

A SYMPOSIUM ON

*Life and Death: A Study of the
Christian Hope*

THE Committee on Christian Faith of the United Church of Canada has recently published a study booklet on the ultimate issues of human destiny, under the title *Life and Death: a Study of the Christian Hope*. This booklet has received a good deal of publicity, much of it misleading, and a good deal of criticism, much of it uninformed. Our Editorial Committee is glad to offer our readers a symposium by distinguished representatives of four Canadian churches, as a contribution to a balanced assessment of a significant document.

E.R.F.

I

Professor E. R. Dodds, in his Sather Lectures on *The Greeks and the Irrational*, remarks that "there is no domain where clear thinking encounters stronger resistance than when we try to think about death." Inherited notions, the traditional ideas of the society in which we live, are discarded or modified only with the greatest reluctance. Wishful thinking, of course, plays a great part in inhibiting clear and honest thinking. Even more, the mind is all too often paralyzed by the terror of the unknown, intensified by feelings of guilt, partly conscious, partly unconscious, sometimes reasonable, but all the more powerful in proportion as they are unreasonable—

"the dread of something after death,

The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will;

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Thus conscience does make cowards of us all" (*Hamlet*, Act III, Scene I).

In this pamphlet, the Committee on Christian Faith of the United Church of Canada has tried to help us to do some clear thinking on this subject. There is no attempt here to lay down definitions of official doctrine, nor yet to survey contemporary opinion among members of the United Church. We have before us the attempt of a group of serious and competent ministers and scholars to give sensible answers, in terms of fundamental Christianity, if not always in terms of a literal interpretation of Holy Scripture, to the questions that people ask about death and the life after death. "What happens when we die?" "Is there a Purgatory?" "What do we mean by Heaven?" "What do we mean by Hell?" "What is the Last Judgment?" "Will Christ come again?" "How are we to interpret the thought of Christ's

reign on earth?" These are a few of the thirty-odd questions which the Committee has formulated, and used as the framework for the presentation of its contributions to our thinking.

The answers will not seem radical except to those who still cling to the fallacy that Scripture alone gives unequivocal and final answers to all these questions, and those who imagine that the Christian religion stands or falls with the doctrine of eternal punishment in hell. The notion of hell as a region where sinners suffer eternal punishment for the sins which they have committed on earth is not in fact a Biblical doctrine, except that it has left a few traces in the New Testament (not in the Old Testament). "Hell is undoubtedly a Greek invention," says Professor Martin Nilsson, the venerable Swedish scholar who is our leading authority in the field of Greek religion. It would be very strange indeed if in the New Testament, a collection of twenty-seven Greek books written between 50 and 150 A.D., there were not occasional traces of this Greek notion of the after life. The most vivid pictures of hell, however, are found, not in the canonical books of the New Testament, but (leaving pagan writings out of account) in apocryphal writings such as the Apocalypse of Peter; and the ghastly mediaeval descriptions of hell, which find their most magnificent expression in Dante's *Inferno*, are not drawn from the New Testament at all, but from apocryphal writings and pagan sources, with a rich accretion from the torture-chambers of mediaeval prison-houses. Those who have taken most offence at the Committee's modest efforts to offer a reasonable interpretation of the essential ideas underlying the hell-symbol appear to base their objections on a naively material conception of existence in the life to come. We have here a striking example of the capacity of people to avoid clear thinking about death and the life after death. What has a body which has been eaten by worms to fear from the fire? Is the "body" in which the dead rise to be conceived spatially, and the hell or heaven to which it goes to be conceived as located in a specific quarter of the created universe? If flesh and blood do not inherit the Kingdom of God, as St. Paul says (I Cor. 15:50), it is equally true that flesh and blood do not enter into a place of punishment; yet these naive ideas of hell presuppose punishments which are only appropriate to a body of flesh and blood.

Now it must be kept in mind that while St. Paul makes a noble effort to suggest what the "spiritual body" of the resurrection will be like (though even this is expressed rather in terms of its *unlikeness* to the "natural" body of flesh and blood), neither he nor any other New Testament writer makes any effort to teach anything about the mode of existence of the impenitent. "They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might," says St. Paul (II Thess. 1:9). "If any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire," we read in the Apocalypse of John (Rev. 20:15). But the thought here is clearly of final destruction, not of continuance in another kind of body which will be capable of suffering

punishment everlastingly. We cannot even imagine a Christian writer speculating about the kind of "body" in which the impenitent would be housed, in a way at all comparable to that in which St. Paul unfolds his thoughts about the "spiritual body" of "those who have fallen asleep in Christ" (I Cor. 15:12ff.).

To this reader, the discussion of the question: "Is there a Purgatory?" seemed less satisfactory than most of the book. If we are to embark on controversy with the Roman Catholics, we ought to formulate more clearly the doctrines to which we take exception. It is not indicated here that the Roman doctrine of Purgatory is integrally connected with the penitential system of the Church, and it seems to be implied that any notion of penal (as distinct from disciplinary and cleansing) sufferings after death is incompatible with the doctrine that salvation is the gift of God and "contradicts the truth of justification (or forgiveness) by grace through faith" (p. 38). This seems to dismiss the doctrine of Purgatory altogether too easily. Without desiring in the least to defend the Roman doctrine, we might recall that forgiveness does not carry with it exemption from the penalties of sin in this life (cf. II Sam. 12:13-23), and if this be granted, we can hardly argue that the freeness of God's forgiveness is impaired by the exaction of penalties from the forgiven after death. It is not enough to say that "the Roman Catholic conception of Purgatory is not Biblical," since the Committee is itself going beyond the bare confines of that which is strictly Biblical; and if it is claimed that "it is contrary to Biblical teaching *and the Christian revelation*," the charge should be more amply substantiated.

But the further thought of the same chapter (c. VIII), once the Roman doctrine of Purgatory has been dismissed, raises "the possibility of discipline, cleansing and renewal after death" (p. 41). For some reason, which is not quite clear, there seems to be some objection to speaking of an "intermediate state." Yet it is said on another page (p. 39), that "the Christian . . . will not receive fulness of eternal life until the consummation of all things at the end of history"; and that "we are concerned here with the possibility of repentance, discipline and spiritual growth *between death and the End*" (p. 41; my italics). Such words as these seem to involve the notion of an "intermediate state" of the Christian believer between his death and his reception of "fulness of eternal life . . . at the end of history"; and we may be inclined to wonder that the authors of the booklet should boggle at the words when they lend countenance to the idea. In fact, it is only by a kind of *tour de force* that they can argue "that we should not think of this growth of the Christian as taking place in some temporary state or place, but as the continuation of the eternal life he enjoys on earth." For though it be in some sense a continuation of the same life, it is certainly a continuation *under different conditions*, and yet not under conditions which are to hold throughout eternity. The general thought is well expressed by Father Lionel Thornton. He points out that St. Paul, in Philippians 1:21, 23, makes "a classic statement of faith with regard to the Christian attitude towards death. It

consists of two sentences, in each of which death seems to be regarded as the gateway into a fuller form of the life in Christ. . . . It would appear, then, that death is not the end of our pilgrimage, but rather the gateway into a more advanced stage of that pilgrimage wherein some grave hindrances which at present hamper us have been removed." And he draws one further conclusion from St. Paul's statement. "If it places the departed souls in a position of advantage over those Christians who are still living the earthly life, it also, and with equal emphasis, indicates a continuity of pattern, in that both stages of the Christian pilgrimage are centred in Christ" (*Christ and the Church* [London: 1956], pp. 137-140).

Scripture alone does not give unequivocal and final answers to all our questions about death and the life after death and about the End of history and of time. Nor can we claim that Christian theology has developed a clear and consistent eschatology. The authors of this booklet are far from professing that they have succeeded in mapping all the uncharted territory. We may well feel grateful that they have approached the manifold questions reverently and thoughtfully, bringing to them a rich combination of theological competence and pastoral concern, and so have offered much wise and helpful guidance to us all.

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II

Two comments need to be made immediately. First of all, this is a study booklet. The intention is to summon the Church to study the matters raised because they are "worthy of study" by all Christians. Secondly, the central theme for this study is one to which Christian attention has not been called with anything like the urgency or the seriousness which it has plainly deserved.

Any study of the final destiny of man inevitably moves in two realms, the theological and the speculative. The questions raised by death, the life after death, heaven and hell, judgment, the "second coming," and the "coming of the kingdom of God" are of such a nature that they involve what we believe concerning God and our own ability to interpret our belief and relate it to our experience. We may have strongly cherished beliefs, but unless we can follow through their consequences with some measure of intellectual integrity, we shall not be able to test their validity or present their claim.

This is the task undertaken by the members of this theological committee. They have raised the question of the meaning of death, and the answers to this and to many related questions form the substance of their study outline.

There would seem to be three kinds of death, or, at least, three occasions when death takes place. There is the obvious and universal occasion when the physical organism, or the human body, ceases to function and the process of physical disintegration sets in. This is mortality, the end of physical

life. There is also the death which is "the symbol, the outward sign, of man's rebellion against God." This is the death of sin, "a death more radical than physical death." This, however, is not conterminous with mortality. Although many even die physically while in this condition of death, people can live in this "death."

There is yet a third kind of death of which the study speaks. On two occasions it is strongly emphasised that the essential death for the Christian is his Baptism. "From all this we can see that physical death determines nothing for the Christian except that he goes to 'be with Christ, which is far better.' His essential death is his Baptism, when he dies to self and sin. There he denies himself and declares for Christ. He gives himself up to Christ and his cause. He throws away his life for Christ. And then Christ gives it back, cleansed, renewed, transfigured and glorified!" (p. 27). Yet again, "in a sense death is already past for a Christian. His essential death is his death to sin. He dies at his baptism, at the time of his acceptance of Christ as Saviour and Lord and his renunciation of self and sin" (p. 39).

It is no exaggeration to say that for the vast majority of people the concepts of being dead in sin and of the essential death in baptism have little meaning or relevance. In their eyes death is what happens when a physical body permanently ceases to function and becomes a corpse. When they turn to the Church what they desire chiefly is an explanation, an appraisal of this experience which befalls all people, young and old, good and bad. Death is no respecter of age or of goodness, of intelligence or of stupidity. What does death mean? Does it involve anything more than can be seen—a permanent physical failure brought about by accident or sickness, disease or disaster, noble self-sacrifice or squalid self-indulgence?

In dealing with this enquiry the Commission does well to bring before its readers the other two deaths to which it refers, but what it says is singularly inadequate. It would seem as though the Commission were content to provide a Christian answer to the question of death in general, but it has not given anything like a full treatment of the fact that Jesus Christ died. This is the one fact which should have been examined more fully. The creed is explicit: "he was crucified, dead and buried." This is the authentic event. Moreover, when our Lord spoke to his own he affirmed again and again that the "Son of Man *must die*." It is not a question at the moment what he hoped to achieve through his death. It is the fact that he neither sought to evade death nor to make it out to be something which, in fact, it was not. Death was a cup which he would fain have dashed to the ground; but he did in fact die, and he was young and he was good. Does this death shed light upon every man's death? What can we say about death in the light of the death of Jesus Christ which could not be said had he not died?

It would appear as though this were the basic theological weakness of the whole study. Was death "a major crisis" in the life of Jesus Christ? Is this the meaning of "Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani"? If we account for his death in some other way, then we must go on to say from what death he was raised.

There is conclusive evidence to show that in his resurrection death—his and ours—was overcome. The grave was robbed of its victory and that which makes death really tragic, namely sin, was taken away. Death, then, as it was understood by the prophet of old and by most people who speak or think of it, was “swallowed up in victory.”

This is not to dismiss death as something unreal. There is a reality about the experience of death which no one can deny. But this Christian affirmation puts death in its true perspective. It belongs to the physical life of this world. Can we say that if man were not a “fallen creature” he would not be obliged to die? Would he enjoy deathless physical existence? Is it conceivable that the Incarnate Lord himself could have enjoyed in the flesh permanent, deathless existence? The answer is quite clear. We have no evidence that the physical structure of our body could continue in this world except within the bounds of death and decay. Under certain physical conditions of disease, sickness, disaster, hunger, storm and tempest, death is certain and unavoidable. This we know and this we have to recognise.

Into this world Jesus came. In this world he died, and the fact that he died was a true indication that God’s coming in person and pitching his tent among us was no fiction. “The Word became flesh” and went the way of all flesh, even to death. Henceforth we know that death awaits us all. Nevertheless, because Christ died and was raised from the dead, we can now say that God has acted decisively and victoriously. He has not taken away death. He has exposed the hollowness of the claims put forward on behalf of death and has demonstrated that he is the Sovereign Lord of Life and Death. This is basic to any enquiry into the final destiny of man.

In very informal language, man has to reckon with God. Man may live as though God were not. He cannot so die. “This night thy soul shall be required of thee,” and the hand that taps man on the shoulder is the hand of God. To know this is to cross the threshold into the mystery of death.

This then is where we begin. We do not begin with death as we normally speak of it. We do not even begin with our “death to sin” or with our essential death, even our baptism. (Incidentally, how United Churchmen can speak theologically of Baptism as they do in this Study Outline [pp. 27, 39], and practice ecclesiastically a baptism which makes impossible on the part of the baptised himself any of the deeds which they insist are involved in baptism is quite incomprehensible.) We do not proceed to discuss heaven and hell, purgatory and the possibility of growth in grace beyond the grave. We begin with Jesus Christ. No matter what we seek to illumine, our starting point as Christian apologists is with Jesus Christ.

What is the nature of the Christian hope? Christians are not Christians because they have a better version of the ancient Greek hope of the immortality of the soul or of the Marxist hope of the “classless society.” They are not saying anything distinctively Christian when they say what Moslem and Jew can say, albeit differently, about heaven and hell, judgment and resurrection. These (and to them may be added a belief in purgatory and

prayers for the dead) are not distinctively Christian doctrines. The Christian gospel may have modified some of them and even enriched their meaning, but the exclusive Christian doctrine about the future is the simple phrase, "From thence he shall come." The Christian hope is centred in Jesus Christ. His presence in this world has "made all things new." We know, however dimly, what God sought to do at the beginning and what He will do at the end, because of what he wrought in Jesus Christ. That which distinguishes the New Testament shape of things to come from all other outlooks on the future, whether Jewish or Gentile, ancient or modern, is the *parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ*. In other words, Christians look for the "coming" of One who is present, not for one who is absent. This is the only unification of outlook granted to the Christian. Because of the *parousia*, he does not concentrate on what happens to the individual soul and ignore the whole cosmic process, especially human history. In the Christian hope there is fulfilment both for the individual person and for the whole cosmic historical process. The end is God's return to man more than man's return to God. This is the heart of the gospel of grace and of love.

This is the reason why all other doctrines pertaining to judgment, immortality, purgatory, the millenium and other kindred issues are peripheral. They belong to the circumference of the Christian hope, but they are not distinctive of the Christian hope itself. This is an event and a meeting, rather than a state or a vision. Beyond the event and the meeting are the still unknown and limitless possibilities which God has prepared for those who love him.

There is only one further comment to be made, namely, that there is a closer connection between the Christian hope and the life of prayer and worship than would appear from this *Study*. One person, at least, would have welcomed a closer examination of the life of prayer and worship in a study of the essential realities of life and death as the Christian knows them.

We are greatly indebted to the members of this Committee, and it is to be hoped that a fuller presentation of the theological issues will be forthcoming.

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III

The popular press has marked this booklet with an unfortunate misunderstanding. It is not simply a plea for prayers for the dead and for the doctrine of universal salvation. Some treatment of both subjects is to be expected in any work that concerns life and death! Perhaps it is also to be expected that a contemporary treatment should be more sympathetic to both than our fathers could be. For we live in the age after the researches of Schweitzer and Dodd, after the challenging theme of the Evanston Assembly—and after the enforced universalism of world wars and nuclear fission and space flight.

Moreover, this is a *study* booklet, given "general approval" by the United Church General Council in May, 1959, as "worthy of study in the church." As such, it offers greater scope for suggestive comment than a more formal theological statement, although the latter would have been a concise and definitive document calling for study and decision in a way that this may not be able to match. For here is an expansive style of writing that seeks to raise the proper questions and not to give the precise answers, to offer lines of future study and not to lay down limits of belief.

The cutting edge of the debate which this work should initiate is the problem of language. To speak about the future, about *eschata* or "last things," is to use language that can be only oblique, indirect. For if all language is symbolic, theological language possesses a peculiar dimension of mystery about its symbolism, and this is evident particularly in its "descriptions" of last things. An Appendix, "Symbolism in relation to the interpretation of the Bible," explores this area, sacred to Oxford philosophers but vitally relevant to all theology. "True symbolism, while it suggests meaning, suggests also mystery, which is not merely the 'unknown' but the meaning that lies hidden, the fulness of meaning that is being revealed."

Such serious grappling with certain implications of linguistic analysis is wholly commendable. Yet in the text we find that truth is simply "bigger than language," so that we must get behind outward forms (p. 53). Here and elsewhere (pp. 80ff.) the term "symbolic" seems to mean "merely symbolic." Is this the old "essence of religion" or perhaps the new "kernel within mythology"? Certainly it is not that which a Reformed Church ought to make clearly central—the distinctive Biblical category of "sign" as the divine-human instrument of the Holy Spirit.

This is illustrated by the teaching on death. Here too, most helpful and necessary correctives are stated—the soul-body unity of man, the reality of death, as over against natural immortality of the soul, death as an enemy. Yet once again a certain ambiguity appears. Do we believe in life after death because of what heart and conscience say, along with science's evidence of orderliness and creative purpose (a moot point indeed!), as in chapter 3—or because of the resurrection of our Lord, as in chapter 4? Surely the latter is the only positive ground of this doctrine especially? But is it adequate to the reality of His new humanity to say simply that His presence to us now is "non-physical" (p. 82)? If Christ's own resurrection was not in some sense "physical," of what was the tomb "empty"?

Again, the apocalyptic doctrine of the Two Ages is treated in several places, without helping us to see their *overlapping* in Christ, who is the beginning of the New Age. Consequently the mystery and connection of the ascension of our Lord and the descent of the Holy Spirit are not clarified in this context. Neither is the relation between eschatology and liturgy, nor the grounding of last things (postdestination) in first things (predestination). Perhaps more serious is a failure to close with the millennial errors which trouble our people, and to which this is hardly an antidote!

As to prayers for the dead, such intercession (p. 59) is not the crux, but is rather a consequence of chapters 8 and 9. The first of these rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, but suggests that "the life after death may be one of growth in grace and progress towards perfection" (p. 37). The difference is said to be that between "penal suffering" and mere "remedial discipline." What's the difference?—as editor Reynolds used to ask. Presumably the difference is only in the nature of the means by which the state of grace is augmented. Is "remedial discipline" any more compatible with justification by faith (p. 38) than "penal suffering"?

A parallel argument is advanced for the hope of conversion after death, of the heathen or abnormal, for instance, who have no real opportunity for "decision for Christ" in this life. Now no one would gainsay "the strain of universalism in the New Testament—the note of hope that at the last *all* shall be saved" (p. 47). But surely the question whether it is possible that some people are beyond redemption is more than "a speculative question which we do not need to ask." Is it not rather already answered in the decision to take universalism so seriously, to call other New Testament teaching only "apparently explicit" (p. 40) and to resort to rhetorical questions rather than exegetical ones? This is a decisive step beyond purgatory, beyond Aquinas towards Origen.

These criticisms are offered by way of debate; they presuppose the excellent work of the Committee, and the genuine service it has rendered to Canadian theology at least. We have been reminded of "the forward look of our faith" (p. 9), for "Mankind and the universe are on tiptoe with expectancy" (p. 78). Best of all, we have been shown that eschatology issues in ethics, as the closing chapter makes clear. For in this age of Christ's cosmic "count-down," what have we to do but to engage in our mission with all the urgency of God's own work?

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IV

The appearance of *Life and Death* is both a general and a particular sign of our times. Theology is a work not only *of* the Church but equally *for* the Church. This two-fold relationship has not always been evident during these recent years. There has been something of a *hiatus* between the doctrines of the schools and the interests of the market-place, and some, at least, of the attempts to close the gap have hardly been notable for the lucidity of their interpretative power. Hence the demand for a study of gospel communication whereby theology will not be confined to the detached pursuit of professional scholars, but will fulfil its mission by bringing the Word of God to the people of the Church.

Life and Death is a worthy achievement in the teaching ministry of the Church. It derives from contemporary movements in theological thought,

but the winds of its doctrine are not cunning speculations that issue from any partisan school. In the light of the gospel, and in plain language, a serious attempt is made to state what a Christian may believe concerning the gravest of questions—human destiny in this world and, even more, in that world “where,” as the old Scottish saying puts it, “we are longest to be.”

As to the particularity of the sign, here, too, we must note the contemporary relevance of this little manual. It is always open season for the pale horse and its rider, but there are times when the clatter of its hoofs beats more insistently on the ear. For us today, the end of the world is an imminent possibility, and, in the biblical idiom, the end of the age is widely held to be a realized actuality. We are being projected into a new era of world history by movements that gather their force from the dynamic drives of political and social revolution. The horizon of the future is dark with threatenings of disaster. Contemporary philosophy is obsessed with the problem of meaning, and when it lifts its sights from puzzling problems of linguistic expression to more cosmic targets, meta-history rather than metaphysics is the field of battle. The existential thinker concentrates his fire on the lonely fate of the human individual, and propounds his questions face to face with the stark fact of inevitable death.

Such a time is always ripe for eschatological speculation, and no field has provided a more prolific germinating bed for religious cranks. In his *Journal of the Plague Year*, Daniel Defoe observes that “the apprehensions of the people were likewise strangely increased by the terror of the times; in which, I think, from what principles I cannot imagine, the people were more addicted to prophecies and astrological conjurations, dreams and old wives’ tales, than ever they were before or since. Whether this unhappy temper was originally raised by the follies of some people who got money by it, that is to say, by printing predictions and prognostications, I know not; but certain it is, books frightened them terribly.” Such is hardly likely to be the effect of *Life and Death* on its readers; certainly it is not the intention of its authors. Nor do they merit the further condemnation of Defoe who could not “acquit those ministers that, in their sermons, rather sank than lifted up the hearts of their hearers.”

The compilers of *Life and Death* are to be commended as much for their silence as for their speech. At the same time, they do not lack courage in an honest and sincere endeavour to provide guidance in a realm where reverent agnosticism must modify the most confident of assertions. The attitude is similar to that of Augustine in speaking of the Godhead, when he maintained that the only reason for resorting to the expression of *tres personae* is to avoid saying nothing at all (*ne taceretur omnino*). The method adopted is strictly biblical, but it is recognized that the teaching of scripture requires exegetical fidelity and interpretative insight to issue in a hermeneutic wisdom. What it really means is that authority and reason must go forward hand in hand to arrive, if not at the finality of absolute revelation, at least at an assurance where the earnest inquirer may rest his confidence. This little

book is an excellent example of enlightened theological method at work on a difficult subject.

Life and Death is addressed to Christians rather than to the general reader. This is at once its strength and weakness. There is very proper recognition that the believer who reposes his confidence in Jesus Christ has an assurance about the life to come that is not available to other men. Indeed, when faith has accomplished its perfect work in a spiritual rebirth, the incidence of physical death is anticipated by a foretaste of heaven. Yet all, whether they profess and call themselves Christian or not, must die; and the presumption of the teaching here presented is that all will be raised up, if not now, certainly after death. Does then the distinction, frequently made in current theology and here emphasized, between resurrection and immortality warrant the stress laid upon it? In strict usage, immortality may be not only a wrong word but a false idea, but it is commonly understood to mean some kind of survival after physical death. So far as we know, its realization is not affected by our beliefs about it, and all men, apart from claims of natural right, are bound to be interested in it. Jesus never enunciated general truths about mankind, and so we search in vain for any teaching of His on the mere question of human survival. But it can be asserted that He assumed the reality of a life to come. Faith in Jesus means at least the acceptance of His authority, because He was at-one with the Mind and Will of the Father. Paul went so far as to maintain that "if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised." Nobody ever spoke sterner words about death and judgment than Jesus Himself, and, as our writers wisely remind us, "it is wrong . . . to sentimentalize Jesus and picture him as One whose chief mission in the world was to assure people that everything is going to turn out all right in the end." While there are elements in His teaching that suggest the life to come will be radically different from life here and now, He also laid emphasis on the quality of our present life as determining our ultimate fate. We can go all the way with the writers of *Life and Death* in rejecting belief in "Hell as a place of everlasting fiery torment." We can even share their universalistic hope that, in the end, all men will fulfil their Divine creation by their Divine salvation. But all the teaching of scripture surely dissuades us from a preoccupation with the problem of survival, and emphasizes the decisive character of this life. Mere survival beyond death could be a prescription for eternal weariness, darkening into the most absolute misery. This is not the Christian hope, but rather a continuing life of boundless possibility in the love of God. *Life and Death* says this to the Christian, but it might have said more to the "average man" about the general question of survival as he hastens to the universal encounter with death.

Of course, there is much more that could be said. *Life and Death* is a handbook and not a treatise on eschatology. The grand question of predestination is side-stepped with a glancing reference by the the assertion that "we are given no clues as to the form or manner of a resurrection of those not

destined for eternal life." No word is spoken to sorrowing parents, bereaved of little children. While we are warned against looking for a "Baedeker's guide to the next world," surely Heaven merited more discussion than it receives in the shortest of all the chapters—a page and a half compared with three devoted to Hell!

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