries eternal guilt (Mark 3:29, Matt. 12:32). Also significant is the parable of the debtors who will be thrown into prison until he has paid his debts (Matt. 5:25-6). It is clear, from the teaching of Jesus, that hell is a real possibility for those who choose permanently to ignore God’s offer of grace.

There is also the brief reference of Jesus’ descent into hell after his death. This is also part of the Creed. An ancient Holy Saturday homily tries to explain the richness of this concept:

He (Christ) has gone to search for Adam, our first father, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow Adam in his bonds and Eve captive with him – He who is both their God and the son of Eve... ‘I am your God, who for your sake have become your son... I order you, O sleeper to awake. I did not create you to be a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead.’”

This shows Christ’s solidarity with sinners.

Someone once described hell as a state of eternal obsession with guilt so that one is unable to accept forgiveness. The flames of hell are then the rejected flames of God’s love, as St. Catherine of Genoa held.

The unique idea of Christianity is that humans do not need to suffer from guilt and self-condemnation. We can be forgiven if we are truly sorry and truly try to remedy the situation so that it won't happen again.

What is Purgatory like?

After death, are we able to be in touch with those still living, especially our friends? Can we grow in any way in the life to come? Can others on earth or those already in the afterlife come to our help? Are we able to be in contact with other deceased persons? What sort of punishment awaits us if there is a state of purification? How long does it last?

We now look at the immediate state of those who died and do not immediately reach a state of heaven or hell. This is what Catholics call *Purgatory*.

What do we learn about Purgatory from Catholic teaching?

Scripture scholars do not agree that the doctrine of purgatory is explicitly found in Scripture. Nonetheless, certain scriptural passages have provided some Church Fathers and theologians with help in discussing this situation.

The chief text cited is 2 Maccabees 12:45-46 which says, "but if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin."

The background to this passage is the fact that Judas Maccabeus took up a collection and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering to make atonement on behalf of Jewish soldiers who had died in battle carrying idols of Jamnia, which was forbidden by law. The implication here is that the prayer and sacrifice for the dead will help to deliver these soldiers from their sin. We must be careful not to read too much into such a text; rather what is interesting is the evident expression of solidarity that seems to exist between the living and the dead.

Also, 1 Cor. 3:13-15 which says, "the work of each will be made clear. The Day will disclose it. That day will make its appearance with fire, and fire will test the quality of each man's work. If the building a man has raised on this foundation still stands he will receive his recompense; if a man's building burns, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as one fleeing through fire."

The context of this text is a quarrel going on in the Corinthian church about the work of Paul and Apollos in building up the community. The reference to fire in the text is primarily the fire associated with the final judgment and is not really concerned with the purification of sins by fire immediately after death. To this extent, the text is not, strictly speaking, about what has subsequently become known as Purgatory.

There is no explicit doctrine of Purgatory in the Old or New Testament. Yet, these texts would be used to support the doctrine that gradually developed from the early church's practice of offering prayers, alms and the Mass on behalf of the departed.

The early Fathers of the church remind us of the practice of praying for the dead. The Eucharistic prayers included it. The underlying idea was that the dead may still be in need of forgiveness for their sins before entering eternal life.

By the fourth century, the liturgy of Christian burial also included the practice of offering the Eucharist for the dead.

St. Augustine developed a concrete doctrine of Purgatory, based on 1 Cor 3:11-15. He brings up the idea of a place to which those not yet purified must go to be purified by a cleansing fire in order to expiate for the temporal punishment due to forgiven moral sins and for venial sins not explicitly forgiven.

The Second Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, makes a passing reference to Purgatory:

This most sacred Synod accepts with great devotion the venerable faith of our ancestors regard this vital fellowship with our brethren who are in heavenly glory or who still are being purified after death. It proposes again the decree of the Second Council of Nicea, the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent. At the same time, as part of its pastoral solicitude the Synod urges all concerned to work hard to prevent or correct any abuse, excesses, or defects which may have crept in her and there, and to restore all things to a more ample praise of Christ and of God.

- Lumen Gentium, 51

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also speaks of Purgatory; recapturing many of the things have been said already (see # 1030-1032)

How do we make sense of Purgatory today?

For many, the doctrine of Purgatory has lost its credibility. The language used and the fact that the doctrine is not clearly taught in scripture makes us rethink our approach to it.

From human experience, every human being senses the distance and differences that exist between the Creator and the created. We also are aware of the tension within the human personality between choosing God daily and the day to day living out of that decision, between the intention and the behavior, the aim and outcome. Each of us are made up of a complex set of relationships that exist at different levels. At the center of this, is our relationship with God, while, at the same time, the knowledge that we are tied to Adam. The possibility for good as well as the reality of evil exists in us.

What does it mean today to talk about the “temporal punishment due to sin?” Obviously, this hasn’t to do with God but with the consequences flowing from the reality of sin. We are always challenged to engage in penance, prayer and good works after conversion.

We are all related to others in this life. Included in this, is our relationship with God, which affects and shapes all relationships. In order to reshape our relationship with God, we must also reshape our relationship with others. This reshaping process takes time. It doesn’t happen all at once. Whatever is left within the process at the time of death, whatever remains to be done or undone within the human personality, is the primary concern of church teaching on Purgatory. Purgatory, therefore, is about finalizing a process, completing a divine-human relationship.

When does Purgatory take place? According to some, Purgatory can take place in this life through penance, prayer and good works. For others, Purgatory happens in death; that the option for God takes place in death. A third view, although less popular suggests that Purgatory takes place some time after death. More important, in any understanding of Purgatory is awareness before God of how much we need to change and to be changed in this life and in death in virtue of the infinite love and mercy of God, shown in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

George Maloney says,

“Purgatory is real. It is as real as all of us who, both in this life and in the life to come, have not yet surrendered every part of our being, every relationship that has made us who we are, to Jesus Christ. It is painful. It is joyful. It is learning to die. It is experiencing new levels of life in the Risen Savior. It is a vital part of heaven. It is the ante-chamber to fullness of happiness.”

Whatever Happened to Limbo?

How come that, in the past, we heard a lot about Limbo and now hear nothing about it? What has changed?

Jesus insisted that one had to be reborn by water and the Spirit (John 3:5). To be saved, one had to profess that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:10). So, how can children, who die before receiving baptism, before having a chance to develop a general desire to love God, ever reach salvation?

Over the centuries, theologians have proposed different theories about the fate of such children. One basis approach was that of *Universalism*, namely that one places complete faith in God's power and merciful love to carry through his plan of salvation. Ultimately, it means that hell and any other state of confinement, will give way to only heaven.

St. Augustine also addressed the destiny of such children. He could not reconcile Jesus' verdict that in the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46), there would be only heaven or hell with the Pelagian teaching that infants dying without baptism went to Limbo. (Limbo is from the Latin, meaning hem or border). This is the theological term applied to the place or state where those who died before Christ's redemption temporarily waited for deliverance, or the permanent place or state where children who die without baptism are deprived of the beatific vision.

Augustine's thinking and the thinking of many theologians of the Middle Ages was that such infants, because they possessed original sin on their souls, cannot be in heaven. Therefore they must be in hell but he does concede that their punishment is of a milder form.

We must remember that the church teaching on Limbo has not been clearly defined in any church document.

The Council of Trent defined that all human beings are born in the state of original sin and that this sin is removed by baptism, either actual or by desire. So the stance of the official teaching church has been one of neither approving nor rejecting the doctrine of limbo.

No matter what explanation we come up with, we must keep three things in mind. First of all, God is love and he freely created all human beings, including children, in order that they might all share in his eternal happiness, that they may come to know and love him.

Second, we must hold that Jesus died on the cross to save all human beings, including children and thirdly, we realize that we are condemned to punishment, not so much because of God's vindictive nature but by the individual, self-centered choices we make during our lifetime.

What is the Communion of Saints?

We talk about the "communion of saints" in the creed at church, what do we mean? A communion or community arises when people are brought together through a common interest. The deeper the interest, the more stable the community, the stronger the ties that bind it together.

One of St. Paul's favorite themes is that of the "body of Christ." (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Rom 12:4f; Eph. 5:30; Col. 2:19).

The early Church became more and more aware of their oneness as the Body of Christ through the Holy Spirit, which bound them together (Rom. 5:5' Eph. 4:4)

The doctrine of the Communion of Saints evolved during the first five centuries of Christianity. It was based on the belief that death does not separate us from our loved ones, the apostles, great saints, martyrs, etc. All, whether living or dead, are joined their head, Jesus and to each member. The saints and angels have a power, which is Christ's power, residing within them, to intercede, not only for all of us on earth but for all those in need of healing after their earthly death.

The literature from apostolic times to the present shows a constant belief in the practice of praying and fasting in intercession for individual persons, churches and all humankind. From this came the further development of the doctrine of the communion of saints.

This basic belief that Christians are able to pray and intercede for one another touched other teachings, namely the efficacy of prayer, the union between the suffering and the saved.

We implore the intercession of the dead because we believe they are even more alive and more loving and so more open to helping us. Because of who Mary is in God's great plan, she holds a special place for us. Because she is full of grace, we ask her to pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says,

“It is not merely by the title of example that we cherish the memory of those in heaven; we seek, rather, that by this devotion to this exercise of the fraternal charity the union of the whole Church in the Spirit may be strengthened. Exactly as Christian communion among our fellow pilgrims brings us closer to Christ, so our communion with the saints joins us to Christ, from whom its fountain and head issues all grace, and the life of the People of God itself.”

- Catechism of the Catholic Church # 957

Immortality

Age cannot reach me where the veils of God have shut me in,
For me the myriad births of stars and suns do but begin,
And here how fragrantly there blows to me the holy breath,
Sweet from the flowers and stars and the hearts of men, from life and death.

We are not old, O heart, we are not old, the breath that blows
The soul aflame is still a wandering wind that comes and goes;
And the stirred heart with sudden raptured life a moment glows.

A moment here – a bulrush's brown head in a gray rain,
A moment there – a child drowned and a heart quickened with pain;
The name of Death, the blue deep heaven, the scent of the salt sea,
The spicy grass, the honey robbed from the wild bee.

Awhile we walk the world on its wide roads and narrow ways,
And they pass by, the countless shadowy groups of nights and days;
We know them not, O happy heart, for you and I
Watch where within a slow dawn lightens up another sky.

- Susan Mitchell (1866-1926)

End of the World

1. Do Catholics believe in the Second Coming of Christ?

Yes.

2. What does the expression in the Creed mean: From thence He shall come to judge the both the living and the dead?

Those words refer to the general judgment of the whole human race at the end of the world. God has revealed that, in due time, our Lord will come in great power and majesty to judge all humankind.

3. If this is true, we should not believe that a person is judged the moment he dies.

That does not follow. God judges each individual soul as it leaves this world. So Scripture tells us, "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Some will say, "If each soul has its particular judgment as it goes from this world, then why the general judgment of all collectively at the end?" There are many reasons for that.

- The first and particular judgment is for us; the second and general judgment is for God, whose justice will then be manifested to all creatures.
- Again, at the particular judgment the soul only, in a state of separation from the body, is judged; at the last judgment the souls of men will be reunited to their bodies, and they will experience a reiteration of their judgment in their complete personalities, and the bodies in which men have served God or sinned will share in the happiness or misery which is the lot of the soul.
- Furthermore, man is not only individual; he is essentially a social being. We live in society, a common life in which mutual influences, good and evil, are constantly in evidence. Now a common life should have a common ending. Our Lord tells us that there is nothing hidden which shall not be revealed. For wise reason time keeps its secrets; but time, at the end, will reveal all to all under the eyes of the great Judge. And all that God has done or permitted will be justified before the whole universe. Those who have died in the grace and friendship of God will find this general judgment to their glory and happiness. But those who have died at enmity with God will find it to their disgrace and misery. So God will triumph either in His mercy or in His justice.

4. Scientists 'say that the universe will last for millions of years, gradually losing energy till all life is frozen out.

If we allow for purely natural factors that is most probable. That is, the universe will probably go on for millions of years, gradually losing energy, provided God Himself does not step in and bring the existing state of affairs to an end in a way beyond the comprehension of men.

5. **Is it after this scientific conclusion that the Day of Judgment is expected?**

The Catholic Church teaches that Christ will certainly come again to judge the living and the dead and that will end the present era as far as mankind is concerned. And that will be before all life is frozen out from this globe. When it shall occur is not known to men and not included in the teachings of the Church. Also, while this coming of Christ will affect the human beings who inhabit the earth, the Church has nothing to say as to what will happen to the planet itself. It may go on cooling till it is as cold as the moon, or perhaps be destroyed by some cataclysm. That all rests with God, and matters little to men whose fate will long have been decided before such possibilities can materialize. The scientists would say: Judging by the apparent natural laws we observe, and abstracting from any untoward and un-supernatural intervention by God, we think the world will go on for millions of years, and eventually grow so cold as to freeze all life out of existence. If you ask them: But is there any likelihood of a supernatural intervention by God? They would reply: Speaking purely as natural scientists, we don't know. Natural science is not competent to speak on such a subject positively. Christ has revealed that such an intervention will take place at some future time, and we scientists cannot say that it will not happen, nor can we say that there are any reasonable grounds for refusing to believe in the authority and capacity of Christ to fulfill His predictions.

6. **St. Paul speaks of "That Day," of the crown of justice laid up for him, and of the blessed hope which looks forward to the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Savior Jesus Christ. When will this appearing take place?**

There are two judgments, the particular judgment of each individual, which takes place immediately after death; and the general judgment which will occur at the end of the world.

In the particular judgment, each soul will answer for its life on earth, and will be rewarded or punished accordingly. St. Paul knew that our Lord is not outdone in generosity, and after all his labors and sufferings, knew that he could confidently expect a crown of justice to be received as soon as his life was over. Therefore, he said, "Having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, a thing by far the better" (Philippians 1:23). The day of each one's death, therefore, is "That Day" from the viewpoint of the individual's eternal fate.

But the glorious appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ refers to the general judgment of all mankind at the end of the world, when Christ will come in all His majesty and power to manifest His triumph in the sight of men and angels. When this final consummation of the ages will occur no man can say. God has revealed that it will occur, but purposely refrained from revealing when. Jesus, therefore, said expressly, "Of that day and hour no one knoweth, no not the angels of heaven, but the Father alone" (Matthew 24:36).

7. **What did our Lord mean when He said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but My word shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35)?**

He primarily meant that His teachings were eternally true. It is as if He said: Though all else should fail, My doctrine can never fail. It will last forever.

8. **Will this earth ever be destroyed?**

Certainly in its present form and structure. Our Lord Himself has said that the heavens and the earth will pass away, but that His words never fail. In speaking to men, He was speaking of the heavens and of the earth as they saw them, meaning that things as they are now will cease to be so. We are told that all is to end in a vast cataclysm, both

material and moral. An extraordinary transformation will come over the whole material universe, and Christ, who came as an infant in mercy, will appear as a Judge to administer justice.

9. Will heaven pass away?

No. Our Lord was referring to the heavens, not to heaven as a state of eternal happiness. The visible universe as we see it now is in a state of transition. At least in its present formation it will pass away sooner or later, even by merely natural processes. But apart from this, the final coming of Christ will mean a shock to the existing visible order of things, and a vast change in it. Through all such changes, however, the doctrine of Christ remains unchangeably true, and all that He has taught will most certainly be verified.

10. What is meant by a new heavens and a new earth?

Even were the present universe left as it is, every soul that goes out of this life must see a new heavens and a new earth, if only because it will see things from a completely different aspect. Science tells us that the atoms and molecules of even the most rigid objects are in motion and at an incalculable speed. If the soul could get a truly scientific vision of the dance of atoms and molecules, and of the very stars, it would certainly see the universe under a very new aspect. But the change to come should not only be attributed to the changed condition of the soul. There will be a change in the actual scheme of earth and the heavens. There will be a new order, and a perfect adaptation of all things to a new end. Christ will be the organizer, as He has organized the Church and humanity. It is quite possible that all may be spiritualized and submitted to the elect, the elect to Christ, and Christ to God. Thus, St. Paul himself says that all creation waits for the manifestation of the children of God. Exactly what will occur, of course, is a mystery, which God has not deigned to reveal. But He has revealed the fact that Christ will come again in some glorious way to judge mankind. And we Catholics accept that fact on the authority of God's word.

11. What is meant by the New Jerusalem?

The very word Jerusalem means City of Peace. The New Jerusalem means the finally established and spiritual Kingdom of Christ, in which He will reign in eternal happiness and peace with those who are saved.

12. Let us suppose that the world has ended, and that there are some souls in heaven and some souls in hell.

Some will be in heaven, and some will be in hell.

13. On the one hand some will be enjoying unlimited happiness; on the other, suffering unlimited misery.

Neither the happiness nor the misery will be unlimited.

14. What do you suppose God will have got out of it?

I do not go in for suppositions. I know that God will get this much out of it. The very goodness which diffused itself generously in the creation of human beings will be acknowledged and proclaimed by those human beings whether they are in heaven or in hell. And that, not because it will be of any essential advantage to God, but because it is right that it should be so. You will not find it difficult to conceive this of those who attain heaven. Your difficulty will be to conceive it of those who lose their souls and go to hell. Let me try to help you. God's goodness not only gave man the gift of existence, but also the dignity of a free will by which he would be master of his own destiny. If man,

however, yields to pride, rebels against God, and dies still obstinately refusing to make his peace with God, then unrepentant pride will by its very eternal punishment proclaim the eternal rights of the Supreme Good to be loved above all things. Hell is a proclamation of those rights, exemplifying as it will that supreme hatred of evil, which is a necessary consequence of a supreme love of good. Love and hatred are really one and the same movement in reference to opposite objects. For evil is opposed to the good, and hatred is the reaction of love for what is good against the evil opposed to that good. Were there no love for good there would be no hatred of evil. And hell, by the very grimness of its penalties upon evil, will proclaim for eternity that the good should have been loved.

15. How much better off will God be than if the thing had never taken place?

Creation, and the consequence of creation, could not add to God's perfection and happiness. But God is just and will vindicate the rights of justice. Meantime, you have been created. And your chief concern is to fulfill the will of the God who made you. Instead of asking how much better off God will be whether you save your soul or lose it, the practical problem for you is to ask how much better off you will be if you save your soul and avoid hell. So Christ puts the question to you, as to all of us, "For what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul" (Matthew 16:26). You cannot ask yourself that question too often.

16. If it had to be, to satisfy Himself in some way, then He is deficient in some respect.

We cannot say that God had to create anybody. God was free to create or not to create. Granted, however, that He freely chose to create you, endowing you with intelligence, free will, and immortality of soul, then if you abuse the gifts God have you, use them to offend God rather than to serve God, and die without being reconciled to God, God will have to send you to hell. And He will do this to vindicate the claims of justice. Far from this implying a deficiency in God, there would be a deficiency in Him if, having given the moral law, He did not vindicate that law. Men too easily assume that God's dominion over creatures must not under any circumstances involve inconvenience for those creatures. Their liberty must be supreme, even if God is to be deprived of the liberty to appoint the moral laws regulating their conduct. Men must be allowed to flout those laws, and do as they like, and even God has no right to threaten retribution. So men deny hell, and if they acknowledge religion at all, it is to be allowed no office but to soothe and comfort them. Genuine love of God casts out fear. But men want to cast out fear, without bothering about the love of God. And then they talk about a deficiency in God if they are not allowed to do so.

17. If God is really the All in All, it is rank foolishness to imagine that He would be complimented in any sense by the scheme you attribute to Him.

It is not I who attribute any scheme to God. I declare what He was revealed to be the eternal counterparts of the good and evil not only possible, but so evident in human life. And if we take the three great motives of conduct - what is useful, what is pleasant, and what is right -- I have already said that God's treatment of creatures will not be based upon utility or pleasure, but upon what is right and just in itself. And the rank foolishness is to imagine that God must abandon what is right and just because a creature in rebellion against Him whines about the sacrilegious violation of its own utility and pleasure.

18. New Agers talk a lot about nirvana. What exactly is nirvana, and how does it compare with the Christian idea of heaven?

In Buddhism, nirvana is the final state the soul reaches on its journey through different lifetimes. These lifetimes are pictured as a series of lamps, one being lit by another, until the final lamp goes out. The word "nirvana" means "going out" or "extinguishing."

According to Buddhists, our desires and cravings are what keep the process of reincarnation going. By eliminating all desires it is possible to escape the cycle of rebirth. When a person manages to extinguish all his desires, he reaches a state of nirvana and is said to be a saint.

When a saint dies he enters nirvana proper, in which he loses his identity as a distinct individual. Buddha compared the question "Does a saint survive his death?" to the question "Where does a flame go when it is blown out?" Both questions are thought to be intrinsically unanswerable. Neither a dead saint nor a blown-out flame have individual identities anymore.

Nirvana is different from the Christian idea of heaven. Nirvana is a state of desirelessness; heaven is a state of having one's most fundamental desire (for God) fulfilled. Nirvana is a state of ultimate apathy and indifference, heaven of ultimate joy and fulfillment. Paradoxically, Buddhists regard nirvana, the state of desirelessness, as the most desirable state.

Nirvana also differs from heaven because it suggests one will eternally lose his body and his individual identity, while Christians claim they will keep both of them eternally.

19. What about Purgatory?

In 1769 James Boswell had this exchange with Samuel Johnson:

Boswell: "What do you think, Sir, of purgatory, as believed by the Roman Catholics?"

Johnson: "Why, Sir, it is a very harmless doctrine. They are of the opinion that the generality of mankind are neither so obstinately wicked as to deserve everlasting punishment, nor so good as to merit being admitted into the society of blessed spirits; and therefore that God is graciously pleased to allow a middle state, where they may be purified by certain degrees of suffering. You see, Sir, there is nothing unreasonable in this."

Boswell: "But then, Sir, their Masses for the dead?"

Johnson: "Why, Sir, if it be at once established that there are souls in purgatory, it is as proper to pray for them, as for our brethren of mankind who are yet in this life."

Although Johnson was no "Catholic," he recognized that the doctrine of purgatory is not at odds with other tenets of Christianity. In fact, as he may have known, there is considerable scriptural warrant for it, even if the doctrine is not explicitly set out in the Bible.

The doctrine can be stated briefly. Purgatory is a state of purification, where the soul which has fully repented of its sins, but which has not fully expiated them, has removed the last elements of uncleanness. In purgatory all remaining love of self is transformed into love of God.

At death one's soul goes to heaven, if it is completely fit for heaven; to purgatory, if it is not yet ready for heaven, but not worthy of condemnation; or to hell, if it is completely unfit for heaven. But purgatory is a temporary state. Everyone who enters it will get to heaven, and, after the last soul leaves purgatory for heaven on Judgment Day, purgatory will cease to exist. There will remain only heaven and hell.

20. **What about Two Judgments**

When we die, we undergo what is called the particular, or individual, judgment. Scripture says that "it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27). We are judged instantly and receive our reward, for good or ill. We know at once what our final destiny will be. At the end of time, though, when the last people have died, there will come the general judgment which the Bible refers to, for example, in Matthew 25:31-32: "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." In it all our sins will be publicly revealed (Luke 12:2-5).

Augustine said, in *The City of God*, that "temporary punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by others after death, by others both now and then; but all of them before that last and strictest judgment." It is between the particular and general judgments, then, that the soul expiates its sins: "I tell you, you will never get out till you have paid the very last copper." (Luke 12:59).

Fundamentalists are fond of saying the Catholic Church "invented" the doctrine of purgatory, but they have lots of trouble saying just when. Most professional anti-Catholics--the ones who make their living attacking "Romanism"--seem to place the blame on Pope Gregory the Great, who reigned from 590-604.

But that hardly accounts for the request of Monica, mother of Augustine, who asked her son, in the fourth century, to remember her soul in his Masses. This would make no sense if she thought her soul would not be able to be helped by prayers, if she thought there was no possibility of being somewhere other than heaven or hell.

Still less does the ascription of the doctrine to Gregory account for the graffiti in the catacombs, where the earliest Christians, during the persecutions of the first three centuries, recorded prayers for the dead. Indeed, some of the earliest non-inspired Christian writings, like the Acts of Paul and Thecla and the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity (both written second century) refer to the Christian practice of praying for the dead. Such prayers would have been made only if Christians believed in purgatory, even if they did not use that name for it.

20. **Why No Protests?**

No, the historical argument breaks down. Whenever a date is set for the "invention" of purgatory, you can point to something to show the doctrine was already old many years before that date. Besides, if at some point the doctrine was pulled out of a clerical hat, why does ecclesiastical history record no protest against it?

A study of the history of doctrines shows that Christians in the first centuries were up in arms (sometimes quite literally) if anyone suggested the least change in beliefs. They were extremely conservative people, their test of the truth of a doctrine being, Was this believed by our ancestors? Was it handed on from the apostles? Surely belief in purgatory would be considered a great change, if it had not been believed from the first--so where are the records of protests?

Well, they don't exist. There is no hint at all, in the oldest writings available to us (or in later ones, for that matter) that "true believers" in the immediate post-apostolic years complained about purgatory as a novel doctrine. They must have understood that the oral teaching of the apostles, what Catholics call Tradition, and the Bible not only did not contradict the doctrine, but endorsed it.

It is no wonder, then, that professional anti-Catholics spend little time on the history of the belief. (Who can blame them for avoiding an unpleasant subject?) They prefer to claim, instead, that the Bible speaks only of heaven and hell. Wrong again. It speaks quite plainly of a third place, where Christ went after his death, the place commonly called the Limbo of the Fathers, where the just who had died before the Redemption were waiting for heaven to be opened to them (I Pet. 3:19). This place was neither heaven nor hell.

Even if the Limbo of the Fathers was not purgatory, its existence shows that a temporary, intermediate state is not contrary to Scripture. Look at it this way. If the Limbo of the Fathers was purgatory, then this one verse directly teaches the existence of purgatory. If the Limbo of the Fathers was a different temporary state, then the Bible at least says such a state can exist. It at least proves there can be more than just heaven and hell.

Sometimes Protestants object that Jesus told the thief on the cross that on the very day the two of them died, they would be together in paradise (Luke 23:43), which they read as a denial of purgatory.

In actuality, this argument boomerangs on the Fundamentalist and it supports purgatory by proving the existence of at least some state other than heaven and hell, since Jesus did not go to heaven on the day he died. Peter tells us that he "went and preached to the spirits in prison" (I Peter 3:19), and after his resurrection, Christ himself declared: "I have not yet ascended to the Father" (John 20:17). Thus at that time paradise was located in some third state besides heaven and besides hell.

21. "Purgatory Not in Scripture"

Some Fundamentalists also charge, as though it actually proved something, "The word purgatory is nowhere found in Scripture." This is true, of course, but it's hardly the point. The words Trinity and Incarnation aren't in Scripture either, yet those doctrines are clearly taught in it. Likewise, Scripture teaches that purgatory exists, even if it doesn't use that word and even if I Peter 3:19 refers to a place other than purgatory.

Christ refers to the sinner who "will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt. 12:32). This implies expiation can occur after death. Paul tells us that at the day of judgment each man's work will be tried. This trial happens after death. And what happens if a man's work fails the test? "He will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (I Cor 3:15). Now this loss, this penalty, can't refer to consignment to hell, since no one is saved there; and heaven can't be meant, since there is no suffering ("fire") there. The Catholic doctrine of Purgatory alone explains this passage. Notice that Paul is making four distinct points here. First, this purifying judgment of the works is done after death ("each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it" [v. 13]--the "Day" spoke of here is the day one dies and stands before God to be judged [cf. Heb. 9:27]). Second, the person going through this someone who dies in the state of grace, meaning, they are in a state of friendship with Christ ("For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw . . ." [v. 11-12]). Third, this purification involves suffering ("If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss ... [v. 15]). And four, when this purification

Then, of course, there is the Bible's approval of prayers for the dead: "In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the dead to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin" (2 Macc. 12:43-46). Prayers are not needed by those in heaven, and they can't help those in hell.

That means some people must be in a third place, at least temporarily. This verse is so clear on the existence of purgatory that at the time of the Reformation, Protestants had to cut the book out of their Bibles in which it is found out of the Bible in order to avoid accepting the doctrine (Luther, for example also wanted to cut out James, Hebrews, and Revelation).

The fact is that prayer for the dead and the consequent doctrine of purgatory have been part of the true religion since before the time of Christ. Not only can we show it was practiced by the Jews of the time of the Maccabees, but it has even been retained by orthodox Jews today, who recite a prayer known as the Mourner's Qaddish for eleven months after the death of a loved one so that the loved one may be purified. It was not Catholic who added the doctrine of purgatory, but Protestants who, at the time of the Reformation, rejected a doctrine that had always been believed by Jews and Christians--and they cut out a book of the Bible to justify their rejection of it.

22. **Why Go To Purgatory?**

Why would anyone go to purgatory? To be cleansed. "But nothing unclean shall enter [heaven]" (Rev. 21:27). Anyone who has not completely expiated his sins--that is, not just had them forgiven, but "made up" for them in this life--is, to some extent, "unclean." Through repentance he may have gained the grace needed to qualify for heaven (which is to say, his soul is spiritually alive), but that's not enough. He needs to be cleansed completely.

Fundamentalists claim, as an article in Jimmy Swaggart's magazine, *The Evangelist*, put it, that "Scripture clearly reveals that all the demands of divine justice on the sinner have been completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It also reveals that Christ has totally redeemed, or purchased back, that which was lost. The advocates of a purgatory (and the necessity of prayer for the dead) say, in effect, that the redemption of Christ was incomplete.... It has all been done for us by Jesus Christ, there is nothing to be added or done by man."

It is entirely correct to say that Christ accomplished all of our salvation for us on the cross. But that does not settle the question of how this redemption is applied to us. Scripture reveals that it is applied to us over the course of time through, among other things, the process of sanctification through which the Christian is made holy. Sanctification involves suffering (Rom. 5:3-5), and purgatory is simply the "finishing touches" stage of sanctification that some of us need to undergo before we enter heaven--required since "nothing unclean can ever enter heaven." Purgatory is the final phase of Christ applying to us the purifying redemption that he accomplished for us by his death on the cross.

23. **Is there No Contradiction?**

The Fundamentalist resistance to the biblical doctrine of purgatory presumes there is a contradiction between the Redemption and our suffering in expiation for our sins. There isn't, whether that suffering is in this life or in the next. Paul said he rejoices "in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col. 1:24). Ronald Knox explained this passage by noting that "the obvious meaning is that Christ's sufferings, although fully satisfactory on behalf of our sins, leave us under a debt of honor, as it were, to repay them by sufferings of our own."

Paul didn't imply there was something lacking in the Redemption, that Christ couldn't pull it off on his own, and no Fundamentalist misreads Colossians 1:24 that way. Analogously, it is not contrary to the Redemption to say we must suffer for our sins; it is a matter of justice. We can suffer here, or hereafter, or in both places, as Augustine wrote.

But some say, "God doesn't demand expiation after having forgiven sins." Tell that to King David. When he repented, God sent Nathan with a message for him: "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die" (2 Sam. 12:13-14). Even after David's sin was forgiven, he had to undergo expiation. Can we expect less? Fundamentalists think the answer is Yes, because Christ removed the need for any expiation on our part, but the Bible nowhere teaches that.

The main reason for such strong opposition to purgatory is that it can't coexist with Fundamentalism's notion of salvation. For Fundamentalists, salvation comes by "accepting Christ as one's personal Savior." Aside from that one act of acceptance, no acts--meaning no good deeds and no sins--make any difference with respect to one's salvation.

If you are "born again" in the Fundamentalists' sense, you are already saved, and nothing can keep you from heaven. If you are not "born again," you are damned. In Fundamentalism's scheme of things, purgatory would be superfluous, since cleansing before entering heaven would be unnecessary, on the notion that every soul is unclean and that God ignores the uncleanness by "covering" the soul's sinfulness.

24. **What is this about Nothing Unclean?**

Purgatory makes sense only if there is a requirement that a soul not just be declared to be clean, but actually be clean. After all, if a guilty soul is merely "covered," if its sinful state still exists but is officially ignored, then, for all the protestations that may be given, it is still a guilty soul. It is still unclean. A man who has not bathed in a month is not cleansed merely by putting on clean clothes; clean clothes won't remove the dirt. Likewise, "covering" a soul won't purify it; its dirty state is merely hidden from view. Catholic theology takes literally the notion that "nothing unclean shall enter heaven." From this it is inferred that a dirty soul, even if "covered," remains a dirty soul and isn't fit for heaven. It needs to be cleansed or "purged" of its dirtiness. The purging comes in purgatory. Indeed, the necessity of the purging is taught in other passages of Scripture, such as 2 Thessalonians 2:13, which declares that God chose us "to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit." Sanctification is thus not an option, something that may or may not happen before one gets into heaven. It is an absolute requirement, as Hebrews 12:14 states that we must strive "for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

25. **Money, Money, Money**

There is another argument commonly used against purgatory. It's that the Catholic Church makes money off the doctrine. Without purgatory, the claim goes, the Church would go broke. Any number of anti-Catholic books, from the tamest to the most bizarre, claim the Church owes the majority of its wealth to this doctrine. But the numbers just don't add up.

When a Catholic requests a memorial Mass for the dead--that is, a Mass said for the benefit of someone in purgatory--it is customary to give the parish priest a stipend, on the principle that the laborer is worth his hire (Luke 10:7) and those who preside at the altar share the altar's offerings (I Cor. 9:13-14). In the United States, a stipend is commonly around five dollars, but the indigent do not have to pay anything, and no parish maintains a "schedule of fees." A few people, of course, freely offer more. On average, though, a parish can expect to receive something less than five dollars by way of stipend for each memorial Mass said. These Masses are usually said on weekdays.

Furthermore, this money goes to the parish priest, and priests are only allowed to receive one such stipend per day. The bottom -line is: No one gets rich on five dollars a day, and certainly not the Church, which does not receive the money, anyway.

But look at what happens on a Sunday. There are often hundreds of people at Mass. In a crowded parish, there may be thousands. Many families and individuals deposit five dollars or more into the collection basket; others deposit less. A few give much more. A parish might have four or five or six Masses on a Sunday. The total from the Sunday collections far outstrips the paltry amount received from the memorial Masses. The facts are that no Catholic parish gets rich off Mass stipends--or even gets much at all.

26. **Who Decides?**

In interpreting the Bible, in determining whether the doctrine of purgatory contradicts or confirms what is found in its pages, we come upon a recurring question: "Who is to decide?" It hardly suffices to say, "Let the Bible itself decide," since it is the interpretation of the Bible that is in question and no book, not even the Bible, can be self-interpreting. We either interpret it ourselves, using our own resources, or we listen to the word of a divinely-appointed interpreter, if one has been established.

Catholics hold that Christ empowered the Church to give infallible interpretations of the Bible. "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:12-13). This Jesus said to the apostles. Later, the apostle Paul taught that the Church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15).

This takes us, of course, to the rule of faith--Is it to be found in the Bible alone or in the Bible and Apostolic Tradition, as handed down by the Church (2 Thess. 2:15, 2 Tim. 2:2)? That is a theme that must be handled elsewhere, but the reader should be aware that the controversy about purgatory is really a controversy about much more than purgatory.

Purgatory has just been a convenient battleground. The ultimate disagreement concerns the doctrine of sola scriptura. If Fundamentalists understood why that doctrine won't wash--why, in fact, it's contrary to Scripture--they would have little difficulty in accepting purgatory and other Catholic beliefs which are not explicitly set forth in the Bible.

Life After Death

Rev. Mark Connolly

One of the greatest lines in any novel or story is that written in the work of Lourdes and the story of St. Bernadette. Concerning Lourdes, the author said to those who have faith, no explanation is necessary; to those who do not have faith, no explanation will satisfy. And this rhetoric can be applied to the subject of life after this life is over. The subject of death and resurrection, the subject of what kind of a lifestyle we will have in the place called heaven is always going to be a mystery to us as long as we are on the other side of heaven, namely earth.

This subject of life after death has been debated for centuries. We have the guarantee of Christ that he had to prepare a place for those who served him on earth. He told us that he would not leave us orphans and that if we believed in him, even though we might be dead, that he would raise us up on the last day. Scripture is filled with reminders of a life after this one on earth. "God gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life "(John 3:16). Everyone who believes has eternal life.

Reading and researching this subject of life after life on earth you soon find out that those who believe in the life and teaching of Christ, those who are anchored to God and live by faith

and trust, do not have too many problems with this subject. Those who do not believe in Christ, those who do not have that sense of trust and faith in Him and his teachings, are always going to have problems with this subject of life after life on earth.

In the field of scripture and theology, this subject has been discussed for centuries. For the group that maintains that there is not enough evidence to prove a life after this one, there are also just as many that vehemently talk about the Heaven and the eternal life that awaits them.

Outside the field of Scripture and theology, there are many who in their own personal lives have come to the conclusion that there is a happier and better life than the one we now have. Edward Albee, the author of the work "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe", talked about a place he would go to after his life was over. He said he would leave his friends for greater friends. He would leave this home for a better home. And one day, with the personal revelation he received from the Scriptures, he would go out beyond the stars, out beyond the planet Mars into the Kingdom of God.

Now there is no questions he did not have the Semitic language background needed to a meaningful research on the Bible. He probably had very little formal theological knowledge necessary for formal study of the Bible. But he had a revelation from God that gave him an insight into the future life he was going to have with God and that was all he needed. There is no question about the need for greater Scriptural and theological studies on the subject of the afterlife.

If you read the Divine Comedy by Dante, he told us that the Eternal life was inexpressible. It was so beautiful, he wrote,

"High phantasy lost power and here broke off.
Yet, as a wheel moves smoothly,
free from jars
My will and my desire were turned by love,
The love that moves the sun and the other stars."

Karl Jung knew that this problem of life after death had a sad influence on many of his patients especially those who had no sense of belief. He said that because so many had no answer to this overwhelming problem of life after death that their lives often seems "meaningless" to them. Jung made it very clear that we became sick when we ignore these hints of another world and another life. He expressed his knowledge that our lives find fulfillment in a non-physical dimension and that we must prepare now for the steps to come. Death, he suggested, is actually a goal towards which we can strive and shrinking away from it is something unhealthy and abnormal which robs the second half of life of its purpose.

Anyone reading this article can fundamentally do what I did in writing it. Reading and research, coming forth with all kinds of opinions, might give us a greater insight into the subject of life beyond this earth. But the reality of life after death is not only what you discover in reading and research. The great reality of this problem is your trust, your faith and hope in a Christ who could never deceive.

When he told us that he was the resurrection and the life and that if we believed we would have eternal life, he was giving us an answer to this age-old problem of life after earth.

What can be said of this problem is that which was said of Lourdes, for those who believe, no explanation is necessary; to those who do not believe, no explanation is satisfying.

Poems on Immortality

Death, be not proud

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death; nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow;
And soonest our best men with thee do go
Rest of their bones, and souls' delivery!
Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt die.
-- John Donne (1573-1631)

From Intimations of Immortality

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness, And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.
- William Wordsworth (1770-1850)