

Chapter 2.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF THE NATURE AND IMPLICATIONS OF DEATH

In this chapter I propose to discuss the nature (characteristics) and implications of death as a concept: whether or not natural death can legitimately be considered a tragedy; the believer's Christian theistic view of the identity changes that occur at death in the individual's transition from life to his afterlife; and, finally, some other (non-believer and non-Judeo-Christian) ways of conceiving of the nature of death.

Essentially, therefore, this chapter deals primarily with the nature and implications of death and, from the standpoint of the believer, with changes in the form and content of identity (and in its context) that take place after death. The different kinds of reactions to, and attitudes toward, death (e.g., fear, denial, avoidance, procrastination, resignation, acceptance, etc.) in both believers and non-believers will be considered in Chapter 7 and subsequent chapters (8 and 9). Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are concerned with various justice and retributive issues, both from the believer's and the non-believer's point of view,

bearing on the cosmological fate of the surviving identities in Christian afterlife of deceased persons in relation to their moral conduct during their lifetimes. This latter issue is obviously more indigenous to conceptualizations of an individual's death per se, and also to what happens to those aspects of his identity that survive death, than it is to psychological reactions to death generally or to attitudinal anticipation or contemplation of one's own or others' death. Analogous issues will be considered more briefly for the non-believer.

In Chapter 6 I will discuss developmental changes among children in conceptualizing both their own identities and the nature of death, as well as various relevant biomedical considerations relating to death.

Is "Natural" Death Tragic?

This issue, as considered here, applies more relevantly either to mankind generally or to dying individuals--rather than to their families, friends, and loved ones, i.e., to the bereaved, who would naturally tend to regard such deaths as tragic. The question then is really, "Is it intrinsically tragic

that all men must die, that death is an inevitable aspect of life?"

The more plausible and credible case for the tragic nature of death inheres, first, in the fact that it is invariably a very significant limiting condition of life, inevitably terminating every man's existing earthly aspirations, strivings, development, achievements, potentialities, capabilities, relationships, attachments, involvements, activities, productivity, and creativity; and, second, it requires (according to Christian believers) separation of their identities from their bodies and from their familiar physical, social, and interpersonal environments and conversion to their spirit-like afterlife counterparts in a largely unfamiliar environment to them (despite such heavenly compensations as continuous contact with God, communion with saints, and reunion with loved ones who have died either before or after them).

It is true, of course, that death does come at the end of life. But for that reason alone it can hardly be regarded as its goal or crowning glory, or as the fulfillment of its true meaning; and the fact that it happens to all men, as well as to all living things, does not make it any less tragic to the

individual who must die. Death, in my opinion, is an inherently tragic aspect of the human condition that applies to all men.

In a very real sense, therefore, death is often and justly viewed as the final defeat imposed by life on the striving individual. This is the case because of the finality or irreversibility of death which effectively puts an end to all further striving and all second chances.

Compared to all prior defeats experienced on earth, the defeats meted out by death, for example, by ruling out all additional possibilities of earthly self-actualization, are incomparably and qualitatively greater; they are hardly in the same class as the previous ones occurring before death. It is true, of course, from the standpoint of the believer, that the earthly self-identity does live on partially in the spirit-identity (soul) that emerges when the body dies; however, this victory is not of the earth but in an entirely different sphere of reality, i.e., heaven.

As indicated earlier, the relative importance imputed to death by most persons as an ever-possible threatening calamity, paradoxically seems to be much less of a catastrophe by far, and to cause much less worry and concern, than many of the minor,

everyday, and transitory problems, difficulties, threats, and vicissitudes of life, despite its irreversible and terminal implications. However, on second thought, this is not as paradoxical as it seems at first glance, because even when we discount the effects of denial, repression, and procrastination in the case of death, it is more congruous with the nature of man to pay more attention to an immediate minor threat to his security than to an intrinsically more serious but remote threat in the indefinite future which he also feels powerless to mitigate or overcome in any case.

If we take the view that distinctively human thought, achievement, wisdom, creativity, morality, love, compassion, etc. are important goals in life and deserve to be vigorously pursued, and if we are also cognizant of the very high premium placed on them in our culture, thereby justifying the conclusion reached above that death is the most significant limiting factor terminating all further possibilities, potentialities, and striving in these areas, it must then be unequivocally regarded as a major defeat and sizable tragedy for most non-believing individuals. Much less serious, however, from the standpoint of the believer, is the obliteration with death of only

particularized and peripheral identity, i.e., aspects of memories and knowledge that are primarily earth-related; these are sloughed off and replaced by corresponding heaven-related items that are obviously more adaptive for their new environment in the afterlife, thereby making death less inherently tragic for the believer.

Although death does effectively limit and terminate a person's achievement activity in life, there is no real evidence that the prospect of eventual or even imminent death motivates or accelerates his activity in this regard. People seem to be motivated to achieve by genic and experiential factors that are completely unrelated to the fact that they must someday die. At the operational level of setting goals and making decisions, thoughts about death, on the whole, seem to be largely ignored as determining factors, partly, of course, because they are denied, repressed, and avoided, and, more importantly, because all men find it virtually impossible to conceive of their own deaths.

This apparent lack of importance attached to natural death as a calamity or tragedy is belied by the exaggerated importance accorded to death by accident or homicide. This attitude is

matched by the common feeling that no penalty for a heinous crime (e.g., murder, treason) is worse than the death penalty. In both instances sensationalism plays a big role. Correspondingly, no human actions are admired more than dying for one's country or for a creditable cause (e.g., religious martyrs). On the other hand, there is widespread recognition of "fates" that are considered "worse than death" and of the fact that suicide is sometimes condoned if life cannot be lived with honor.

If man (especially a believer) bothers to contemplate at all that death is the common fate of all living things, he still finds it somewhat ego-deflating to consider that he is no less mortal than a worm, a mouse, or a dog, but is consoled that, unlike them, he has a chance at heaven when he dies.

In considering this issue of whether death should be regarded as a tragic event, we must also consider the case of Christian non-believers. These individuals may very well anticipate with death, the total, inevitable, and permanent obliteration of their earthly identities, egos, and personalities, as well as the irreversible termination of everything earthly to which death, as a limiting condition, ordinarily puts an end (see above), including their existing

interpersonal attachments. Some of these persons may also tend to feel angry and resentful about this inevitable extinction of their identities, believing that they somehow deserved better at the hands of nature, and, thus, regard this cosmic outcome as inherently unfair and unjust (but nonetheless terribly real), in addition to partaking of tragedy. Such anger and resentment is considered sinful by believers because it implies a presumption of arrogance, i.e., of possessing judgment superior to God's about what is just and appropriate and, hence, of quarreling with, and rebelling against Him because of it. As confirmed non-believers, however, such persons are not too concerned about sinfulness or about offending God whose very existence they doubt or deny.

The underlying rationale of this latter conceptualization about the nature of death is that man, in contrast to all animals, is able to conceive of the implications of his inevitable mortality (including the dependence of his psychological processes on the integrity of their cellular and neural substrates); and, also, that from this knowledge he is able infallibly to know and predict his own ultimate demise, as well as to agonize over this prediction. Hence, overly

narcissistic persons may feel that his superior cognitive capabilities, which he accordingly and grandiosely compares to those of the God he denies, entitles him to God-like immortality rather than to the indignity of total and ignominious obliteration of identity.

Still other non-believing Christians may sometimes reach the same conclusion about their just entitlement to immortality--but less on the basis of mankind's superior God-like cognitive abilities than on the basis of their own excessively narcissistic (self-love) self-concepts and king-sized needs for ego-aggrandizement and self-gratification. These latter ego needs are obviously incompatible with, and are also outraged and threatened by their doctrinal concept of death as total obliteration of earthly identity. Such persons, in my experience, tend to exhibit maudlin outbursts of self-pity as they approach death; fortunately, they constitute a very small percentage of the dying.

The limiting effects of death per se summarized above undoubtedly contain a certain plausible modicum of built-in tragedy; however, man's cognitive superiority to animals (which superiority he grandiosely characterizes as God-like), his

ability to conceptualize the nature of death and, thus, to be able to predict in advance his own mortality (and to suffer accordingly), as well as his king-sized narcissistic needs, hardly entitle him logically to immunity from the consequences of his own mortality. It is obviously inconsistent to ascribe all bodily functions and consequences (including death) to natural causes (and simultaneously also to deny the possibility of supernatural intervention), on the one hand, and then to demand exemption in the case of his own death from the effects of these same natural causes. Such conceptualizations of death, however, are not only quite rare but also tend to be emphasized mostly by psychoanalytically-oriented theorists like Becker; they allegedly generate a virtual state of "terror" that can only be allayed by leading a life of heroic striving and achievement.

This kind of alleged "terror" is actually perceived by very few of these individuals because of the abundance of effective defenses against it (see below), the illusion of the permanent present, and most important, the tremendous difficulty experienced by human beings in even trying (much less succeeding) to conceive of or imagine the inevitable

obliteration of their own identities and the permanent cessation of their conscious awareness. After a lifetime of selectively experiencing the world through the idiosyncratic filter of their own ego-identities, and of also striving mightily to enhance and gratify their egos, it seems understandably impossible to them both that they will no longer be able to continue doing so, and also that their familiar world, in turn, could continue functioning without either their participation or awareness of same.

The Dilemma of the Believer

Believers, however, may very well ask why I say that natural death is still tragic, rather than an unqualified boon, when as a result of which they will finally see God and the saints face-to-face, remain eternally with them in heaven, and learn the true meaning of many of the mysteries of their religion that were hidden from them on Earth--something for which they have been perpetually yearning all of their lives. Further, they may point in this connection to the promised resurrection of the body in glorified form and to its reunion with the soul.

There is no gainsaying the fact that all of these believed future happenings constitute very significant compensations to them for the loss of familiar earthly identity (and its gradual transformation into unfamiliar heavenly identity), and for the temporary but indefinite loss of the body, as well as the loss of earthly relationships, aspirations, involvements, and pursuits. These believed compensations may indeed be quite superior to what is lost in dying. Nevertheless human beings are so constituted--because the immediate future after death at first looms more importantly in their perspective than does the remainder of life in eternity--that the occurrence of such significant and deeply-felt cosmological losses is still experienced as tragic in nature despite the fact that the tragedy is muted and more than logically counterbalanced by compensatory events in the afterlife. If death were not tragic to believers, why would they mourn the deaths of their loved ones so deeply instead of rejoicing unreservedly? Wouldn't mourning them be sacrilegious if these tragic aspects of death were completely negated by what follows in the hereafter?

The Nature and Characteristics of Death

New Versus Old Identity after Death

From the standpoint of other persons in the culture, all that any individual identity is or has been on earth (i.e., his personality, capacity for awareness, cognitive capabilities, attachments, relationships, involvements, activities, memories, etc.) perishes with the death of his body, irrespective of the prevailing views of believers regarding partial survival of these latter component aspects of his identity as a spirit in the afterlife. Thus, death for all practical purposes effectively terminates a person's continuing presence on the stage of life and his hands-on involvement in the affairs of his culture, no matter how humble or exalted his status might be; whatever may survive and continue to exist in another sphere of reality and being does so hidden effectively from view. Of course, some of the effects of his past actions and utterances when he was alive may persist in the world after his death. All living individuals must eventually undergo this cosmic experience of death, and (from the standpoint of the believer) of subsequently forming a new relationship between his new identity and the universe that, among other things, is no longer dependent on an intact cellular and neural substrate.

When this development occurs, according to the believer's conception of the afterlife, the individual gradually acquires new interpersonal and social roles, becomes increasingly involved in the affairs, activities, interests, and relationships of his new existence, in a new realm of reality, and reciprocally becomes progressively separated and detached over time from the affairs and involvements that formerly absorbed most of his energy, attention, and motivation on earth (except for the renewal of several old attachments to close friends and family members that were temporarily disrupted by his death or by the death of others).

As an example, consider a grown man who dies knowing an average amount about his community and the world in the spheres of economy, religion, and politics, as opposed to a young child who dies. Although each takes a different amount of earthly knowledge to the grave, in the afterlife neither will have much interest in learning about earthly matters. Their former high importance ends as life in that sphere ends. Even though the grown man could possibly predict future trends before he died, he will have little desire to discover whether his predictions

were fulfilled. That intellectual curiosity serves principally to help him and us while we still function on earth.

In comparing the respective criterial aspects of earthly identity during one's lifetime with identity as a spirit in the afterlife, the issue of permanence versus finitude becomes quite salient for the stability of identity. A certain degree of permanence is obviously an essential ingredient of a sense of identity in all human beings, but it doesn't have to be absolute. All persons understand completely the finiteness of life, and yet have no difficulty in experiencing their own identities. (In animals, on the other hand, the sense of identity is much too primitive and concrete for the issue of finitude even to arise.) In order to be stable, the self-concept of identity need only extend into the foreseeable future. A much different dimension of time, however, prevails in the afterworld; nothing short of eternity would be acceptable or even conceivable in heaven.

Not only does the stability of a sense of personal identity depend on a minimal degree of permanence (i.e., extension into the foreseeable future), but it also requires a reasonable intactness of episodic memory. Except for elderly persons with

degenerative dementia, this does not ordinarily pose much of a problem during a person's lifetime. In dealing with limitless periods of time in the afterlife, on the other hand, it theoretically could become a potential difficulty. In practice, however, this is not the case because degenerative dementia obviously can not develop where memory is not dependent on cellular and neural substrates.

Cosmic Effects of an Individual's Death

The death of each individual is currently a significant cosmic event: (1) because of its finality and its termination of all practical involvement in earthly affairs (although progressively waning theoretical interest in these affairs may be maintained from another sphere of reality such as heaven); (2) because his corporeal earthly identity becomes freed of its dependence on its cellular and neural substrates, and becomes an immaterial, disembodied, and eternal spirit; and (3) because he is catapulted into the radically different physical, social, and interpersonal surroundings (in heaven, purgatory, and hell) of his afterlife. He will certainly never again walk on the earth; nor will he ever be seen again on earth by any of its

inhabitants. Someday, at the end of the world, in accordance with God's promise, the believer feels certain that his resurrected body will be reunited with his spirit identity.

Yet, considering the tremendous personal significance of these cosmic changes imputed by believers to any individual's death, most people die very unceremoniously, with little fanfare and recognition by themselves or others that they are imminently destined to become the individual focus of far-reaching cosmological developments with eternal implications. Thus, at the crucial moment of passage from one type of identity to another, and from one kind of world to another, no drums beat and no trumpets blare. We close our eyes, take one last breath, and die all alone in an aseptic hospital bed, with one foot on the road to eternity, and no one to see us off; and we give even scantier attention and recognition to the deaths of others. Generally speaking, life is exigent enough for most people that they have little time to think of the dead. In their desperate need to get on with their lives, even their nearest and dearest when they were alive are forgotten surprisingly quickly once they are dead.

The Universality and Leveling Effect of Death

Inherent in the occurrence of death is an element of transcendental justice that is expressed in its uncompromising universality and democracy. Since it overtakes all men--the mighty and the lowly, the arrogant and the humble alike--it is obviously the most potent and thoroughgoing leveling factor that is operative in life.

Julius Caesar, for example, was the most powerful man of his time in the Roman Empire. Yet, even if he had an afterlife identity, he was still totally incapable after he died of imagining what the world would be like in the future; and he was probably even incapable of becoming gradually knowledgeable about, and aware of, significant social and political changes as they occurred--all because of his naturally progressive disinvolvement from the affairs of his still living contemporaries while he was an inhabitant of the afterworld. He also undoubtedly underestimated the degree and importance of the earthly changes--material and social--that had occurred since his death, believing that they would constitute only minor, easy-to-adjust-to variations of the familiar status quo in his Rome; and he possibly might have fantasized adjusting to them in much the same way that he would have done were he still alive,

attempting perhaps even to play in his imagination the same roles that he originally played so spectacularly when he was in his prime in Rome.

Death is not only the great leveler in reducing the bodies (and dependent identities) of persons of all degrees of wealth, fame, and social status to the same lifeless and insensate "remains" at the moment they die; but, in the eyes of the believer it also gives the exalted ones no greater power to influence future events in our world from their position in heaven, unless, of course, they happen to have saintly qualities.

Unfortunately, however, the leveling effect of death on the living exists more in theory than in actuality. One might imagine, for instance, that the eventual prospect of death, burial, bodily decay, etc. might reasonably have humbling effects on those persons who are either arrogant or excessively narcissistic, and who regard themselves as unique, superior to others, or endowed with special entitlements. In point of fact, however, these considerations have very little effect on the belief of some of these persons that their superior status on

earth entitles them to be exempt from the human condition of death.

Is Man's Mortality Anomalous?

Death self-evidently determines the upper limit of one's life on earth. But much more important to the believer in terms of actual existence (if not self-actualization) is the fact that one's spirit-identity exists eternally, and will (at the end of the world) when the resurrection of the dead takes place, be reunited with its body.

Although people are not generally terrified by death or do not tend to regard it as a particularly unjust or unfair fate or end to life on earth, they not uncommonly consider it as a somewhat anomalous sequel or anticlimax to life--that is, as phenomenologically incongruous with it--possibly because they find it difficult to conceive of the at least partial extinction of their own earthly identities and the cessation of their consciousness as it previously existed in the world. There is also some tendency to view death as a universal law of life for all creatures, with the proviso that man is excepted because he is a rational and moral being made in God's image and likeness.

That animals and even other persons should die is thought to be normal and acceptable enough--quite in line with the natural order of things. It is regarded as somewhat less natural and acceptable, however--and more incongruous--that we ourselves should die, but still hardly that unnatural, outrageous, or unfair in the minds of most of us to warrant making death reactively the mainspring of most constructive human activity, as some psychological theorists about death seem to do.

In a sense, of course, we are born with the issue of mortality already decided against us. Our parents know in advance that we would be born as mortal beings and that, like themselves, we shall die someday. Yet, although some potential parents will refrain deliberately, therefore, from begetting us, and, thus, subjecting us to the vicissitudes of a cruel world only to end up in an underground coffin, most will place a higher value on the gift of life on earth that is followed by eternal life in the hereafter. From another less deliberate standpoint, however, some non-believers might claim that our parents sacrificed us to the pangs of mortality and made us hostage to death only to satisfy their pride, joy, and vanity in parenthood.

How Urgent Does Death Make Life?

One of the more puzzling aspects of human conceptualizations of death is the fact that although people may assiduously and relentlessly strive to effect seemingly minor improvements in their lifestyles, they may still be relatively indifferent to, and take frivolously gross risks to their very lives for quite trivial reasons, e.g., in ordinary automobile driving. It is as if they were either ignorant of the meaning and consequences of death, that is, of the vast differences between life and death, or didn't care (were completely irresponsible), or both. This failure to appreciate and take seriously the implications of death can even be observed among the elderly dying from natural causes, on their acknowledged deathbeds. One would never guess from their relative nonchalance that these persons were standing, so to speak, on the threshold of eternity ready to embark on the most important cosmic journey of their lives. Yet one is supposed to believe implicitly the conventional wisdom which holds that death gives urgency to life by discouraging procrastination, i.e., that if we were immortal we would never accomplish anything inasmuch as the execution of

every industrious and creative impulse would be postponed indefinitely.

Euphemistic Platitudes about Death

To console those who speak or act aggrievedly because they might be deprived of learning how certain personal or current historical situations finally eventuate or are resolved fifty years from now, it is sometimes suggested, somewhat euphemistically, that they are really no worse off in that respect than they would have been in not being born a half-century earlier. Actually the two situations are not at all comparable. Individuals obviously have legitimate curiosity about future trends that began but were not complete before their deaths, but then never learn about these latter outcomes because their identities are no longer present in this world. Fifty years ago, before they were born, however, their identities were obviously non-existent in the world; and for that reason alone they were unaware of what was going on then. Further, unlike those who have already died, their ignorance in this respect can easily be remedied either by speaking about these events to older people or by reading history books.

Another commonly-used euphemistic metaphor referring to death is the state of sleep. But sleep, contrary to common belief, is an active but temporary and usually undirected mental state that both implies intact neural and cellular substrates as well as the subsequent awakening of the individual in his customary bodily state and earthly surroundings. Equally euphemistic also is the standard eulogy at the funeral of a successful professional person, which typically includes the statement that "the profession has suffered a grievous loss" and that "Doctor _____ will be sorely missed." To begin with, nothing is said about his death; he could be missed simply because he had retired in a foreign country, which fact might also account for the "loss" to his American professional group. Second, the implication is clearly present that the "loss" is unusual and unexpected whereas it is usually a quite normal, to-be-expected occurrence under the circumstances. And far from being "sorely missed" afterwards, he was actually almost totally forgotten as a former professional by his ex-colleagues (as most dead persons generally are soon enough after they die).

Own versus Others' Death

Reference has been made above in several different contexts to the great difficulty every individual in our culture has in conceiving of his own death, of the Christian theist's belief in the accompanying partial obliteration of his earthly identity in the afterlife, as well as of the almost complete removal of his old earthly and new afterlife identity from participation in the affairs of his former culture. In the case of the non-believer, total obliteration of earthly identity must be conceived of. It was hypothesized that the difficulty in conceptualizing this situation inheres in two principal factors: first, a lifetime of conditioning in which all of his experience in perceiving and interpreting the reality of the world and of himself is filtered through his idiosyncratic identity, ego, personality, and cognitive structure; and, second, the intense needs of his narcissistic ego for self-gratification and self-enhancement. For both of these reasons it is understandably difficult for him to conceive of a world in which his identity is not, and cannot be, any longer, on his world's center stage; in addition, however, for mostly the first of these two reasons, his earthly identity also tends to be partially protected while he is still alive, from the threat of extinction, simply because he finds it

cognitively next to impossible to conceive of it undergoing such thoroughgoing earthly obliteration.

This situation obviously tends to create a categorical differential or dichotomy between conceptualizing one's own death and conceptualizing the death of others, even that of loved ones. Since the two differentially causative factors described above do not operate in the deaths of others, however, one can primarily view them objectively and logically--largely from a cognitive standpoint, as natural, universal, necessary, and inevitable aspects of life. In attending an acquaintance's funeral, therefore, one conceptualizes his death in these terms (i.e., as a syllogism beginning with "All men are mortal..."), with perhaps some sadness, but as if it were just another ceremony or milestone in the decedent's life, like a christening, confirmation, graduation, or wedding, with no particular cosmic significance (i.e., as involving no termination of his current identity, personality, consciousness, and participation on earth).

Remarkably enough, however, one typically makes little connection at this funeral between the decedent's loss of earthly identity and personality, his burial, and the later

decay of his body, etc., on the one hand, and one's own death and subsequent cosmic events, on the other. One tends to perceive these former events as part of a milestone ceremony, i.e., as merely a euphemistic illusion, usually fostered by the funeral home, that is happening strictly to someone else without any real present or future relevance to one's own eventual fate in life.

This difference in conceptualizing one's own and others' deaths, therefore, can plausibly be attributed to the two above-mentioned factors. As we shall see later, the mature (adult) criterial attributes of the concept of death are applied earlier by young children to others than they are to themselves; and even in speaking of one's own eventual death, one's voice tends to be less casual and more emotional than in referring to the deaths of others, betraying perhaps the hope that one will prove to be an exception to the rule of human mortality.

The Fragility of Life

In addition to being transitory and finite (or mortal), the life of man is also fragile and vulnerable. This, in part, is a reflection of his multiple and highly specialized organ systems

among which are divided all of the various vital functions necessary to sustain life. Hence, since the body as a whole manifests interdependence among its various systems, a breakdown in any one system (or even in a single strategically located blood vessel) can result in death. If we add to this the thousands of diseases and genic errors and inadequacies, as well as the numerous environmental hazards to which man is susceptible, it is remarkable indeed that he survives at all; that he manages to do so is an indication of such protective devices as immune systems and the operation of ordinary inertia and momentum when the body is alive. Even man's most distinctive and precious attributes--his mind and spirit--are fragile in the sense that prior to death their functioning is completely dependent on the biological integrity of their cellular and neural substrates.

All of this suggests that only a thin and tenuous line separates life from death. Life can be terminated abruptly, unpredictably, and unceremoniously. In the virtual twinkling of an eye, man's vaunted cognitive, personality, ego, identity, and awareness systems can become as insensate as stone.

Along similar lines, it seems somewhat incongruous and beyond understanding that a being like man, with such exalted, almost God-like cognitive, moral, personality, and spiritual powers and potential, is embodied in such a fragile shell and is given such an abbreviated span of life and life expectancy (approximately seventy-five years) in which fully to develop the potentialities that he will not only exercise on earth but, as envisioned by believers, will also take along with him into his immortal afterlife throughout eternity.

Inevitability, Arbitrariness, and Discontinuity of Death

Like its finiteness and irreversibility (permanence), the inevitability of death constitutes one of the most salient characteristics of the human condition. Not many aspects of life are generally thought to be truly and invariably inevitable: according to conventional wisdom, only death and taxes. If cessation of all bodily life and of all participation in the activities of the world (i.e., irreversibility) are regarded as the primary or most important criteria of death, then the fact that bodily death must sooner or later overtake every living individual (inevitability) is easily the next most important

criterion. In a sense all of life is but a brief postponement of death on earth or a delayed but inevitable earthly sentence of death. As an irreverent friend of mine so picturesquely put it, "I know of no one who has yet escaped from this planet alive." Conceptually the finiteness of life is part of, and enters into, both the irreversibility and inevitability of death. It is the eventual unavoidability (inevitability) of death, no matter how far away or seemingly improbable it is, that generates much of the dread and "terror" that theoretically might occur, but actually doesn't, for good and sufficient reasons, except in very few persons, and from mostly other causes.

Like other negatively anticipated and postponed dreaded events, death also eventually occurs. But it seems somewhat less inevitable than other expected inevitables because its occurrence is both highly indefinite and usually long delayed. Even more important, perhaps, in undercutting a person's subjective sense of death's inevitability are all of the different mechanisms and ways of denying death. Thus, the resulting subjective ambiguity regarding the inevitability of death often tends to generate false hopes that, unlike many previously experienced and dreaded, but long-postponed,

inevitables, death may still never come to pass. Although it is still regarded as generally inevitable, the credibility of this axiom is partially undermined by its occurrence having been deferred so long and so often as to become somewhat unbelievable, that is, until that certain day when the discredited inevitability and the perceived impossibility actually occur: like everyone else he too dies; the subjectively impossible happens to everyone.

Thus, someday, not too far from now, and inevitably, even though the exact date is completely unknown to me and remains quite indefinite, I confidently expect that I will no longer remain at home with my wife or visit with my friends and former colleagues. It will be as if I had been whisked away by kidnappers. I just won't be home anymore doing what I always did before. Death will have convincingly demonstrated that it is truly inevitable--although quite unpredictable--at least to me. The unpredictability of death's inevitable but actual occurrence has been likened, therefore, to the coming of a thief at night. It (this unpredictability) also contributes to the apparent fragility of life and the seeming arbitrariness of death in many

cases. All of these factors make life seem very insecure: in the midst of life we walk in death, as the Bible puts it.

Death, by definition, is discontinuous and incongruous with all prior life experiences (e.g., illness or accident) if only because of its finality (irreversibility or permanence). Unlike other illnesses, one dies only once and never recovers from it. No other experience in life is even remotely comparable; it is also no respecter of ongoing plans, convenience, or readiness. Death often cuts short, negates, or renders important work and relationships incomplete and terminates an individual's earthly identity at the height of his powers; in this sense it may appear arbitrary and capricious, thus making life's final earthly defeat even more bitter and galling.

Death is not only discontinuous with all prior experiences on earth (see above), but the afterlife into which it catapults those who die, as envisioned by believers, is also discontinuous with the world they leave: their bodies are gone (until the resurrection), their identities assume the form of eternal spirits, independent of any biological substrates; there is no marriage; and the environment--physical, social, and interpersonal--is completely different and unfamiliar. The only

continuity that exists between the two worlds proceeds from the earthly identity that is carried over into the context of the new identity; some residual interest in the people and affairs of the earth; as well as residual relationships with old friends and family in heaven, who had preceded or followed them there.

It is small wonder, therefore, that some individuals (particularly confirmed believers) show some reluctance (instead of unalloyed enthusiasm) about dying and also presumably about going to heaven. Nevertheless, there is a basic core of continuity from earthly to the spirit identity that enables one to speak of "eternal life" in the hereafter (even if this term is a misnomer), and that greatly overshadows the co-existing discontinuity in significance.

Believers point to further evidence of God's essential compassion and mercifulness (despite His warranted and just sternness during the relatively brief cultural epoch in man's history subsequent to the Fall and prior to the Christian era), which were demonstrated by His reconciliation with man through the sacrifice of His only Son, Jesus, that led, in turn, to the forgiveness of sins and to the eternality of man's identity after death (salvation). In this didactic lesson that He gave

man, He showed great mercy and restraint in not permitting the identities of men from being extinguished for more than a brief segment of historical time.

Not all of the discontinuity and separation between the two reality spheres of world and heaven, of course, is regrettable, according to believers. For one thing it is probably advantageous that the inhabitants of heaven gradually detach themselves from concern with earthly affairs and relationships so that they can devote themselves fully to, and can become wholly immersed in, heavenly matters. Second, some portion of the dead individuals' earthly memories and associations are bound to be unpleasant or disturbing, and the departed are, therefore, well advised in maintaining their distance from them.

Concrete Imagery of Death

A significant part of every person's conceptualization of the nature and implications of death is the concrete visual imagery, and/or accompanying verbalizations and emotional reactions to his own lifeless, immobile, insensate, and unresponsive corpse and that of others; its handling, viewing, and placement in a coffin; its burial underground (or

cremation); and its progressive decomposition, ultimately serving as food for worms.

Some individuals tend to feel very embarrassed and demeaned by the excessive familiarity implied in these funeral exercises and by the perceived affront to their human dignity inherent in being handled naked by complete strangers (morticians) as if they were animal carcasses or sacks of flour rather than human beings just very recently deceased. They also resent acutely the indignity, ignominy, and brutal insensitivity of being referred to as "the remains." Their main consolation is that they believe they will be totally unaware of what will be going on at the time. Typically, however, they eventually become quite resigned to their fate, appreciating that there is little or nothing they can do to change it. Relatively few persons, in my experience, exhibit these intensely sensitive emotional reactions to the concrete visual imagery and verbalizations of bodily death (or at least very few admit to them); and more often than not they tend to be non-believers rather than believers, and to experience genuine anxiety in anticipation of death, part of which is probably caused by the above-listed emotional responses to its associated concrete imagery. Most individuals, whether or

not they are believers, prefer to repress and not even think about this aspect of death; but as one might easily expect, they are much less upset by images of the corpses of others than by images of their own, and of enemies rather than of friends or loved ones.

The contrast in appearance and functional capacity between a live and a dead person is usually so marked that the possibility of confusing them is improbable. Relative to his past life on earth, the dead individual is in much the same position as a bug that has been stepped on. Death is ordinarily the opposite of life in most respects; and the transition between the two states occurs abruptly in only minutes, its rapidity being commensurate with the magnitude of the biological, behavioral, psychological, and identity changes taking place. Yet, except in cases of extreme wasting, the contrast in appearance is not completely all-or-none. Just by appearance alone, for example, one cannot tell that the eyes cannot see and the ears cannot hear. In many other respects, too, some corpses look quite life-like, especially when all touched (rouged) and dressed up in the funeral parlor where they unrealistically and euphemistically give the impression of

resting, perhaps, in the midst of a wedding ceremony. Typically, however, it is quite a humbling experience to imagine oneself as the future centerpiece of a wake in a funeral home.

It is undoubtedly these stark, immediate, and concrete bodily changes wrought by death that account for the commonly-heard reactions of shock and disbelief by people to the sudden, unexpected deaths of friends, relatives, or public figures. They contrast this new, imagined set of concrete death images of the decedents with the recent set of healthy and vigorous ones in their memories and then find the death news beyond belief and acceptance.

Imagining oneself as an immobile, unfeeling, unaware, and unresponsive corpse whose body is moved about and manipulated at will by others, is much easier to take and accept if one has had the prior experience of surgery under general anesthesia or of being rendered comatose as, for example, after sustaining head injury and concussion. These latter experiences serve as imaginative preparation for the more awesome, analogous, funeral parlor procedures in the future, thereby desensitizing one against the more gruesome concrete imagery associated with them. As told to one after they occur, they are also in a sense a

foretaste of what death is like and help one in the very difficult task of conceiving of and acknowledging one's own death in the future.

The Creation of Man and Human Identity in the Afterlife

As stated in the preface and introduction, the cosmic and philosophical orientation of the believer in this book is an expression of Christian theism. He generally assumes, and implicitly believes, that there is a personal and teleologically-minded God who created the universe, as well as our own world; who created man especially and deliberately in his own image and likeness; who is particularly concerned with man's moral conduct and justice (through the exercise of the free will with which He endows him); and who judges him retributively, but justly and with charity and mercy. The fact that He is a personal God, however, does not necessarily imply that He intervenes invariably in natural events, in the course of creation, or in the personal affairs of human beings, but, rather, that he suspends selectively the natural laws of cause and effect for special reasons and purposes of His own that are often inscrutable.

God's creation of man is a case in point. According to believers, He wanted to create a superior living creature in His own cognitive, spiritual, and moral image and likeness, immortal like Himself (but with a body), and with awareness and self-consciousness about his own identity and destiny, as well as with ability to anticipate the future. To be truly moral, man would obviously have to have free will, i.e., the freedom to choose evil over good if he so chose (and vice versa). Man's principal function would be to glorify God by fulfilling the latter's infinite variety of cognitive, spiritual, and moral potentialities as expressed in each human variant of Himself.

Natural biological evolution had proceeded at this juncture only to the point of the higher apes who were obviously still a very far cry from the kind of creature in His own image that God had envisioned in terms of cognitive and moral (if not creative) capacity and self-awareness. The immense qualitative leap from ape to man in ability to think and reason; to invent and use language; to understand and to acquire knowledge; to conceptualize, generalize, and formulate abstractions; to anticipate the future; to manifest free will; to develop and be governed by conscience, etc. strongly suggests the probability

of supernatural intervention at this point in naturally-occurring evolution. Further, despite their close physical resemblance to man in their DNA configuration and hemoglobin molecules, the higher apes had shown no signs of spontaneously approaching man psychologically.

These very same physical resemblances, however, plus nearly identical anatomical and physiological systems, tend to rule out the possibility of the extraterritorial (from other planets or stars) origin of man and suggest that, in creating man, God started with the higher apes and deliberately altered their DNA in the developmental direction He desired instead of allowing it spontaneously to reach (or not reach) this point through natural evolution. Also supporting this hypothesized supernatural interpretation of man's creation, and congruent with the views of believers, is the fact that in terms of psychological capabilities, there are no intermediate or transitional forms between man and the apes as there ordinarily are when natural evolution takes a radically new turn.

But partly because of his cognitive and moral limitations, believers maintain, man grossly misused his free will to sin blatantly. He arrogantly thought that he could supplant God and

acquire His omniscience and resulting omnipotence. This theme not only permeates the conduct of Adam and Eve,¹ their subsequent fall from grace, punishment (loss of immortality, banishment from the Garden of Eden, and the need to earn their own bread), and alienation from God, but is also repeated in another allegorical version, the Tower of Babel story, in which men sought to rebel against God and secede from His rule by building a tower that reached into heaven. God then punished them by replacing their single common language with a multiplicity of tongues so that they could no longer understand each other's speech and work together cooperatively; and eventually He dispersed them all over the world from their common homeland. Men thereafter frequently continued to be flagrantly wicked (e.g., in Sodom) and God punished them and also rewarded the righteous few.

As a result of God's withdrawal of the gift of immortality from Adam and Eve, believers point out that their earthly identities and personalities, and those of their descendants for many generations until the advent of Jesus, perished² at death and were obliterated forever. There was no possibility of man regaining his immortality or of liberating his soul (his unique

identity) from its bodily substrate as long as man and God were not reconciled. Additionally, there was the further danger in God's eyes of man becoming too omniscient if he lived eternally and at the same time failed to become reconciled with Him.

Nevertheless, it was still not the case, according to believers, that after the Fall of Man, God abandoned interest in humankind and in its salvation, and was apparently content to consign the souls of all men to the identity extinction of death. He tried to instruct and admonish men through the patriarchs and the prophets; and when the latter died, along with the souls of other just and virtuous men, their identities were preserved intact in a kind of limbo. (Many of the precepts of Jesus were in fact first uttered by the prophets: ideas of love, atonement, forgiveness, the messiah, the virgin birth, and the golden rule).

If one were to have asked God at this point, "If death is admittedly calamitous, tragic, unjust, unfair, and arbitrary and capricious (see above), why did You, as the all-merciful and all-compassionate One, who had originally created man as immortal, later reverse Yourself and make him mortal?" In the opinion of believers, He might perhaps have replied, "Yes, I am

compassionate and merciful but not sentimentally, soft-headedly, or unrealistically permissive--but rather just and retributive, fitting the punishment commensurately to man's manifest degree of wickedness, as an example for future generations. In seeking to uplift man's moral conduct, I must be ever mindful of the effect that an inappropriate precedent of leniency on My part would have on the potential misbehavior of others and even on its repetition by those who have not yet died."

God eventually, according to believers, determined to effect reconciliation through the sacrifice of a Redeemer, His only begotten Son, Jesus, who was then accordingly incarnated, crucified, and resurrected. As a result, the redemption (salvation) of man became possible through the mechanism of forgiving expiated sins, despite man's inherent sinfulness and natural proneness to sin; and salvation was redefined not as man's immortality on earth, as originally enjoyed by Adam, but as eternality of identity in spirit or resurrected form in the afterlife.

Use of the term "eternal life" by believers to refer to the eternality of one's spirit (or resurrected) identity or soul is, strictly speaking, a misnomer since "life" is a biological

concept and cannot be applied to an immaterial state or to a disembodied identity. Life on earth, that depends on viable cellular and neural substrates, ends with death; and earthly identity is succeeded by a spirit identity in the afterlife that bears little resemblance whatsoever to the life-based earthly identity. "Life" and "identity" are, therefore, by no means synonymous.

After resurrection purportedly occurs, however, as predicted by believers, it is appropriate to refer to the reunited body and soul as manifesting "eternal life" in heaven.

In restoring the resurrected body to the disembodied soul after death--although following an indefinite and presumably substantial lapse of time (i.e., at "the end of the world")--God is apparently seeking (according to believers) to redress the stark situation that existed between the time of Adam and Jesus' crucifixion, when the identities of most of those persons who died were lost forever when they perished with their bodies. This was the case because their psychological processes (including their identities) were completely dependent on the integrity of their cellular and neural substrates, which integrity was obviously destroyed at death. The first step then

in restoring immortality or eternality of identity after the reconciliation of God and man was to terminate this latter dependence at death and, thus, to make possible the existence for eternity of an immaterial potentially disembodied identity or soul independent of any biological substrate; and the next step was to reunite it in heaven with its resurrected body. In this reunion with the resurrected body, the soul remains independent of a bodily substrate for its continued existence; and both body and soul exist eternally.

As a result of the new cosmological determination governing the disposition and eternality of identities (souls) in the afterlife that prevailed after the reconciliation, believers maintain that Jesus Himself became the first person to enter heaven; but He entered heaven body and soul rather than as a spirit identity, the first and only person to do so, except for His mother, the Virgin Mary, before the promised Resurrection of all the dead at the end of the world.

Faith and Proof in Cosmology

Obviously, completely objective, definitive, and indisputable proof is lacking (and will probably always be

lacking) for everything that has been said in the above section about the existence of a personal God; the creation of man, his Fall and the loss of his immortality; the reconciliation between God and man, mediated by the sacrifice (crucifixion) of His Son, Jesus (which made possible man's salvation through the forgiveness of expiated sins); and salvation itself, consisting of the eternal preservation of the soul (identity) in heaven, in continual contact with God. As available non-definitive proof, for example, believers point to divine revelation (as presented in the Scriptures) and the fulfillment in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of prophecies made hundreds of years earlier by the prophets. Seemingly irrefutable logic is similarly lacking in definitiveness.

But neither is there any proof that any of the aforementioned beliefs and happenings haven't occurred or are impossible, implausible, or irrational.

In the final analysis, what we believe depends mostly on our cosmological convictions, on what seems plausible, meaningful, and credible, on realistic hope, and, above all, on faith in what believers call the goodness and beneficence of God. Where there is, and can be, no objective and definitive

evidence or validation in the usual sense of the term (i.e., in the case of metaphysical problems), it seems reasonable, justifiable, and superior by far, at least to the believer, to rely on such realistic and enlightened faith than to have no warranted beliefs whatsoever. In these circumstances the relevance and value of faith should certainly not be derogated or treated pejoratively, as atheists, agnostics, and rationalists tend to do.

Death, Resurrection, and Spirit Beings
in the Judeo-Christian Afterlife

Few Christian theological concepts are as ambiguous, elusive, and lacking in explicit definition as death and the fate of the individual after death, i.e., in the hereafter or afterlife. Not unnaturally the chief and early Christian contribution in the past to this ideological issue was the doctrine that by his (Jesus') wholly voluntary (unresisting) and sacrificial death on the cross, followed soon afterwards by his resurrection, Jesus conquered death and sin forever and for all mankind, and in the process, reconciled God and man. In this chapter and book, however, we shall consider only the concepts

of death, the afterlife, spirit beings and resurrection either as ends in themselves or their implications for conceptualizations of, or psychological reactions to, death--but not as theological doctrine to be defended or refuted.

Pre-Judeo-Christian Conceptions of the Afterlife

Even considering the primitive state and development of such sciences as biology, medicine, neurology, and psychology during the lifetime of Jesus, it is a quite reasonable assumption that his better-educated and more scientific-minded contemporaries possessed an intuitive understanding that general (biological) or overall death of the body necessarily implies tissue death of all the dependent substrates of the body (including the neural one for the psychological functions and capabilities listed below); and, hence, that after a very brief interval, irreversible cessation of such psychological capacities as cognition (e.g., learning, memory, thinking), motor skills, self-awareness, identity of self and others, discrimination, imagination, emotion, motivation, etc., set in. However, the mythology of many now extinct or relatively primitive cultures (ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Norse,

American Indian, Polynesian, etc.) strongly suggests that they believed that there are spirit beings serving as successors to the deceased persons, who exist as shadowy, incorporeal spirits, manifesting all of the psychological functions of live individuals, and living in special, restricted regions reserved for them, but never returning to or participating again in the affairs of their former communities or cultures--not even interacting with their still living spouses, family members, or friends.

Thus, given a lifeless neural substrate in a spirit being, it is possible for the latter's associates (1) to perceive no activities by him whatsoever that are indicative of psychological functioning or capacities, or (2) to perceive actions by him that reflect both a high level of competence and motivation and, typically, an even higher level of sensitivity embellishment and dramatic imagination by his particular sympathetic associates (perceivers). It is this latter version of a spirit being's heroic exploits that eventually become an official part of the culture's heroic mythology.

Transformation from Deceased Body to Spirit Being

It is nowhere explicitly explained how the transformation occurs from a deceased body and lifeless, non-functional neural substrate to a highly functional psychological spirit being in terms of cognitive competence, motivation, and altruism. Nevertheless, it is highly improbable that a cultural event of this moment and significance could ever occur spontaneously or accidentally in the absence of a functional neural substrate. In these circumstances, the believer would suggest that only some form of radical supernatural intervention requiring suspension of the ordinary laws of nature, could enable the spirit being to function psychologically despite the absence of its relevant neural substrate.

In any case, spirit beings are culturally and realistically regarded in the land of the living as no longer alive or as members of their culture and community. They function rather in a world removed from and discontinuous with the "real" world of which they were once, prior to death, active participants. However, continuity with permanence and eternality of original identity are maintained indefinitely or until doctrinal resurrection occurs.

Moral Differentiation of the Afterlife

Although no mention of the hereafter or afterlife is made in the first 5 books of Moses in the Old Testament, it seems probable from later scriptural content that the Hebrew people, during their long occupation of Palestine, assimilated the concept of spirit-like beings (succeeding the identity of deceased individuals) from one or more Canaanite tribes. Later, of course, this relatively simple conception of the afterlife was differentiated into regions of heaven and hell with corresponding inhabitants, respectively, of those who led relatively virtuous or sinful lives in this world and could expect little better than retribution in the afterlife.

Spirit beings enjoy an eternal existence (identity) in the spirit world—ostensibly until the doctrinal resurrection promised at the end of the world when they would be judged morally by Jesus together with those who were still living.

Resurrection

Resurrection involves a biological reversal of whatever pathological, anatomical, and/or physiological abnormalities exist as significant causes or effects of death. The resurrected

person, thus, emerges as a biologically intact individual. He does not necessarily, but usually does, enjoy eternal existence (life). In addition to the promised doctrinal resurrection of those spirit beings who lived virtuous or sinful previous lives, individualized resurrection is practiced in cases of wrongful, martyred, sacrificial, or accidental death, as in the cases of Jesus and Lazarus, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the resurrection of various believers by the apostles. Not only must the resurrected individual look recognizable, like the candidate for resurrection did prior to his resurrection, so that he can be recognized and accepted by his family, community, and culture, but he must also want to participate in these circles again on the same basis as before.

The term, "eternal life," customarily employed to describe the eternal living existence of the resurrected person, is used correctly in this latter context as opposed to its use in connection with the description of the identity of a spirit being who definitely is not alive in the biological sense of the term, and, hence, has no "life" whatsoever—eternal or otherwise. The "life" part of the phrase, "eternal life," therefore, is undoubtedly a misnomer based on the failure to recognize that

the spirit being is not really a life form like a resurrected being is. In resurrection, on the other hand, there is always biological reversal of the biological causes and effects of death; and the restoration of the equilibrium or "steady state" (homeostasis) that also prevailed prior to death. Direct resurrection involves biological restoration to a stable biological state of a disordered bodily condition that has led to death. Indirect resurrection, on the other hand, requires initial destruction and reversal of the highly stable equilibrium achieved by the spirit being before reversal of the latter's disordered bodily and psychological functioning can be attempted.

Since death can be considered a biologically destructive and individually variable process and state, its genuine conquest can only be effected by reversing the process of biological destruction with respect to a decedent's essential life principles.

One might very well ask who is available now to perform resurrection considering that Jesus, the apostles, and their like are no longer with us. Even if we consider resurrection to lie within the scope of biological science, its actual

successful attempt must surely lie a very long time in the future; and in any case it will certainly be no ordinary device, research biologist, or master physician who will be able to restore all of the disordered bodily substrates to normal functioning.

The Nature and Differences between Soul and Identity

Thus far, because it hasn't been necessary for our purposes to define these terms more precisely, or to distinguish definitively between them, we have used them in their general sense and more or less interchangeably. Actually they are not synonymous. To begin with, "soul" is a religious term and concept ("the incorporeal nature of man or principle of mental and spiritual life"), whereas "identity" is both a more general secular term ("the distinctive character belonging to an individual") and a term that has a special meaning in psychology where it is generally used synonymously with "individuality," "personality," or "self-concept." A person's identity, for example, would include his body image, key demographic variables (age, sex, nationality, vocation, religion, marital status, educational level, social class, etc.), his cognitive structure,

his basic personality traits, values, goals, attitudes, motivations, maturity, ego-involvements, etc. More recently, psychiatrists and psychologists have also used the terms "ego" and "identity" interchangeably; in fact, the items listed above as included in the term "identity" would also constitute a very acceptable definition of "ego."

"Soul," on the other hand, as used in this book, is a less inclusive and more restrictive term referring to only the core or very basic aspects of a person's identity (i.e., excluding fringe and peripheral aspects); to the absolute rather than to the relational or contextual facets of his identity that would be functional in any context; to an essence, distillation, or precipitate of his personality; and to an abstraction of his personality and cognition that is completely emptied of all particulars. When the earthly identity first separates from the body at death, for example, and sloughs off its peripheral, relational, and particularized earthly associations, and is then transformed into an incorporeal and eternal spirit, it is appropriate to refer to the latter entity as the soul.

When the soul is reunited with the resurrected body, however, it is no longer called the "soul," technically speaking

(although in a loose sense it still might be). Its core aspects (stripped of its distinctively earthly peripheral and relational elements) then gradually acquire some distinctively heavenly, peripheral, and relational elements of its own, but never as many as on earth. Strictly religious usage of the concept of "soul," in other words, is restricted to the absolute, non-contextual, non-relational, and wholly abstract and general core of personality or identity; whereas "identity," whether on earth or in heaven, also includes the peripheral, contextual, relational, and particularized elements described above. Genic determinants are obviously more prominent in the development of the soul, especially in the child's early years, whereas experiential determining factors in development come into play more prominently in the later years of childhood, adolescence, and adult life as identity; at conception, birth, and during infancy, the genic components of the soul are largely non-functional potentialities.

From the above it is clear that the soul is not conceptualized by believers as a complete and faithful replica of earthly identity at death, but rather as a generalized or abstract version of it with many of its particularized and

relational aspects, indigenous to its earthly developmental origins and associations, removed and gradually replaced by their heavenly counterparts. Restoration of the body to the soul during resurrection largely replaces the body-soul associations that were originally cast off at death in the transformation of a substrate-based identity into a substrate-free soul.

In the latter process of streamlining the identity into soul at death, many peripheral and purely contextual and particularized memories are obliteratively assimilated by a lesser number of more abstract or general concepts in cognitive structure. The particularity of some transcendental experiences, however--e.g., a uniquely beautiful painting, sublime music, sculpture, and poetry, or an ideally romantic and mystical sexual experience with one's spouse that engenders the "one flesh" feeling and enhances love, affection, and intimacy--becomes transfigured, so to speak, into new abstract and unique categories of which each particular experience is the only member of its own abstract class, each thereby being in a class by itself; and since such transcendental memories eventually become permanent components of one's eternal soul, it can be truly said that such experiences in a sense last forever.

A final dynamic and non-creational attribute of the soul is deemed more compatible with modern concepts of ego psychology than is the traditional creational, preformed, and static Judeo-Christian theistic view. According to the latter conceptualization, a fixed and unchanging essence of unique individuality (the soul) is created by God and infused preformed into the fetus at the time of conception. This static entity, according to Christian doctrine, remains in the body, unchanged, indestructible, and immortal, during one's lifetime. At death, however, it is transferred intact to the body's spirit successor and is later reunited with the body when the Resurrection occurs, and remains unchanged throughout eternity.

In contrast to this static religious concept of soul, it has been demonstrated above, and in Chapter 6, that such secular equivalents of soul as ego, identity, and personality, all of which do not originate pre- and fully-formed, unchangeable at birth or conception, but rather are products of the interaction between genically-determined potential developmental capacities, on the one hand, and their sensory, perceptual, cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal determinants, on the other. The only inherent (preformed or predetermined) aspects of any of

these developmental entities are the particular genes determining in part the developmental processes and limits involved in their evolution. These latter genes in all probability originated proximately from biparental genic pools, although the original modification of primate DNA, responsible for the distinctive human potentialities in these respects, could very well reflect the operation of supernatural intervention at the time of man's original creation, thus contributing to God's titular, if not actual and proximate, fatherhood in the heredity of all human beings. In any case, there are no good logical or theoretical reasons for believing that the soul differs significantly from its secular equivalents or counterparts insofar as undergoing a constant process of formation and modification that continues eternally, but always preserving its unique individuality as it changes both from pressures from within as well as in response to external stimulation.

The Cosmic Importance of Identity

Identity is cosmically important because the only aspect of the reality of the world (or of heaven) that we are able to

experience is its relation to, or reflection in, our own identity as it is filtered through our idiosyncratic cognitive structures, egos, personalities, and ego-involvements. Man lives not only for worthwhile intellectual, emotional, esthetic, and spiritual experiences--for acquiring knowledge, for self-fulfillment, for affectional expression (e.g., love), and for satisfying relationships, etc.--but also thereby to maintain, enhance, perpetuate, and extend his identity (ego).

In facing the prospect of death, contemplative man is dismayed less by the prospective loss of all of the above-listed goals, experiences, and values, than by the threatened extinction of his identity--if and when he is able to conceive, or at least partially conceive, of such an eventuality. How he reacts and tries to adjust to this perceived obliteration of his identity (total or partial) at death--if such indeed is his perception and understanding of the matter--will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

As indicated above, the concept of identity to be meaningful must have a certain enduring quality and encompass a certain minimal duration of time. For earthly identities this minimum is at least the foreseeable future. In the afterlife,

however, the only conceivable minimum is eternity itself. The period of time during which the identities of dead persons are remembered tends to vary from seconds to fractions of historical time. Geological time, however, generally obliterates the memory of all individuals, no matter how famous they may be.

The cosmic significance and implications of death are the factors that make it an intrinsically important event for the individual, qualitatively distinguishable from other catastrophes in his life. But although it is phenomenologically outside the range of, and discontinuous with, other calamitous human experience, it is still familiar enough, especially to elderly people in our culture (despite all of the denial, euphemisms, procrastination, repression, etc.), to be regarded as a significant part of life. Accordingly, therefore, it should be dealt with seriously--as a universal and inevitable problem with which all people should endeavor to come to grips. Only by so doing can they not only die with a positive, appropriate, and realistic attitude towards death, but they can also improve thereby the quality of their lives by appropriately modifying their goals, values, and priorities.

Why God Seeks to Preserve Human Souls Eternally

In creating man in His own image and likeness--a creature different from all others He had created previously--different primarily in possessing cognitive, linguistic, anticipatory, personality, moral, and self-awareness capacities and potentialities, similar to but, of course, vastly inferior to His own (especially in the creative sphere)--God evidently felt from the very beginning, according to believers, that immortality was an eminently appropriate characteristic for the man called Adam. Sparing such a magnificent product of His creation from the ignominious extinction facing all other living creatures, was, thus, first of all, a simple act of appropriate recognition on God's part of man's qualitative superiority to his other created creatures.

Second, God knew that Adam (and his descendants), alone of all the creatures He created, with all of his reasoning and anticipatory powers would very soon be able to conceptualize the nature of death and, hence, be able to anticipate that he too, if he were mortal, would someday inevitably have to die. Thus, as a further mark of compassion, God then wished to spare Adam the anguish and dismay of contemplating the obliteration of his

own identity--anguish that was made possible only because he had been created to begin with in God's own image and likeness. God, therefore, was compassionate for these latter two reasons, because He felt, perhaps, that Adam was entitled to immortality in view of the very capacities with which He had endowed him.

It seems highly unlikely, therefore, that the All-Compassionate One would be cruel enough to create a being who was God-like in so many ways (in comparison with animals) both to have his identity perish completely after only a very brief span of life, and to suffer, for virtually a lifetime, the torment of knowing that the extinction of his identity was both imminent and inevitable. It is true that He first did precisely this retributively to Adam to teach him a lesson and later to Adam's descendants because of their continuing wickedness; but He relented as described above by becoming reconciled with man through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, thus demonstrating His compassion again in this respect. Terminating man's identity abruptly and permanently, on the other hand, by reducing him (body and dependent soul) at death to a lifeless, insensate, and decaying mass, would hardly seem appropriate and acceptable as a long-term solution to man's eternal fate in the compassionate

eyes of God and believers. Although the hereafter solution involves permanent severance from participation in the affairs of our familiar world, it does enable man's identity to exist eternally in another sphere of reality.

An apparent third reason, from the standpoint of the believer, why God wishes to preserve human identities eternally is that every person He creates is a unique expression and variant of Himself, since each individual created by Him is modeled after His own image and likeness. Thus, to allow these likenesses of Himself to perish forever after only a brief sojourn on earth, before they had a full opportunity to develop all of their potentialities, would be a self-destructive act and a negation of His creative predilections. Their continued existence and achievements, believers intimate, are in a sense a joyful celebration of His own creative capacities as well as additions to His sense of conservation.

Last, according to believers, God appears eager to save human identities eternally from extinction in order to create the possibility of imposing eternal retribution on man for his conduct on earth, i.e., to reward him with eternal existence in heaven if he is good, just, and obeys His commandments and to

punish him with the eternal torments of hell for his wickedness. In this sense God apparently regards man's life on earth more as a testing or proving ground for determining his lot in the afterlife (heaven or hell) than as existence for its own sake or as an end in itself.

Other Conceptualizations of Death

In the preceding sections of this chapter, the believer's Christian theistic cosmic conceptualization of the nature and implications of death, God, and the hereafter has been presented in considerable detail from a psychological standpoint. As indicated previously, however, completely objective and definitive evidence is not presently, and may never be, available for these explanatory concepts; acceptance of them, therefore, is a matter of faith informed by reason, plausibility, hope, divine revelation (as recorded in the Scriptures), and the fulfillment of scriptural prophecies by the prophets on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In this section I will consider briefly, but critically, two other cosmic conceptualizations of death and the afterlife, namely, the "total extinction or obliteration" view, espoused

mainly by non-believers and atheists and the Buddhist view which is largely antithetical to the Christian.

Non-Believer and Atheistic: Death as Total

Extinction of Identity

This viewpoint obviously allows for no supernatural creation or intervention whatsoever. According to its proponents, man (and his superior cognitive, self-concept, moral, personality, anticipatory, and awareness capacities) simply evolved from the higher primates by a process of natural selection, in much the same way that any other species presumably originated. His psychological processes are held to be completely dependent on the biological integrity of their cellular and neural substrates, that obviously also undergo death when the body itself dies. Hence, at death all psychological states and functions, including the individual's psychological identity, cease to exist forever; it is as if he never existed in the first place. No supernatural influence is expected at death to render these states and processes independent of their substrates and, thus, able to continue functioning without them; and his identity, of course, does not

assume a disembodied spirit form when he dies that purportedly resides in a heaven the existence of which he denies.

There is, of course, no hard evidence that this view of the death of an individual's body as inclusive also of his mind, personality, identity, and self-awareness is false or impossible. On the face of it, it is supported by the total personal disappearance and non-participation of all of the great and lesser men of the past in the current affairs of humanity; this much is conceded by proponents of a theistic cosmic position who would nevertheless contend that these past identities still exist as invisible, immaterial spirits in a sphere of reality that is discontinuous with that of our own world.

Additionally, believers contend, it just seems somewhat incongruous with the tremendous qualitative superiority of man's cognitive, moral, and spiritual capacities (in comparison with those of other higher primates), given man's otherwise almost identical pattern of DNA, to suppose that he evolved naturally rather than was created supernaturally by God in the latter's image. The same incongruity is also apparent when believers ponder the reasonableness and credibility of this God-like

mental capacity, personality, and identity of man, being totally dependent on the integrity of his fragile cellular and neural substrates, and then undergoing complete extinction with his own death, after being exercised for only a relatively brief period of time.

Almost all ancient peoples, believers remind us, also found these latter twin propositions of the total extinction hypothesis rather incongruous with the apparent reality of things, and thus, believed both in the supernatural creation of man and in the survival of his identity after death. These two aspects of cosmology were also important features of their daily life; and until relatively recently, with the advent of a more mechanistic and reductionistic science, the same generally held true for modern man as well.

Obviously, it is much easier to live with the Christian theistic than with the atheistic "total extinction" view of the creation and cosmic fate of one's identity. It offers much more comfort and solace to one's narcissistic ego to believe: first, that one's species was specially created in the image of an omnipotent and omniscient being who is personally concerned with one's fate rather than that it simply evolved by natural

selection; and, second, that one's identity will survive eternally rather than simply perish with the death of one's body. This is the case because even with the help of such multiple self-protective mechanisms as denial, repression, the "back burner" maneuver, the illusion of the permanent present, minimization, euphemization, and "numbing of thought," the non-believer or atheist who professes total extinction of identity with death is still bound to experience at least transitory pangs of fear and anxiety from time to time as he reflects on his certain belief that someday, in the not too distant future, his identity will be permanently non-existent.

The Christian believer, on the other hand, need only contend with three much less formidable threats to his narcissistic ego: (1) the termination of his participation and involvement in familiar earthly family and community affairs and relationships and his corresponding removal from familiar physical, social, and interpersonal environments, with the replacement of all of the above by their unfamiliar afterlife counterparts; (2) remaining a disembodied spirit for an indefinite period of time until resurrection takes place at the end of the world; and (3) the possibility of negative divine

judgments (damnation) at the time of death and again when resurrection occurs and the world is destroyed (the Second Coming of Christ).

Typically the non-believer's fear and anxiety of the total extinction of his identity at death is relatively mild, tolerable, and non-disabling (hardly the "terror" that some writers describe); and it doesn't interfere significantly with his work or activities. Just his difficulty in conceiving completely of the nature and implications of his own death will protect him from the more serious consequences of this real threat to his narcissistic ego. (In individuals with severe and disabling levels of generalized anxiety [or panic disorder] who are also afraid of life, death fear and anxiety could be somewhat more pronounced.)

More likely, however, these extinction-of-identity beliefs might have a negative effect on the non-believer's general philosophy of life, giving rise to a nihilistic or existentialist approach to living and striving as futile, absurd, or meaningless. On the other hand, quite compatible with this conceptualization of death in some of these persons might be a passive resignation reaction (rather than true acceptance)

to this only brief sojourn on earth, with an accompanying determination to make the most of it in terms of finding self-fulfillment and transient happiness, and leaving the world a better place for having lived in it. Some of these individuals may also find consolation in the fact that even though they believe that their identities will be totally obliterated in the future, their culture will survive indefinitely--particularly if they feel that they have made a contribution to its survival.

All of the latter reactions of the non-believer, of course, are also commonly found in the Christian believer, but in somewhat less pronounced form, because his aspirations for an eternal identity in heaven make him focus less intensely on the fate of his relatively short-term earthly identity.

Buddhist. Antithetical in spirit, orientation, and in its chief cosmic goal to Christianity [which conceives of salvation as the eternal preservation of the essence of individual identity (the soul)], Buddhism, a non-theistic religion, on the other hand, is oriented toward the opposite ideal of terminating the desire (craving) for separateness of one's identity from the general life principle animating all living things, and merging it

indistinguishably, not only with all other animal and human identities, but ultimately also with the very universe itself.

The desire or craving for a distinguishably separate identity is made possible, in the first place, according to Buddhist doctrine, by man's capacity for self-awareness, which Buddhists consider the immortal aspect of his self. Once this desire (craving) is formed, its continued existence reciprocally energizes and perpetuates the tendency toward self-awareness. Only by being able to renounce the desire for separateness can self-awareness cease being energized and its immortality extinguished.

If, on the other hand, desire for separateness is not overcome before death, it perpetuates the continued existence of the self-awareness component of personality which is then reborn in another individual (human or animal). The new individual, in turn, develops a new personal identity which, together with the reincarnated self-awareness tendencies, constitutes the new personality. Through his capacity for self-awareness he becomes conscious of his new individuality (but remains unaware of his old identity that had undergone reincarnation), comes to regard

it as the principal value in life, and develops a powerful urge to preserve it indefinitely.

This latter urge both reciprocally enhances the self-awareness aspect of the individual during his lifetime, and (if not renounced before his death) effects its rebirth in another individual. The resulting cycle of birth and rebirth (reincarnation) then continues indefinitely until the person's craving for a separate individual existence is completely extinguished, at which point the ultimate goal of life, Nirvana, or supreme enlightenment, is achieved.

One major difficulty with the Buddhist conception of personality development is that the so-called immortal aspects of personality (including self-awareness of one's unique identity) that typically survive death and then continue in another individual, are considered to be preformed, whereas it is generally accepted by psychologists today that identity or ego develops in large measure as a result of exposure to relevant experience.

Much more difficult to explain is how a religion like Buddhism, that exalts the eternal anonymity of deceased individuals (i.e., total and permanent extinction of their

earthly identities) is able to command the allegiance of hundreds of millions of people in the Far East at any given point in time. (Historians, for example, tell us that one very important reason for the phenomenal spread of Christianity in the Western world during the first millennium, in comparison with that of other competing religions, was the hope it held out for the survival of individual identity after death.)

One possible answer to this question is that instead of providing theistically-derived reassurances of the existence of individual identity after death, Buddha adopted the "sweet lemon" approach of making the eternal loss of such identity the most important and desirable goal of life; and this approach apparently had a very strong appeal to Orientals whose overall orientation to life is basically more passive and less egocentric, individualistic, aggressive, and self-assertive than that of Occidentals.

NOTES

¹Theologians generally interpret the Adam and Eve aspects of man's creation allegorically rather than literally or historically. The same is true of the Tower of Babel story and Noah's ark.

²In alternative Christian belief, the souls of the unjust, in the era between the Fall of Man and Christ's Ascension into heaven, did not "perish" on death in the sense of being annihilated or destroyed, because the soul once created by God is thought to be immortal or indestructible; they "perished," rather, in the sense of being alienated from God's care and love. On death they remained eternally in a kind of limbo--but not in the same limbo in which the souls of dead righteous and just men (e.g., Moses, Elijah) resided prior to the coming of Christ, awaiting entrance into heaven with the advent of the Redeemer. It was this latter limbo that Jesus visited when, according to the Gospels he "descended into hell" after dying on the Cross and rising again on the third day. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, Jesus was the first man (in His human aspect) to enter heaven. Those persons after Him who are predominantly just and righteous are said to go straight to heaven, whereas the wicked descend to hell. The less righteous spend a variable

period of time in purgatory to be purified of their sins before entering heaven.

Summary and Conclusions of the Outcomes of Jesus' Sacrificial
Death on the Cross as the Conquest of Death and Sin Forever

One of the most central and founding doctrines of the Christian religion, adopted by most believers soon after the historical occurrence of Jesus' death on the Cross, was inspired both by the self-sacrificial manner of his death and by his altruistic purpose in so doing--that is, helping his followers and mankind generally to attain salvation as manifested by eternal preservation of individual personality and identity in heaven.

The explanation offered by most theologians of the final positive outcome of the death of Jesus is: (1) that the sacrifice was entirely voluntary (i.e., freely accepted); and (2) that it was proposed and executed by Jesus himself both as the semi-divine and only son of God and as the exalted founder of the emerging new religion of Christianity.

Last, (3) his self-sacrificial death was approved and sanctioned by God, the Father, thereby setting the stage for the much-desired and much-discussed reconciliation between God and man after their long period of alienation precipitated by Adam's

disobedience and God-supplanting defiance. Concomitantly, the prospective death of his only son, Jesus, evidently constituted a very grievous sacrificial loss for God himself, possibly making him more receptive to the long-bruited reconciliation with man.

Perhaps the most crucial and pivotal issue facilitating the reconciliation between God and man was the new moral-theological dictum, accepted by both parties, that most sins could be forgiven if appropriately expiated under conditions that were applied later to the sacrament of penance, thereby guaranteeing that some less-tainted sinners could be saved.

All of these pre-conditions applying to the death of Jesus obviously made his self-sacrificial death itself more significant and authoritative to both its initial and more recent interpreters. In fact, the scenario of Jesus' sacrificial death by crucifixion, symbolized universally by a simple cross, has been Christianity's most effective human-interest appeal in evangelizing both native and more sophisticated cultures and also in converting the totality of these diverse groups into one of the largest, most faithful, best organized, and one of the most influential world religions that has already lasted two thousand years.

Shortly after or before total death occurs, the body's neural substrate, together with the reset of the bodily tissues,

undergoes rapid degeneration and tissue death. For this reason, the transfer of the neural representations of past experience, new learnings, and psychological capabilities (including self-awareness of one's own identity) from the decedent to the spirit being (its imputed immediate successor) must be made with controlled dispatch.

How this hypothesized transfer actually takes place has not as yet even been theorized. In more primitive cultures an undifferentiated and unspecified divine omnipotence and omniscience may be implicated, whereas in more sophisticated cultures the intervention of a divine, supernatural technologist may possibly be envisioned.

If this critical transfer is not made for any reason or is not executed in a timely fashion, the development of a conscious sense of identity, of various cognitive abilities, and of psychological reactivity presumably would not occur. Stimulation of the dead neural substrate at this point in time evokes about as much cognitive and behavioral response as stimulating a cement sidewalk or building block.

Life itself is strictly a biological concept that is often confused or incorrectly equated with the concept of identity. Identity can, of course, often be co-extensive with life, but this co-extensiveness is by no means exclusive. A sense of identity, for example, can doubtlessly exist in the complete

absence of life as in the case of the eternal identity capacity of the spirit being. The otherwise existence of eternal identity, however, naturally presupposes the accompanying condition of eternal life, which biologists generally consider to be impossible in multicellular organisms. (See p.).

In this regard it may be noted that Christian clergymen commonly imply that in blessing a communicant for eternal life in the future, they are also really enhancing his chances for eternal identity and, thus, also for salvation. In this context they apparently forget that non-life, as it exists in a spirit being, can nonetheless be endowed, or acquired experientially, with a sense of identity.

The actual psychological mechanisms, as previously mentioned, whereby it is possible to transfer information to the spirit being to maintain conscious awareness of self-identity and the identity of others, to exercise cognitive functioning and reactivity, and to preserve both pre-death and post-death experience (as well as the successful [adaptive] outcomes of various learning situations) are completely unknown and not even hypothesized at the present time. The spirit being, of course, as only a hypothetical construct, has merely a certain heuristic and theoretical value now in explaining some aspects of the after-life, dominated by the spirit being after it "takes over" the direction of psychological functioning in the afterlife.

One must be careful, however, not to equate these latter non-life mechanisms with those of a live neural substrate.

Thus, the spirit being, referred to above, as a hypothetical construct, obviously has no objectively or validly acknowledged substantive or functional reality as such. Such reality, if it does exist, probably does not exist as precisely as conceptualized, although it conceivably could do so under certain circumstances.

Some of the Canaanite tribes, prior to the Israelite settlement of Palestine, conceptualized the existence of a non-living, incorporeal, immediate successor to the identity of the decedent that included a conscious sense of self-identity that could also be perceived as such by others. As part of its identity function, the spirit being also serves as a selective repository for past and current memories, especially those that have adaptive value.

Up to this historical point in their scriptures, (the end of the complete five books of Moses), the Israelites, unlike many ancient peoples, had not recognized or formalized the existence of an after-life following death; but some time before the onset of Jesus' public ministry, they broke sharply with this particular religious orientation and tradition by borrowing intermittently from one or more Canaanite tribes the concept of a non-living, incorporeal spirit being. Jesus and his followers

were undoubtedly influenced by this concept by virtue of his scholarly familiarity with and grasp of the Hebrew Scriptures. But he apparently decided not to include reference to them in the crucifixion scenario.

Considering the magnitude and unqualified nature of some of the claims regarding Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, followed by his resurrection, e.g., the claim that he conquered death and sin forever and for all men, seems somewhat overstated, and disappointing. If nothing else changes in a confrontation, the relative expressed power of the antagonists should change, that is, move in the direction of the less powerful figure. If the latter figure at the start of the conflict "conquers", one should then expect that the latter's general position should become less distressing and devastating, less unpredictable, less disruptive, and also less terminating prior to future positive potentialities. But in Jesus' death scenario, death remained just as real, grim, and conspicuous, and just as productive of grief, mourning, and tragedy as in many routine deaths. The possibility that the tragedy of death might be softened by the anticipated face-to-face contact with God and the saints seemed to make little noticeable difference in death reactions. People died just as frequently and just as often for the same unsavory reasons--murder, mayhem, and

betrayal. In short, little if anything significant apparently changed.

But this is really not the entire relevant story. The more spiritual and the more ascetic a particular follower happened to be, the greater was his dependence on pure unalloyed faith as opposed to seemingly concrete and practical guarantees; the more abstract and cosmic his concepts of life and about death were, the more likely he was to believe in the positive claims of others in Jesus' death scenario.

Up to a certain historical point in their scriptures, the Israelites, unlike most ancient peoples, had not conceptualized the existence of an after-life; but then under the influence of neighboring Canaanite tribes, with whom they shared the land of Palestine in tribal proximity, they broke sharply with their original theological orientation and tradition in this regard by loosely borrowing from one or more Canaanite tribes the highly sophisticated concept of a spirit being.

Nevertheless, the Israelites in their religious and intellectual life continued to pay more attention to the concept of life and its derivative psychological properties that explain (by their absence in death) states of awareness, much psychological functioning, a large variety of cognitive capabilities and reactivity, and sophisticated self-awareness (including self-awareness of self-identity).

Some of Jesus' followers, in interpreting his death scenario, appeared to be somewhat unrestrained and expansive, thus, overstating in their interpretation of his death scenario and its sequel, and thereby raising unrealistic hopes among those who tended to focus more on practical and action measures rather than on spiritual, eternal, idealistic, intellectual, or moral issues. Anticipated actions that might soon put an end to death and sin as negative forces in man's nature that were perceived as his most formidable enemies and as obstacles to eternal salvation. The more practical, prudent and concrete-minded followers, who had more confidence in selective action and legalistic guarantees than in unproven articles of faith, expected that Jesus would soon take decisive action to press home the conquest of death and sin once and for all on a reality rather than on just a hypothetical and ideational basis.

On the other hand, those other followers of Jesus whose personalities tended more to accentuate attachment to spiritual, idealistic, intellectual, or even humanistic issues rather than to material or hedonistic values, and who tended to be more abstract rather than concrete in their thinking, were more prone to evade the issue of whether and when to take definite action against death and sin.

The problem of resurrection is extremely complex and difficult, both in the relatively recent and more remote past,

and is still just as difficult in the present. This is the case because resurrection is not a maneuver and phenomenon that can be reliably performed and repeated under standardized or stipulated conditions. It is considered briefly in the present context because it is perhaps the most dramatic part of Jesus' death where his resurrected body "conclusively" demonstrates to his followers his victorious conquest of death and sin forever and for all men.

However, since resurrection is both a phenomenon and an anti-death technique that could not really be successfully and unequivocally performed, even today or at any other historical time, it must be considered now to be solely a matter of faith on the part of both the subject and the beholder.

Resurrection also poses special problems of interpersonal logistics. First, how is it possible for one semi-divine man (Jesus) to validly judge personally so many individuals? One could then invoke at this point the omnipotent and omniscient capacities of God; but even these capacities have limits and must also obey the laws of nature. Further consideration of resurrection problems and issues will be considered in the chapter on relevant biomedical issues, e.g., to what extent is the body at an earlier point in time actually the same body--molecularly and tissue-wise (not be mention the same identity)--that is resurrected at a much later date. This is especially

problematical if a long time elapses before critical examination of the deceased body occurs or if the corpse is cremated soon after death but a long time before examination. In the latter case its constituent molecules become widely dispersed in time and space prior to any kind of physical or chemical procedure examining its identity.

Further discussion and consideration of the concept of resurrection in the context of biomedical aspects of resurrection can be found on page 000.

We mourn the deaths of those we love because, no matter how devout our beliefs in the afterlife, we still ponder the distinct possibility that these deaths mark cosmologically the final dissolution or extinction of their one and only short opportunity in eternity of overcoming their mortal being and capacities and so expressing their transient personalities and identities hypothetically. For this end even believers and those who love them do not consistently regard the incomparable joys of heaven as adequate compensation for the frustrations of their mortality. Like the frail insects, man has had his brief time on earth in the sun and now may conceivably be fated to be naught ever more, not even capable of experiencing his own precipitous descent into nothingness.

Why the Title of this Book is "Death and the Human
Condition"

To summarize generally and to consolidate the logic of the preliminary conclusions of this issue, I believe that it overstates the actual reality of the biblical situation, to claim unqualifiedly that Jesus 'conquered" death and thus became "the savior of the world" because he freely accepted death for himself on the cross in order to "conquer" it (and its consequences and implications) for all men forever.

In the purely literal sense of the term, Jesus obviously did not "conquer" death, because people naturally continued to die at the same rate as they did before the crucifixion; to be mourned and grieved by their loved ones just as before; to be unaware, insensate and unresponsive to their environment; to find their careers and their planning for same terminated; and to no longer participate in family, community and cultural affairs. To use an allegorical analogy, in spite of what it might say in the scriptures of any religion or in the folklore of any ethnic group, no person, after truly dying, has ever been seen walking on the face of the earth. Finally if heaven is truly such a wonderful and inspiring place, why should anyone, particularly a loved one, feel so sorry for his spouse, relatives, and close friends when they die and presumably go there forever.

These reconciliation exchanges referred to above were actually an approved way of ending God's negative feelings about mankind, and his poor interpersonal relations with man because of Adam's disobedience and perhaps also because of his ambivalent desire to supplant him as the true moral arbiter (rather than God) in his own little microcosm in the Garden of Eden. God himself also regretted that his only son, Jesus, had to die in order to bring about a reconciliation with man; but this was the prevailing and conventional mythological belief and custom of the times, namely, for divine personages to make a personal self-sacrificial validation of their own creditability with respect to honoring and fulfilling the terms of any new and important covenant with man.

Jesus' concepts of expiation and forgiveness were very similar, (but more precise) to those of John the Baptist (who baptized him) insofar as individual sinners were expected to expiate and receive forgiveness only for those actual, individualized and personal sins for which they were personally responsible. These latter concepts, therefore, were self-evidently much superior ethically to related contemporary Canaanite and Israelite concepts of justice, guilt, expiation and forgiveness that were also practiced only on the annual holy Day of Atonement during which the high-priest attempted to atone by prayer for the totality of guilt associated with the

collective sins of the entire community and to seek God's forgiveness for same.

Also, and perhaps much more important, as a result of this achieved reconciliation, the descendants of Adam, who on dying heretofore, but no longer, had to lose their souls and identities forever, as well as God's love and protection, as a result of being segregated on death in limbo (except for a few prophets, patriarchs and holy men). Likewise, mortal, moral, and frequent sinners, who in the past had been segregated in hell and subjected invariably to torturous and retributive punishments, were spared the latter chastisement if they fully and sincerely expiated their sins.

These latter consequences of the reconciliation between God and man, which Jesus' voluntary and altruistic acceptance of his own death on the cross supported, also gave limited or qualified sanction to the claim of high-ranking believers that he had "conquered" death, and hence, was "the savior of the world". But by any standard, the factual basis of this claim was actually no mean or trivial theological accomplishment even considered solely in its own right, despite being overstated both soon afterwards and by succeeding generations of Christian believers.

In addition, Jesus, building on the moral theology of John the Baptist, individualized and personalized the judgments of

guilt, responsibility, expiation, and the forgiveness of sins, all of which constituted considerable advances in the theology, ethics, justice, mercy and charity of sinfulness, thereby adding to his already exalted status of master teacher and biblical scholar, the laurels of outstanding theologian and ethical philosopher and reformer. Later he was to become the first unacknowledged Christian martyr even though his period of death and suffering was very brief.

Nevertheless, all of this as impressive as it appears, still does not add up appropriately, realistically, justifiably, and correctly to regarding Jesus as the "conqueror" of death and "savior of the world," and can easily be perceived as unrealistic and wishful thinking by simply citing the continuing negative consequences and implications of death ever since the emergence of man on our planet, and also after many of these same negative consequences still appeared despite the arduous efforts of Jesus and other friends of man to extinguish them.

On the other hand, much of the glory and adulation showered on Jesus, both before and after his crucifixion, reflected not so much his actual theological achievements listed above, but rather the fascinating drama of his mysterious and quite unexpected resurrection, seemingly performed by God in relation to an exalted, semi-divine, mysterious individual who recently admitted being the messiah, the only son of God, and the founder

of the nascent religion of Christianity, whereas not long ago he was known only as "the carpenter's son," and a master teacher and biblical scholar with many disciples.

An independent consequence of the Reconciliation Scenario, of course, was the greater personalization of the "guilt and expiation" forgiving sequence, that is, charging only the particular individual who committed the mortal sin rather than his entire community with the associated burden of guilt and then requiring him to repent this sin and make amends (restitution).

Later, at the forecasted end of the world, these sinners would be judged again by Jesus, and if their spirit beings were found to be worthy, they would be united with their own resurrected and glorified bodies and would then, according to scripture, would presumably enjoy everlasting life.

The hypothesis was advanced above that it was not so much the undeniably solid theological and ethical achievements of Jesus--his individualizing and personalizing the concepts of responsibility, guilt, justice, expiation, and the forgiveness of sins; emphasizing the application of mercy and charity in judging sinfulness; the possibility of forgiving most sins if they were properly expiated; reconciling God and man who were long alienated mostly because of Adam's sin of disobedience and presumption of supplanting God as moral judge in the Garden of

Eden; increasing the frequency of salvation and decreasing the number of mortal and chronic sinners (and also of "original" sinners) whose souls identities were segregated in hell and limbo respectively and thus were forever lost to mankind.

It was rather Jesus himself, the man, who made both his crucifixion and his ethical system the spiritual centerpieces of the birth of Christianity, and his disciples, the men who claimed that he supposedly "conquered" death and sin and, thus, became "the savior of the world."

It was undoubtedly the high drama and abruptness of this unexpected resurrection, however, that led to the widespread assumption that it could have been performed on Jesus only by God, who was encouraged rather than deterred in so doing by Jesus' humble origins and his later modest station in life as a carpenter, an itinerant preacher, and interpreter of Hebrew scriptures, despite his recent extraordinary claims echoed by his disciplines, of being the Messiah and the only son of God. Ironically enough, however, the drama of the occasion and of Jesus' personal history, seemingly validated these latter claims after the crucifixion in the minds of both the common, uneducated people and of his disciples, as well as fostered the view that Jesus had "conquered death and sin" and, therefore, was "the savior of the world." Resurrection, commonly perceived as a mark of God's special favor, also validated the specific

virtues that Jesus championed for the Israelites as recorded in his parables--humility, loyalty, kindness, truthfulness, honesty, reliability, and responsibility.

The greatest reward that any man could realize in his opinion, for leading a consistently upright life on earth was the rare gift of God, through resurrection, of living another life on earth and then still another life in heaven. In either case, however, resurrected life, was limited rather than eternal because of the multicellularity factor, requiring periodic and infinite renewal to be everlasting (see pages 000). But as stated above, he was not successful in suppressing the negative consequences and implications of death (see page 000).

It seems, therefore, that death is inevitably part of complex multicellular life and is the price that nature must pay for the life advantages of multicellularity. Despite the reputed omnipotence and omniscience of God, resurrection and eternal life may very well be beyond his powers. God, the author of nature, is obviously just as subject to the laws of nature, that he himself promulgates, as any scientist is. Further discussion of the problems and difficulties of resurrection can be found in the chapter on biomedical aspects of death (pp. 000-000). Death, in other words, is the chief limiting and inevitable

aspect of the human condition that both creates and limits the potential capacities and achievements of man.