

The Christian Meaning of Death

by Olin Alfred Curtis

The Christian view of death is one of sorrow, dread, and hatred, but lifted into solemn triumph by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Genesis 2:17, Romans 5:12, Romans 5:14, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, Ephesians 2:1, Revelation 2:11

Topics: "Mortality And Sin", "Nature Of Death"

Description

Olin Alfred Curtis delves into the various conceptions of death from non-Christian perspectives, highlighting the idealization of death by modern poets and the scientific view of death as a servant of life. He then explores the biblical perspective on death in both the Old and New Testaments, emphasizing the significance of bodily death as a consequence of sin. Curtis also conducts a philosophical study of death, discussing the nature of life, the organism of man, and the source of life as being rooted in God. He concludes by examining the personal, moral, and racial significance of bodily death as a penalty for sin and the ultimate climax of probation in the journey of the soul.

Transcript

Before considering the teaching of the Bible which bears directly upon the death of Christ, we need to determine what meaning death itself has from the Christian point of view. My plan is first to indicate the non-Christian conceptions of death; then to examine the Bible in both Testaments; then to furnish a philosophy of death adequate to express and protect the Christian meaning.

Non-Christian Conceptions

The Idealization of Death. Death is idealized into a friendly and even beautiful event by some of the modern philosophical writers, but especially by the modern poets. This poetic idealization is not to be explained by the natural temper of the poet, which inclines him to "transform a stump into a stairway," but rather by the fact that he is (with notable exceptions) a heathen mystic made superficially hopeful by a Christian atmosphere. He is an easy optimist who has never paid the ethical price of a profound optimism. A perfect example of this class is Walt Whitman, who has influenced modern poetry in a most subtle manner. In a poem, written as a protest against the thoroughly Christian painting, Death's Valley, by George Inness, Whitman says:

"Nay, do not dream, designer dark,

Thou hast portrayed or hit thy theme entire:
I, hoverer of late by this dark valley, by its confines,
Having glimpses of it,
Here enter lists with thee,
Claiming my right to make a symbol too.
"For I have seen many wounded soldiers die,
After dread suffering -- have seen their lives
Pass off with smiles;
And I have watched the death-hours of the old;
And seen the infant die;
The rich, with all his nurses and his doctors;
And then the poor, in meagerness and poverty;
And I myself for long, O Death,
Have breathed my every breath
Amid the nearness and the silent thought of thee.
"And out of these and thee,
I make a scene, a song, brief (not fear of thee,
Nor gloom's ravines, nor bleak, nor dark --
For I do not fear thee,
Nor celebrate the struggle, or contortion,
Or hard-tied knot),
Of the broad blessed light and perfect air,
With meadows, rippling tides, and
trees and flowers and grass,
And the low hum of living breeze --
And in the midst God's beautiful eternal
right hand,

Thee, holiest minister of Heaven --

Thee, envoy, usherer, guide at last of all,

Rich, florid, loosener of the stricture-knot called life,

Sweet, peaceful, welcome Death"

The Scientific View of Death. This scientific view Dr. Newman Smyth has gathered up, for popular service, in his interesting apologetic, *The Place of Death in Evolution*. For our purpose here we do not require the details of the discussion. The gist of it all is that, as a result of scientific investigation, death is regarded as a servant of life in the economy of nature. Death is not a finality of failure, but a sacrifice to secure a higher process of life. Death is a crucial feature in the normal movement toward the finest vitality. Dr. Smyth says: "As life becomes more organized and complex, death prevails. It comes to reign on earth, because it comes to serve. At length in the history of life a living form arose, so multicellular and so well organized that it ceased to continue the course of life, simply by dividing and multiplying itself into daughter cells; it had acquired the power of giving up its life for another; it died in order that its offspring might continue its life in forms struggling to still higher Organization and better fitted to survive while it must perish. One parent form passes away in order that others may catch up the motion of life, and in turn transmit to others life's rhythm and joy. Thus death comes in to help, and not merely to hurt; to help life further on and higher up, not to put a stop to life."

The Conception of Death in the Bible

In the Old Testament. By death the writers of the Old Testament usually mean what we mean by physical or bodily death -- not annihilation, but the cessation of this existence on earth by the separation of the soul from the body. Professor A. B. Davidson says: "By death the Old Testament means what we mean when we use the word. It is the phenomenon which we observe. Now, all parts of the Old Testament indicate the view that at death the person is not annihilated; he continues to subsist in Sheol, the place of the dead, though in a shadowy and feeble form occasioned by the withdrawal of the spirit of life."

Sometimes the objection has been raised that death as used in Gen. 2:17 ("for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die") could not have meant bodily death, inasmuch as Adam and Eve did not, according to the account, die a bodily death on the day of their disobedience. But the real meaning of the Hebrew is not fully brought out in our English Bible, not even in the Revised Version. The real meaning is (see Dillmann's Commentary in loco): "Death will be certainly for thee the consequence thereof." But even if the English translation were correct, the objection would have no force; for death is a long process which only culminates in the final separation of the soul from the body. As a matter of direful fact, a man begins to die as soon as he is born. Our entire relation to the natural world is one of death; and many of us have a hard fight of it to keep alive at all.

As Martin Luther said in his Table Talk: "Death peeps out at every limb."

I carefully examined about two hundred passages, where the term death is either used or implied, in the Old Testament; and I did not find one where the meaning was not (plainly or probably) that of bodily death. In some instances, though, it seemed to me that the whole meaning of the statement was not exhausted by the idea of bodily death. It was bodily death and a peculiar background.

In the New Testament. We have in the New Testament a much more complicated situation. But we can start with at least two certain points: First, that in the New Testament the usage is sometimes like the prevailing usage of the Old Testament, the term death meaning nothing more than bodily death; and, second, that in the New Testament the usage is sometimes most comprehensive, the term death meaning the total present condition of the sinner. Now the question comes up, Does the term death ever mean in the New Testament narrowly and precisely moral, or spiritual, death? So eminent an authority on New Testament words as Professor Hermann Cremer says, No (*Wörterbuch*, in loco). But I cannot be so certain. There are a number of places where, as in the second chapter of Ephesians, both text and context would seem to require a meaning sharply beyond the general idea of an abnormal total condition produced by sin, a meaning exactly corresponding to that disintegration of conscience which we are wont to call moral death.

Again we have, as a striking peculiarity of the book of the Revelation, the expression, "second death." Without doubt this means, not the annihilation of the wicked, but their everlasting punishment. In his *Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life*, Professor Charles says: "The second death is the death of the soul, as the first is the death of the body. It is not the annihilation, but the endless torment of the wicked that is here meant."

Death and Sin. As to the relation which sin sustains to the "second death," and to every phase of moral death, we need no argument whatever. Nor is it economy to spend out time in proving that in the Old Testament sin and bodily death are placed in a penal connection. Our crucial question is this: Does Saint Paul teach that bodily death is a penal consequence of Adam's transgression? The test passages are 1 Cor. 15.21-22 and Rom. 5.12. To economize, we will consider only the passage from Romans. It reads thus: "Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned." The matter is of such extreme importance that we will deal with it through exegetical authority:

Gifford on Romans (*The Speaker's Commentary*). "That death must here be understood in its primary sense as the death of the body, is clear from the connection with verse 14, where no other meaning is admissible, and from the unmistakable reference to the narrative in Genesis (Gen. 2.17) and the sentence there pronounced, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (Gen. 3.19)."

Beet on Romans. "We have no indication that the word death (chap. 5.12-19) means anything except the death of the body. The argument rests on the story of Genesis; and there we have no hint of any death except (Gen. 3.19) the return of dust to dust. The proof in Rom. 5.14 of the statement in verse 12 refers evidently to the visible reign of natural death. And the comparison of Adam and Christ requires no other meaning of the word. Through one man's sin the race was condemned to go down into the grave; and through one man's obedience and one divine proclamation of pardon believers will obtain a life beyond the grave. The whole argument is but a development of 1 Cor. 15.22."

Vaughan on Romans. "Natural death, primarily, and as the punishment specially denounced; spiritual and eternal death, incidentally and secondarily, as the necessary consequence of the severance of a creature from the service and love of the Creator."

Meyer on Romans. "The *thanatos* is physical death viewed as the separation of the soul from the body and its transference to Hades. Had Paul taken *thanatos* in another sense, therefore, he must have definitely indicated it, in order to be understood."

Godet on Romans. That the meaning is physical death Godet says "is confirmed besides by the obvious allusion to the narrative of Genesis (2.17 and 3.19) as well as by the explanation in the following verses (13 and 14), where the word death is evidently taken in the strict sense."

Orello Cone (Paul, the Man, the Missionary, and the Traveler). "That the *thanatos* of Rom. 5. 12 is primarily physical death there can be no doubt, not only on account of the analogy of the Jewish theology, but also because the word is employed without any indication that other than its literal sense is intended."

Bruce (Saint Paul's Conception of Christianity). "When Saint Paul says, 'So death passed upon all men,' does he allude to the familiar fact of physical dissolution, or is death to be taken comprehensively as including at once temporal, spiritual, and eternal consequences? If my conjecture as to the Adam- Christ train of thought be correct, we must understand *thanatos* in the restricted sense."

The Mood of the Bible. The exegesis of this or that passage of Scripture does not, however, furnish us with the full case. The Bible has a mood toward physical death. This mood is expressed, for instance, in the ninetyeth psalm, that "most pathetic description of the drift of the generations of men into darkness." And even such seeming breaks in the mood as we find in the third chapter of the book of Job really only serve to emphasize the general attitude of the Bible toward bodily death. In the Old Testament the mood is one of profound sadness; but in the New Testament the mood changes and is intensified into the most unmitigated hostility to physical death. Death is not regarded as my good friend death," but as man's relentless enemy to be overcome only by the power of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And so, even if there were no definite text in point, we would need to explain this mood from the standpoint of redemption and the Christian consciousness; and such an explanation would require the precise connection between bodily death and the divine punishment of sin. In one sentence, there is not the slightest doubt but that the Word of God treats physical death as an abnormal human event coming upon the race as an immediate penalty for the Adamic disobedience of God's command.

Conclusions. But our study of the teaching of the Bible, more thoroughly gathered up, results in the following definite conclusions:

1. While the Bible sometimes teaches that the condition of the sinner is a state of spiritual death, and that this spiritual death eventuates in everlasting punishment, it nevertheless puts the most significant stress upon bodily death.
2. Bodily death is not regarded as a friendly or useful event, as a normal feature in beneficial process of nature; but is regarded as abnormal and hostile and terrible.
3. The explanation of this biblical attitude toward bodily death is to be found in just one thing, namely, that this death expresses God's inflexible hatred of sin, is the penal stamp which he has fixed upon the entire human race because of man's original transgression.
4. The consequent Christian bearing toward bodily death is one of sorrow, dread, and hatred; and all this lifted into solemn triumph by means of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Saint Paul has the exact, full Christian feeling when he bursts out: "But -- thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

A Philosophical Study of Death

What is Death? In practical speech death is the negation of life. Death is the absence of life. It does not carry with it necessarily the idea of total annihilation. Surely there might be death with annihilation, but usually there is no such entire destruction of the object in death. For example, here is a tree which has been entirely dead for months; but it still stands with trunk, branches, bark, and roots -- the tree has not been annihilated, but it is dead.

What is Life? But when we say that "Death is the absence of life," what do we mean by life? In his First Principles, Herbert Spencer says, "Life is definable as the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations." But such adjustment is rather what life does than what life is. A better definition is that of Bishop Dahle: "Life is that force in an organism which places all other forces, working in it, in serviceable relation to its growth and preservation." This is very close to the fact, but not quite complete. Let us begin with the idea of an organism. An organism is a complex of essential parts, every part making contribution to the common end, and all the parts interdependent. That is the lowest organic condition. In a higher organism every part must be both means and end -- by which I mean that every part gets as much as it gives. In the highest conceivable organism, like the personal organism of the Trinity, not only is every part essential to the organism, but also the entire organism is essential to every part; that is, the very existence of every part is possible only in and by means of the entire organism. Now, what I understand by life is this: It is the power of organic action. Or, it is the power which every organism has to act as an organism. That tree is dead because its power to act as an organic tree is gone. The parts of the tree are still in action as separate parts, change after change taking place, but the parts do not act together to accomplish a common purpose, and so the tree as a tree is dead. And the death of the tree began the very moment any smallest feature of the tree went its own way and no longer made contribution to the common task. Thus, life is the power of reciprocity in action, and death is the absence of that power. And so the inevitable mark of death is the breaking up of an organism. In the beginning of death the organism begins to break up; and in the completion of death the organism is entirely broken up. There is no need, with Bishop Dahle, to emphasize the ideas of growth and preservation, for the organism will take care of itself and exercise every organic function, if it only has the power of organic action.

The Organism of a Man. Already, in considering the racial nexus, I have called your attention to the fact that the human body has great importance in Christian doctrine; but here I wish to get at the same point from another angle. The organism of a man is not completed in the soul alone; full manhood requires both soul and body. But we must be careful at this point not to yield an inch to the materialists. The Christian conception is squarely between the two extremes:

1. That the soul is dependent upon the body for existence itself; and, 2. That the man is complete as a bare personal soul. Speaking of Saint Paul's teaching, Professor Charles says: "According to the apostle, on the other hand [over against Philo's idea that the body is the enemy of the soul], though the flesh is in antagonism with the spirit, there is no such antagonism between the body and the spirit. Nay, rather the body is indispensable to the completed well-being of the latter. A bodiless human spirit is 'naked,' is in a state of weakness and deprivation."

The biblical emphasis upon the importance of the body can be thus related to the conception which I have given of life and death: Man is a personal soul, or a spirit, in such vital fitness with a physical body that the two, soul and body, make in their plan one organism. When the organic relation is perfect, then there is the full manifestation of human life; when the organic relation is impaired, there is the first note of death; and when the organism is entirely broken up, then death is complete.

The Source of Life. Not yet, though, have we discovered the root of the matter. Underlying all the utterance and emphasis of the Bible there is one primal conception, namely, God is himself the source of life. It is not merely that life comes from God as Creator, it is profounder -- God is the life. No created thing has any power to live. The organism does not create, but only expresses the power. Now, I think, we can see the bottom. Man as an organism is utterly dependent upon God. It is only when man is in absolute correspondence with God that he has the power of perfect organic action. But man is a moral person, and therefore he cannot have a purely automatic correspondence with God. The correspondence needs to be personal and moral. In swifter speech, a man, to live a full human life, must have constant companionship with God in moral love. Man, thus, by his disobedience snapped the vital relation -- broke away from the very source of life -and so instantly the human organism began to break up -- away from God man began to die. The whole case can be analyzed in this way:

1. The deepest fact of human death is that man is not in vital personal companionship with God.
2. Thus, death is first of all evident in man's moral nature, for right there is the point of personal rupture with God.
3. But death is not only moral, but also human, in the sense that it injures, and at last breaks up, that organism of soul and body which is essential to a full human life.
4. The extreme biblical stress upon bodily death is for two reasons: First, because bodily death has in its awful event the entire significance of death. A man's organism goes to pieces in death because he has not moral power enough to keep the thing together; and he lacks this power because the original vital connection with God has been lost. And, second, because bodily death is the consummate expression of God's hatred of sin -- indeed, the penal mark against sin.

The Bodily Death of Man and Death in the Natural World. If we consider man's death as a consequence of sin the question arises, How can we relate man's bodily death to the universal and structural fact of death in the natural world? Different answers have been given, of which the most important are these:

1. The connection between death and sin is proleptic. Foreknowing man's sin, God provided a world to fit the fact.
2. The tree of life was intended to protect man, or to lift him beyond the operation of natural law. In commenting on Rom. 5.12, Dr. Whedon says: "Adam's first organism seems to have been naturally dissoluble, and its dissolution to have been prevented by the tree of life. His bodily immortality seems thus to have been properly supernatural." A view something like this was held by Professor Franz Delitzsch, who looked upon the tree of life as having a kind of sacramental efficiency.

Dr. Latimer, the dean of the School of Theology in Boston University, united the two views. In his lectures on Didactic Theology he said: "As to physical death, the difficulty is removed when we consider that it is likely that man was created mortal and the tree of life guaranteed his immortality. ... Yet even this mortality was the result of sin, proleptically, so to speak, since God's foreknowledge of man's fall determined him to confer upon man a mortal constitution."

3. The answer, however, which best suits the temper and method of modern Christian apology is that sin merely gives a new moral content to a normal event. Death as a part of the process of natural law is a normal thing, but the entrance of sin into man's life transforms for him the event into a dreadful abnormal

experience. The most convincing statement of this view has been given by Professor James Denney. I will quote a fragment: "Conscience, quickened by the law of God, has to look at death, and to become alive, not to its physical antecedents, but to its divine meaning. What is God's voice in death to a spiritual being? It is what the apostle represents it -- death is the wages of sin. It is that in which the divine judgment of sin comes home to conscience." Of course, this view can readily be joined to the proleptic; and this connection is skillfully made by Professor Bruce in his Apologetics.

4. This last answer to our question, this conception of human death as a normal event filled with abnormal quality, I have most seriously tried to accept, for it affords the Christian preacher "the line of least resistance"; but I am obliged to reject it as insufficient. It is too easy. It does not penetrate the awful tragedy of sin. Sin, I believe, has spoiled the whole universe. Everything from the flowers to the planets is a failure -- does not work out the full ideal. Nature is like a limping king. He gets along, but his movement is out of keeping with his majesty. Let the scientist investigate and induce his conclusions; I will in my thinking and feeling make no terms with death. I hate death; I hate it everywhere -- in garden, and meadow, and swamp, and forest -- everywhere; it violates every noble thing in me; I long for a world where there will be no dead thing, where every created thing will just live, live, live forever! I must, therefore, begin with the proleptic view. Man is the center in cosmic significance. This does not necessarily require that our earth must have the importance now assigned to it in the speculations of Alfred Russel Wallace. It merely requires that our earth, and the whole regime of nature under which man lives, has been created with fitting reference to his peculiar probation, and to his terrible rejection of God. The world ever manifests a shattered ideal, and one feature of this sad manifestation is the process of death. From the standpoint of the divine ideal, death is an abnormal thing. All its waste and foulness and (in the higher ranges of life) suffering and positive cruelty are, in the deepest thinking, entirely unnecessary. The fact that death is now made to serve in many ways a useful purpose is a point of no force, for sin itself is made to serve in many ways a useful purpose. And, further, we are, according to the Christian faith, finally to have a universe with no death in it from side to side. If the Christian man can believe in the reality of an ultimate universe having no process of death, surely he can believe that such a universe is God's ideal; and that this world with death all over it is but the eternal ideal accommodated to the awful history of human sin.

This proleptic view will answer in application to the world as the environment of man's probation, and in application to man's constitution and placement in the world; but it will not answer as an explanation of man's own experience of death. For it is perfectly evident that the account in the Old Testament, and special references in the New Testament to that account, demand a definite historical connection between the first transgression and man's bodily death. This definite connection I would make in this manner: Man was created mortal; he was placed under the possible dominion of all natural law; but he was also created a moral person, with full freedom, in a peculiar plan of vital relation with God. From the very start, the intention, the ideal purpose, was for man to develop as an actual self-conscious companion of the living God. The realization of such vital companionship would not require a high degree of mental life, but it would require absolute obedience. Perhaps the tree of life, of which Whedon and Delitzsch and Latimer made so much, may be regarded as the picture indication of this vital plan of companionship with God. Had man obeyed God, the companionship would have been maintained, and in such companionship man would have remained organic, could not have died. In other words, the higher possibility would have triumphed over the lower possibility. Precisely what would have taken place we do not know, but we can get a hint by thinking of the transcendent event of translation, and by thinking of the life of our Lord immediately after the resurrection. What I hold, then, is that for man to live in a world of death did not

make it necessary for man to be a slave to natural law, and to pass out of this earthly existence by the rupture of the human organism. The possibility of this rupture was proleptic, but the rupture was historical -- was entirely due to man's sin. Thus, there was a fall in the most literal sense.

But it is urged, "The perfect saint now on earth must die." Yes, the saint must die because he does not, in all his holy life, get back the connection of vitality. He may come to love God supremely, that I believe; and he may organize all his motive life by means of that one mighty motive of supreme love; but he has not a constant vital seizure of God in self-consciousness. That he cannot have before his glorification beyond the grave. Man's perfection in self-decision is possible in this life, but his perfection in self-consciousness, and so his perfection as an individual person, is not possible in this life.

The Personal Significance of Bodily Death. You will remember what I have said as to the social meaning of man's body -- that his body furnishes him with the machinery of personal expression. Keep that point in mind, and bodily death will begin to take on a large personal significance. In the experience of bodily death a man is for the first time absolutely alone. As long as he had a body he had to see something, or hear something, or touch something. A man may have no fellowship with men, and may think that he has exhausted the torture of loneliness. But he has not exhausted it. He can still see the sun, or hear the thunder, or feel the wind in his face. These things do not meet his personal need at all, but they do occupy his attention, and protect him from the solitude of profoundest introspection. But in death, the body is torn away, and the man has no protection whatever. He is naked in the silence. All he has is just his own isolated poverty of person -- a single, impotent, self-conscious atom of being -- a bare needle-point of quick personality all alone in the long reaches of the Infinite.

The Moral Significance of Bodily Death. The most dreadful feature of the isolation, though, lies not in the fact that the sinner has lost his world of persons and things; but in this fact together with the further fact that he has not lost his conscience. He is not only absolutely alone, he is also alone with conscience. Not one person, not one thing, can even for an instant shelter him from the violence of the moral smiting. Now, of all times, this lonely sinner needs the friendly presence of God; but his death is empty of the friendly God. His death expresses the holy anger of God. The man must now meet the insistence of God's moral concern closely and finally before the last door of destiny is forever closed. O God! if that isolated sinner had only yielded to his Saviour, and now had him in personal fellowship there in the solitude of death, how the whole situation would be transformed!

The Racial Significance of Bodily Death. As the human body is the racial nexus, the loss of the body in death must have racial significance. Not only does physical death isolate the individual person, it also breaks him off from his race. He is now a man without a race. The full meaning of his raceless condition will be brought out in other connections; but I want you to begin to hold the point even now. The Adamic race, as a racial groundwork of social solidarity, is gradually being destroyed by bodily death. One by one men are by death wrenched out of the racial relation, and flung out into the isolation of bare personal existence, to await as responsible persons the final judgment.

The Fitness of Bodily Death as Penalty. Although bodily death is a divine penalty, still we are not to think of it as an arbitrary penalty. It is not "a judicial execution, but a consequence involved in the nature of the transgression." But this statement must not be taken to signify anything automatic. God personally indorses an expression of his hatred of sin which fits into the nature of the transgression. You can see this intrinsic fitness the moment you bring to mind again the essential character of personal sin. In personal sin the normal independence and self-valuation of personality are so extremely emphasized over against the

demand of the moral ideal as to become selfish egotism. The moral person says: "I will do right." The sinner says: "I will do wrong." In each case the free and majestic person is at the front; but in one case there is submission, and in the other case rejection of moral authority. Bodily death is in consummate fitness with this supreme selfishness of personal sin. Bodily death is the strongest accentuation of egotism. It takes this egotist, this sinner, wrenches him out of the protective physical scene, breaks him off from his race, flings him into absolute isolation, and compels him to inhabit his own selfish fragment of being. Death says to the sinner, "You would not obey God, you would not love your fellow men, you lived for self, you wanted only self -- THEN TAKE IT!"

Such an extreme accentuation of the inherent egotism of personal sin is a most fitting end to a life of probation. To see this point clearly we must note again the relation probation sustains to personality, and especially noticing the probational import of self-consciousness. Already I have spoken of the fundamental motives which urge men toward volition (in the analytical treatment of the fall of man), one of these motives being bodily, one cosmic, one social, and one personal. But while several of these motives are not inherent in bare personality, yet it is in the operation of personality that they all come to ultimate deposit in moral character. For we must never forget that moral character can only be achieved by 'positive indorsement in self-decision. But for such self-decision there must be self-consciousness. Now we are ready for our point. This self-consciousness which is essential to self-decision, and therefore essential to the fixing of moral character, is a sporadic experience in our earthly life. It comes in broken flashes, now and then, here and there; and it is only in these blazing moments of self-vision that we have our strokes of destiny. But a man needs to review the whole history of self-decision, to behold in the flash of God's moral lightning all he has done, and all he now is as a result of all he has done. He needs one final crucial chance thoroughly to face his manhood, and, in this fullness of self-conscious opportunity, to accept himself, or to reject himself. Thus, death is the climax of probation.

There are in your minds, I quickly perceive, two rising objections to this large probational valuation of bodily death. The first objection is that death is often such an event of pain or confusion or lethargy as to be clearly unsuitable for such pregnant work in self-decision. My briefest answer to this objection is a personal one. My own experience has taught me that the surface of death, what the physician and the other bystanders observe, is no indication whatever of the personal event beneath the surface. The door of the inner chamber is shut. The second objection is that such a valuation of bodily death tends to discredit the sufficiency of life itself as a probation. My answer to this objection is again to call your attention to the significance of personal habit. I say personal habit, not automatic habit, but that bearing of the responsible person which results from repeated self-decisions and the continued narrowing of the range of possible motive. With this psychology of moral character clearly in mind, we see at once that, in any typical instance, it must be life and not death which practically determines destiny. But we can also see, I think, that the probational process is only fairly and fully completed by a last crisis in which the moral person is solemnly alone with his conscience and his entire history. In this last crisis the pressure toward righteousness is exhausted (if there be any possible pressure remaining), and another probation beyond the grave is philosophically inconceivable.

The racial fitness of bodily death does not require special discussion, as such a fitness is involved in what has been said concerning the racial nexus, racial sin, and the racial significance of bodily death.

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