return to religion-online

The 'Last Things' in a Process Perspective by Norman Pittenger

Dr. Pittenger, philosopher and theologian, was a senior member of King's College, Cambridge for many years, then Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, before retiring in 1966. Published by London: Epworth Press, 1970, This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

(ENTIRE BOOK) Christians have always been concerned about last things – death, judgement, heaven, and hell. The author gives the outworn dogmas about these issues a sense of reality and significance for Christians today.

Preface

A brief sketch of the significance that may be discovered for those living today, in the traditional scheme of the "last things" – death, judgement, heaven and hell.

Chapter 1: The Traditional Scheme

An approach to "the last things," from the standpoint of Process Theology. It is too late to resurrect the old beliefs, but there are important values which they affirmed and expressed.

Chapter 2: An Approach to a New Perspective

A discussion of the assumptions about last things. What did the last things *mean* to men and women who accepted the scheme quite literally or with this or that reservation or re-interpretation?

Chapter 3: Death

We need to forcibly come to terms with our own death. We all are going to die! In the face of this irrevocable fact, we must undertake the responsibility of loving, for that and that only makes possible the authenticity of living.

Chapter 4: Judgement

We are victims of a sentimentalized notion of love and how it works. What judgement intends to say is utterly integral to genuine love. Love always *is* judgement, in its authentic meaning.

Chapter 5: Heaven and Hell

Hell is the absence of God. The alternative is enjoyment of God, in which God accepts and receives into Himself the person who, in ignorance and impotence and by an act of free decisions, has been possessed of the kind of 'becoming' which makes his or her acceptable and able to be received by God.

Chapter 6: Question and Hope

God as *desire,* or as the great Desire-for-good, is the yearning God, seeking to fulfil others in relationship with them, and by that very token seeking their returning love, which because it is given to God freely is also God's own fulfillment, God's own enrichment.

Chapter 7: The Centrality of Love

Love is always a *relationship;* and a relationship involves two who are in it -- God to man, man to God -- in which each of them is not only acting in a causal manner but also being acted upon in an affective manner.

Chapter 8: After the 'Death of God'

The talk in the "Death of God" talk was the death of certain concepts of God, rather than a supposed death of God himself. It made its contribution and that contribution is past. The author discusses a number of opinions that follow the "Death of God" theology.

return to religion-online

The 'Last Things' in a Process Perspective by Norman Pittenger

Dr. Pittenger, philosopher and theologian, was a senior member of King's College, Cambridge for many years, then Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, before retiring in 1966. Published by London: Epworth Press, 1970, This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

Preface

The purpose of this book ought to be clear from its title. It is an attempt to sketch briefly, mostly by way of suggestion, what significance may be discovered, for men and women living today, in the traditional scheme of the 'last things' -- death, judgement, heaven, and hell. It admits frankly that this scheme, as it has come down to us, is incredible, however valuable and helpful, not to say apparently 'true', it was for many who have gone before us in the path of Christian discipleship. But it tries to point out certain indispensable realities in human, above all in Christian, life which that outworn scheme somehow managed to present to those who accepted it.

I should like to emphasize that at best this is a 'sketch'; and that it is 'mostly by way of suggestion'. I should be the last to assume that I have said everything that might be or ought to be said on the subject, and I am very conscious of serious omissions as well as of many shortcomings. In extenuation, however, I plead that in the compass allowed me -- for these chapters were originally lectures -- nobody can say everything. What I have done is to select, according to my best judgement, what seemed of crucial importance and hence could not be omitted. And that is all that I can say, as an excuse for this book's inadequacy to the theme with which it attempts to deal.

It remains to thank the authorities of the several divinity schools in the United States which were kind enough to ask me to lecture in February 1970. The principals, deans, and other officials, as well as the

theological students and others who heard the lectures, will know how deeply indebted I am to them all. The lectures, practically in their present form, were delivered at the Episcopal Theological School, Cambridge, and the Boston Theological Institute.

Two further chapters (on The Centrality of Love and After the 'Death of God') have been added, since they deal with related subjects. The second of these (Chapter Eight) originally appeared in *The Church Quarterly* for April 1969; I am indebted to the Editor for permission to reprint it here.

Norman Pittenger

King's College

Cambridge

return to religion-online

The 'Last Things' in a Process Perspective by Norman Pittenger

Dr. Pittenger, philosopher and theologian, was a senior member of King's College, Cambridge for many years, then Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, before retiring in 1966. Published by London: Epworth Press, 1970, This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

Chapter 1: The Traditional Scheme

It is frequently said, in criticisms or comments on the various new movements in Christian theology these days, that the one area to which they give little or no attention is the one that has to do with what are called in text-books of doctrine 'the last things'. For example, one of the charges against *Honest to God*, almost as soon as it appeared, was that John Robinson had said nothing in that book about 'future life' -- although the critic must have forgotten that not many years before the bishop had written, while still a theological teacher, a treatise entitled *In the End God* which is a considered and very interesting and suggestive discussion of exactly that subject as well as of the related aspects of 'the last things'.

Although, in this particular instance, the charge was misdirected, it is true, I think, that the detailed and careful consideration of 'the last things' has been infrequent in the 'new theology'. Much is said about the eschatological perspective, much is written about the way in which the 'coming Kingdom' impinges on the present world, and much is asserted about the need to take the eschatology of the Bible seriously. Here, however, eschatology does not signify what the theological text-books include under that phase. The term is used, perhaps more properly, to denote the special Jewish insistence on 'the end', 'the good time coming', the Kingdom either in its final appearance (with some) or in its 'anticipated' or 'realized' form (with others).

Whatever may be the case with the new theologians who are influenced

by 'secularization', by 'the death of God', or the existentialist conceptuality provided by Heidegger -- and here John Macquarrie is an exception, since his *Principles of Christian Theology* does include a consideration of the subject -- not many theologians who prefer to approach the re-conception of Christian theology with the use of 'process thought' have published extended studies of 'the last things'; or, if they have, I have not come across them. Schubert Ogden is the notable exception, in what I regard as his excellent essay on 'The Hope of Faith', included in *The Reality of God.* By and large, though, the subject is not one that appeals to such thinkers.

I should wish to associate myself entirely with the process theologians. And it seems to me a useful enterprise to undertake in these chapters a consideration of 'the last things', although in short compass and in the light of my own obvious incompetence I can only open up the discussion and make what may be a few helpful suggestions. Certainly I do not claim that I shall do more than raise questions, suggest a few possible answers, and urge readers to pursue the matter for themselves. But of the importance of the subject I have not the slightest doubt; and as you will see, this is not because I wish to cling in some obscurantist way to something that has been traditionally sacred, but because I am convinced that death, judgement, heaven, and hell -- 'the four last things' -- are subjects with which we *must* concern ourselves, however different from our ancestors may be the way in which we wish to understand what those terms denote.

So much, then, by way of preface to the lectures. I now turn to a fairly straightforward and, I hope, accurate sketch of what the tradition in Christian theology, found in those text-books to which I have referred, does in fact have to say on these matters. Since I myself was taught this scheme, many years ago, I shall outline what I *was* taught, under the heading used in those days, of 'Christian Eschatology: Death, Judgement, the Intermediate State, Heaven, and Hell'. You will see that a fifth term has been added here -- 'the intermediate state'; this is because my own instruction was received in an Anglican theological school of tractarian background and of Anglo-Catholic sympathies. Hence the common Catholic and Orthodox view that 'something happens between' death for every man, and arrival in heaven, so to say, was included in the picture. Had I been educated, theologically, in a more Protestant divinity faculty that term would not have been found, of course. But 'the intermediate state' was certainly an element in the general picture for most Christians, indeed it still is and increasingly so

among Protestants too; hence I shall include it in my outline-sketch.

What were the sources of this teaching? The present study is too brief to permit any proper analysis, but we may say that Christian eschatology, understood in this sense, is the product of a marriage of ideas found in Jewish thought, including the inter-testamental period, and the hellenistic soul-body portrayal of man. The story is exceedingly complicated; it would be a great service if some scholar or group of scholars would investigate it, in the light of our modern knowledge of Jewish and early Christian ideas, as well as with attention to the diversity of the thought about man found in the Graeco-Roman world.

Things are not quite so simple as an earlier generation of historians and theologians took them to be. There are questions like the possible development of a more 'spiritual' view of resurrection of the body, among Pharisaic thinkers in the period immediately before and contemporaneous with the beginning of the Christian era; the uncertainty about the supposed fate of the non-Jewish peoples when Judaism began to talk of God's Kingdom 'coming on earth', however transfigured the earth may be, and with this the nature of that Kingdom and the degree to which and the way in which it was coming; exactly how early Christian thinkers brought together the Jewish notion of resurrection and the Hellenistic idea of immortality -- for it is apparent that they resolved the obvious contradictions in a far from simple manner. But, generally speaking, we can say that the doctrine of the last things was gradually worked out from taking with utmost seriousness, and even with a stark literal understanding, much in the later Old Testament documents, as well as what the teaching of Jesus, then of St Paul and St John and the rest of the New Testament, was supposed to have said. Here was a disclosure, in so many words (and I would emphasize that it *was* thought to be 'in words', that is, in propositions stated in or deducible from that teaching), of man's destiny. Along with this, the philosophical notions about soul, about immortality, about a realm above and beyond the hurly-burly of this world, present in the tradition of Greek philosophy and variations on that philosophy in the early Christian era, had become so much part of the atmosphere of thought that inevitably these two affected Christian thinkers.

The marriage of this Jewish-Christian eschatological picture and the Greek philosophical view was not easily accomplished, nor was that marriage without its difficulties -- it was hardly a quiet and successful relationship. But such as it was, it slowly matured; and the end-product

was the sort of thing which finally was worked out in, say, St Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians, on the one hand, and in Calvin's *Institution of the Christian Religion,* on the other. And so far as the Bible had its unquestioned place in the enterprise, it was used as if the teaching found in it, especially in the gospels and the Johannine-Pauline literature, were a revelation in actual words of what death, judgement, heaven, and hell (and, where this was accepted, purgatory or paradise or the 'intermediate state') really were. As in so many places, in Christian theology, the 'proof-texts' were found for what the Church wished to say, through its theologians.

It is a nice question, of course, whether a good deal of the teaching was based on these texts, or whether the texts were discovered, after careful searching, to bolster up ideas that had slowly gained acceptance. But this situation is not peculiar to 'the last things'; it has been found fairly generally in the whole Christian theological enterprise. In any event, so far as the Bible was used, it was used in a way like that followed today by fundamentalists: the words were taken at their face-value, even if that 'face-value' seems a little odd and not always *obviously* what it is assumed to be. When there were contradictions in those materials, a reconciliation was effected, or at least attempted, through the use of the 'different levels of interpretation', where the historical meaning, the moral meaning, the theological meaning, and the highly mystical meaning could be distinguished and an appropriate distribution made in the discussion of this or that biblical text.

But what was the resulting teaching?

First of all, that human life in our span of years and so far as man's history is concerned is, like the created world itself, derivative from a realm of heavenly existence which abides eternal over against the transient, mortal, and uncertain span of our years. Of this fact, death stands as the great sign. Every man dies. This is the inescapable fact which no one can deny. But not *all* of him dies, for man himself is compounded of soul *and* body; and while the body dies, the soul cannot die. By its very nature it is immortal.

You must remember that I am not attempting here to make critical comments on the scheme; rather I am trying to present it as it was generally, and commonly, held and taught. If I were to make those critical comments, I should be obliged to say something at this point about the way in which this notion of the soul's immortality is very

doubtfully found in the Scriptures and how it is an importation into Christian thinking from elsewhere. But that is not the point. For the generality of Christian theologians, the soul was taken to be immortal, so that when the human body came to die, the soul was 'released' from its bodily dwelling-place and enabled (shall we put it this way?) 'to go elsewhere'. The Book of Common Prayer, before recent revisions, talked in just this fashion; and, in doing so, it was typical of the common Christian teaching.

Death was the most important thing that happened to man and all of his life before death was to be seen as a preparation for that event. The importance of death was not only in its being the end of this mortal life; it was also in its being the moment when, in a 'particular judgement', the future destiny of the one who died was fixed. There was no possibility of repentance *after* death; as we must note, there was either the definite sending to eternal damnation of the evil man or the preparation of the good man for a final heavenly state (in circles that did not accept some doctrine of an 'intermediate state', there was instead a sort of 'waiting' until the final consummation) -- but the moment of death, with its judgement of this and that individual, was absolutely final in its determination of the direction that was thereafter to be taken.

But if the soul was immortal, and human destiny determined at that particular judgement by a God who, although he was indeed merciful, was also just and would treat each man according to that man's merits -- whether simply his own merits or in the light of 'the merits of Christ' in which by repentance for sin he took refuge -- what happened to the body? Obviously the body corrupted in the grave. Yet there was the teaching about the resurrection of the *body*, so somehow this must be included in the final destiny of each man. Hence it was taught that at a later time, when God began to wind things up as we might put it, there would be a resurrection of all bodies. Precisely how this could occur was not known, but in some appropriate fashion these bodies would be raised from their graves, reconstituted in some equally appropriate fashion, re-united with 'their' souls -- and then there would be a final judgement, in which the soul-and-body together would face the Grand Assize, to receive the statement of the great Judge as to its eventual fate.

There was a good deal of puzzlement here. *How* would these bodies be raised? What would they be like? How, in some transformed condition, were they to be permitted to enter into heaven, to be in the presence of God for ever? What about the bodies of those whose destiny had been

determined, at their death, to be not heaven but hell? This sort of question was much discussed -- St Augustine, for example, was troubled about the bodies of the very young or the very old or those who had been maimed or crippled. The general picture is clear, however. Bodies would be raised, quite literally. Soul and body would be re-united, as the hymns put it and as art portrayed it. Graves would be opened, bodies would emerge in their reconstituted form, and man as the union of soul and body would face the judgement of God.

Some very few would be, so to say, exempted from at least part of this. In the Catholic theology in which I was brought up, the saints were somehow to be granted the *immediate* vision of God, at the point of their death. What happened to *their* bodies was not entirely clear, although in Roman Catholic circles it was believed (and in quite recent times it has been made an indisputable dogma) that the body of the Blessed Mother of our Lord had not in fact died at all but had been received into heaven, thus anticipating the general resurrection which was to be a part of the more general human lot. Those saints, already in heaven, were constantly interceding for men and women on earth. With God himself, they were in bliss; but because they had shared and hence knew our mortal lot, they could be trusted not to forget their human brethren and they continually prayed for those left behind.

On the other hand, the souls which were not thus in heaven already were in a state either of preparation for heaven (among Protestants, this of course was denied -- but exactly 'where' those souls might be was left an open question, although some have described the 'state' as being a sort of 'cold freeze' until the day of final judgement), or, having completed their preparation, were now awaiting the day when they would be reunited with their bodies and so enabled to enjoy the heavenly bliss which was promised them. They could be helped by the prayers of their brethren who were still 'in the flesh', we were taught; or at least, *I* was. Prayers for the dead were an important part of Christian devotion, since through them those who were in the intermediate state would be furthered on their way towards the perfection which God intended for them.

It was, of course, a natural and very human thing to wish to remember, and indeed to demand the right to remember, those whom we 'have loved long since, and lost awhile'. But it was also an act of piety to do so. In Protestant communions, the practice of prayers for the dead had been given up, along with acceptance of the notion of an intermediate

state of some sort. But even there, as recent liturgical forms show, the human desire sooner or later had to be satisfied; and in some fashion, perhaps by *comprecation* (that is, praying for the departed by associating them with prayers for ourselves), the realization of this 'communion' had to be made available. In Catholic circles, especially in the west, such prayers were taken to be a way in which somehow the purification or purgation of the departed soul might be accomplished more effectively, even if the idea of the intermediate state as 'punishment' was not held.

Furthermore the most solemn and sacred of all acts of Christian worship, the Eucharist, could be 'applied' to those who were dead. How often have I heard, and how often after ordination have I said: 'Of your charity, pray for the *soul* of X, that God may grant it a place of light and refreshment and peace.' Thus the 'intention' of the celebration could be *for* the departed, either one by one or, on All Souls' Day, for them all.

So far I have spoken of the way in which death and judgement were presented, with, perhaps, too extended a reference to the idea of the intermediate state. Now we come to heaven, the goal or end of those who in that state were being purified and prepared for heavenly joy. Heaven, of course, was said to be the vision of God, so far as 'immortal mortals' could see him; it was the place, in a spiritual sense of course, where the blessed dwelt in profound fellowship one with another in God himself. Responsible theological teachers did not take at their face value the pictures of heaven which were found in hymnody, nor did they regard the somewhat extraordinary set of images in Revelation as being an exact representation -- indeed, these images, laden with Jewish eschatological conceptions of the nature of the Kingdom of God when there should be 'a new heaven and a new earth' were sometimes felt to be slightly embarrassing. But there was a reality behind *all* the pictures and images -- and that reality was life in God, with all the saints, where suffering and pain would be no more and where all the anguish of this mortal life would be absent entirely, being replaced by sheer joy such as that of the angels themselves.

Some of the greatest theologians had been prepared to say that *one* of the joys possessed by the blessed in heaven would be to witness the suffering of the damned in hell. This unpleasant idea was refined in these responsible thinkers to mean that the blessed would rejoice to see God's justice vindicated, rather than delight in the actual sufferings of those who through their own choice had shown themselves utterly unworthy of heavenly bliss. But hell was a real possibility. In certain of

the theologies the fires of hell were taken almost literally, but in most of them the everlasting pains endured there were summed up in phrases like 'deprivation of God' -- and hence of abiding happiness -- or the pain of recognizing the evil done in this life with its inevitable consequences. A few more recent writers had interpreted hell in a less terrible fashion; they had even turned it into a kind of purgatory in which the anguish was a necessary means of purification -- for such thinkers hell was not everlasting or eternal (whichever you choose) but temporary; in the end God would win all men to himself. Such universalism was not regarded as orthodox, however, no matter how much more it might seem to be in accordance with the supposedly Christian conviction that God is love.

I quite realize that the sketch which I have just given can be faulted as being too brief and too selective; it can also be called an unfair parody of what was in fact taught. To this I can only reply that this *is* what I myself was taught, first, as part of instruction given in my parish as a child and later, with many refinements and qualifications, in lectures in theology as an ordinand -- although I should add that my teacher was himself, quite obviously, very ill at ease about the scheme, left it to the very end of his course, and even then touched upon it gingerly. In fact he engaged in a process of gentle 'de-mythologizing', although that word had not been invented in that time. Certainly the two or three 'standard texts' which we were supposed to master *did* talk in that way, however, although at least one of them left it open to the reader to make his own interpretation of what the scheme, presented as *the* orthodox view, set forth in such precise detail.

It is hardly necessary to say that this scheme does not commend itself to most of us today. Obviously there are many who still accept it, or something like it; to deny that would be nonsense. But, by and large, it has been given up in that form or in any close approximation to that form. This has been for various reasons. A new approach to the Bible has been one of them. A view of revelation as found, not in propositions, but in events of history and their meaning has been another. A third has been a conviction that much in the scheme stands in stark contradiction to the belief in God as love -- especially in the bits about hell and endless suffering. Still another has been the feeling that nobody could ever have the knowledge to enable him to draw so exact and precise a map of 'the future life', as it has been called. And a fifth reason is that the portrayal of 'the last things' in these terms, indeed the emphasis on some destiny for man out of this world which makes what goes on *in* this world merely preparatory for heaven or a way of avoiding hell, is

thought by a great many people to entail a neglect of their duty here and now to live in Christian love and to find in that their deepest satisfaction, whatever may await them when this life is ended.

But however we may analyze the reaction, reaction there has been. Thus in a large number of sermons, in much religious instruction, and in the emphasis found in theological teaching, death, judgement, heaven, and hell have little if any place. I can recall, in recent years, only one sermon that I have heard on death, one on judgement, and none whatever on either heaven or hell. Nor do I think my experience very unusual, for it has included many parish churches, college chapels, and the chapels of theological schools. Furthermore, a glance through the syllabuses of a number of theological colleges has disclosed that they include but the briefest mention of the traditional scheme. And an admittedly hurried examination of several texts intended for use in courses of instruction before confirmation or in 'religious studies' in schools for adolescents has made it plain that this whole set of ideas is either entirely absent or is so 'muted' (to put it so) that it plays no really significant part in what children or confirmands learn as they are introduced to the Christian faith and its theological implications.

I do not wish to dwell on this, however; surely the change in atmosphere and attitude must be familiar to most of us. 'What I do wish to say is that we still find in our liturgical forms, even in some (if not all) of the revised ones, the relics of the traditional scheme, and that our hymns still suggest many if not every one of the ideas that I have so briefly, and some will think unfairly, sketched for you. Perhaps this is one reason why there is so often an air of unreality about our worship, when such liturgical forms and such hymns are used, as they must be. For these reflect, however dimly, a scheme which is no longer *taught,* as part of the faith, or in fact believed.

But what chiefly I wish to suggest is that while I for one welcome the disappearance or 'muting' of the traditional teaching about the last things, I also think that they did point to important truths about human life as well as about Christian faith. This does not mean that I desire a return to the former state of affairs; it does mean, on the other hand, that it may very well be incumbent upon us to attend to these matters, to see what 'values' -- if I may use that not too happy word -- the old scheme somehow preserved, and then to consider whether or not those values may be stated in some other fashion -- that is, in a fashion which will not be quite so outrageous as I, with many others, think the scheme I was

taught really was.

In other words, I have the feeling that we have a job to do. This is why I very much regret that the so-called 'new theologians' have not written much, if anything, on the subject, for I believe that they could have helped us considerably and that their failure to do so has left us impoverished. There is a familiar saying about 'throwing out the baby with the bath-water'. In a way that saying applies here. We certainly do *not* want the old 'bath-water'; but maybe the 'baby' has something still to say to us. I apologize for this very strained image; but I am confident that you will take my point. What, then, did the older scheme have to say, in terms of enduring values or meaning, which we should *not* reject when quite rightly we reject the scheme itself?

In the remainder of the book I shall attempt this task, but in a very preliminary and suggestive way. First, however, I must indicate the particular approach which I shall take and the materials and method that I wish to use. That will occupy our attention in the next chapter. Then I shall say something about death, judgement, heaven, hell, and the so-called intermediate state. A later chapter will consider what may be said about the Christian hope in its relationship to 'personal existence' after death.

In closing the present chapter, let me say, very briefly, what seem to me some of the obvious values in that older scheme which most of us have by now given up. Such a statement will perhaps provide some preparation for the more detailed discussion in the following pages.

First, then, the fact that death was so stressed in the scheme made it very clear that this event in every human life is of enormous importance. That we shall die is the one inevitable thing to which we must adjust ourselves. But death is not simply the inescapable end of each man's life; it is also the plain demonstration of his mortality, a mortality which both conditions and characterizes everything that he is and does up to the moment when he is pronounced dead. Doubtless it is absurd to dwell on death as such; it is equally absurd to attempt to deny it, to cover it up, to pretend that it is not there -- one thinks of the pathetic way in which contemporary funeral customs so often try to disguise what as a matter of obvious truth a funeral is all about. Such fashions are pathetic; they are also silly. So is the evasion of the use of the word itself, with the substitution of such phrases as 'passed on', 'has left us', 'has gone away'. People *die* and we should honestly and courageously accept that

this happens. And as I have said, this dying stands as the sign over every bit of human life. We are mortal men, who during a certain relatively short period have responsibilities, know joy and sorrow, contribute to the race of which we are part. Anything else that we may wish to say about ourselves cannot be a denial of that mortality.

Again, the stress on judgement in the old scheme made apparent the place of decision in human life and at the same time the responsibility that comes with decision. It faced men with the one-way movement of history, in which what has happened has indeed happened; it cannot be *undone,* no matter what may be *done with it.* We are what our decisions have made us, even when we grant that the area in which those decisions were taken may have been restricted. Having made the decisions we have made and having become what we are in consequence of those decisions (although obviously other factors have entered in as well), we cannot evade or avoid appraisal in terms of them. *Who* appraises is not the issue here; but *that* there is appraisal is plain enough. The traditional scheme made it impossible to escape from this.

When the scheme included, as it did in my case at least, the intermediate state, this was by way of showing that nobody was good enough, loving enough, faithful enough, to be counted perfect, save (as the scheme claimed) for those few who were called ‘saints’ in a quite special sense of that word -- not the New Testament sense, incidentally. Furthermore, in its own odd way it stressed the love of God, who provided opportunity for ‘growth in his love and service’, as a prayer puts it, and whose justice was therefore mitigated by his mercy. When this belief was coupled with the notion of a last judgement which would not occur until God ‘had accomplished the number of his elect’, in words from still another prayer, it said something about the corporate nature of human life, the equally corporate nature of whatever destiny men have, and the need for patient waiting until our fellowmen have found their capacity for fulfillment along with us. Prayers for the dead again indicated the social nature of human life, our belonging together, and our helping one another as we move on towards our goal, whatever that may be.

Heaven stood for the sheer joy which may be known when men are in such a relationship with God, in company with their fellows, as will mark their own realization or actualization, through the gracious influence of love at work in and even beyond this mortal life. At its best, it did not invite those who believed in it to a selfish satisfaction but

spoke of 'social joys', in widest sharing, in and under and with God himself.

Hell is the difficult aspect of the scheme, for all too often it succeeded in introducing the element of terror or fear into human existence. 'The fear of the Lord' frequently became sheer terror in the face of possible unending pain. Hence there was always the danger, and often the horrible reality, of men and women trying 'to be good', as the phrase goes, lest they find themselves in 'the fires of hell'. That, certainly, was not only a poor way to persuade people to 'be good', but was also an invitation not to be good at all, in any genuine sense -- only to be 'prudent' in the worst meaning of that word. And yet there was something else. That was the utter horror of lovelessness, the desperate state of life in which no response is made to God's solicitations and invitations. And there was the stark recognition that evil *is* evil. A good God might have ways of dealing with evil, but that it was evil could not be denied. So Thomas Hardy's words were seen to be true:

> *If way to the better there be*
> *It exacts a full look at the worst.*

The reality of death as a fact: the inescapable element of decision and the consequences in searching appraisal: the social or communal nature of human existence, coupled with the honest recognition that *no* man is in and of himself a perfect agent of the purpose of God and the love of God: the joy of fulfillment with one's brethren in the imperishable reality of God: and the terrible character of evil -- these were values which the older scheme somehow affirmed and expressed.

This does not mean that we should attempt to resurrect that scheme. It is far too late in the day to do that, I should claim. Nor does it mean that the scheme as it stood was a very satisfactory or even worthy mode of expressing the values which I have noted. On the other hand, it suggests -- if it does nothing more than that -- a necessity on our part to find ways which will provide for an expression, an affirmation, of those values in our own terms and in our own way. If we can achieve something like that, we shall also have maintained a certain continuity with our fathers in the faith. I believe that this last is not unimportant for us; indeed I believe that it is of the highest importance. My reason for believing this is that true *radicalism* in theology, as elsewhere, consists in penetration

to the roots; which is to say, in getting at what utterly unacceptable ideas, as we see them, were attempting to say. It may well be that then we shall feel obliged to reject that which they *were* trying to say; on the other hand it may be that we shall discover that this which they were trying to say is significant, perhaps even essential, in the total Christian stance of faith. In respect to the impossible and incredible scheme which I learned as a young man, I believe this to be the case. For God's sake, quite literally; for man's sake, quite surely, let us give up the *scheme* -- *but* let us see to it that we do not lose altogether the insight or intuition which was behind it and which was expressed, sometimes in ghastly and ridiculous fashion, in its several elements.

15

return to religion-online

The 'Last Things' in a Process Perspective by Norman Pittenger

Dr. Pittenger, philosopher and theologian, was a senior member of King's College, Cambridge for many years, then Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, before retiring in 1966. Published by London: Epworth Press, 1970, This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

Chapter 2: An Approach to a New Perspective

In closing the last chapter I spoke of the values which had been represented in the outworn traditional scheme of the last things. I suggested that true radicalism in theology meant an effort to get to the roots, to see what was deeply intended in patterns, pictures, and propositions that to us are not credible. And I mentioned the importance of maintaining such continuity as is possible, in this and in other respects, with our ancestors in the Christian fellowship. In a word, I was urging a theological variation of Leonard Hodgson's by now well-known point about Biblical enquiry. What must the case really be, so far as we today can grasp it, if people who thought and wrote and naturally accepted such and such ideas put things in the way in which they did put them? Hodgson was suggesting that after all the preliminary scholarly work has been done, this is the question which the interpreter of Scripture must ask. And I am suggesting that after we have discovered, so far as may be, how this or that theological idea came to be, on what grounds and with what intention it was asserted, we have then to ask a similar question.

I realize that some of those who call themselves 'radical theologians' will regard such a procedure as quite absurd. They will disclaim any responsibility for maintaining continuity with the past of the Christian fellowship and will urge that we must start afresh, with no *impedimenta* from the past. It must be observed that such theologians usually do not

fulfill that implied intention, for they still insist on their loyalty to Jesus, at least, even if their way of being loyal to Him is as various as, say, William Hamilton's talk about Jesus as being 'the place where we stand' or Paul van Buren's sense that somehow association with Jesus provides a 'contagious freedom'. What is more, when some of these thinkers say that they are 'giving up' God, it is to be noted that at the very same moment they seem anxious to preserve, in some fashion or other, what the faith in God meant and supplied to those who did, as a matter of fact, deeply believe in Him. Their presentation of that significant and presumably enduring 'reality' is not very impressive, in some instances anyway; but the intention is there.

Thus I would conclude that *in principle* what I have been urging is not so obscurantist, reactionary, or nostalgic as it might appear. But I wish also to remark that what such critics often imply is a very unhistorical notion of how any faith, and *a fortiori* Christian faith, does work as a matter of historical development. They are not really radicals at all, when they suggest the necessity of starting entirely fresh, and demand that there be no commitments of any kind to the religious traditions of the past. For religious faiths do not grow that way, nor do they come into being in that way in the first place. Such entirely revolutionary ideas rest upon a failure to see that the Jewish prophets, for example, were related to, and in many ways dependent upon, the tradition which they received, and were enormously affected by the fact of their participation in the life of the people of Israel. Jesus Himself, claimed by some of them as the great revolutionary, was first and last a *Jew*, thinking in Jewish terms, talking in Jewish ways, dependent for His teaching upon the Jewish tradition. He was *not* a revolutionary in the sense intended; He was a genuine radical in the sense that I have suggested. Nor is this process limited to Judaism and Christianity. It is the way in which religions and faiths of all types have historically developed.

Of course some complete revolutionary may propose his own esoteric religious ideas or proclaim his own peculiar faith. The men I am criticizing evidently do not much like such ideas or faiths, which they are likely to denounce as 'mysticism or as erratic affirmations of eccentric individuals. But even if they did take a more favorable attitude, the fact would remain that the positive religions, as they used to be called in studies of religious phenomenonology -- that is, the faiths or religions which grasp large numbers of people, make an impact on the world, and show a capacity to persist in some community form -- are

social in nature; grow out of a past which is not entirely rejected even when the great prophets, teachers, reformers, and renovators come along; and always, or almost always, take towards their supposed origins and their historical development a respectful if (thank heaven) not an uncritical stance.

And the same is true in what used to be called 'secular' areas, although that word has now become so ambiguous in meaning that one hesitates to use it. In philosophical development, A. N. Whitehead said, all western thought is 'a series of footnotes' to Plato's dialogues. Something like that is indeed the case; and only a very ignorant person would be prepared to deny the continuities, with genuine differences and, one hopes, genuine advances, in the total philosophical enterprise. Similarly, in scientific thought, where once again we are indebted to Whitehead, among others, for making clear to us the way in which such thought, along with the procedures it uses and the attitudes it takes, represents a genuine process of development and not sheer novelty entirely unrelated to the past. In social theory and its implementation in social structures, of which Marxism may serve for an example, we may observe the same sort of movement. Karl Marx himself was keenly conscious of this, as a study of *Das Kapital* will show; and, what is even more significant, his doctrine of the dialectic in history is a clear illustration of what I have been urging. Novelty, yes; but continuity, too. The *talk* may be about 'revolution', about the 'qualitative leap', but what happens is a development of social, economic, and political ordering out of the past, while the 'qualitative leap', as Marx himself remarked, comes from the accumulation of a quite enormous number of quantitative changes. It is not *sheer* novelty, although it is new; it is not *unthinking* continuity, although it is related to the past and builds upon, while it also greatly modifies, that which the past has done.

By my references to 'process' in the preceding remarks I have indicated that I stand within a certain philosophical school. Thus I begin my admission or confession of the approach, the materials, and the methods which I believe to be necessary in the indispensable job of re-conceiving the last things, along with re-conceiving the totality of the Christian theological tradition. First, then, a processive view of the world and everything in it; and along with that, what might be styled, perhaps daringly, a processive view of what-it-is or who-it-is that the term *God* points towards.

It is hardly necessary to state here what process thought has to say; and,

in any event, I can refer those who do not know about it to a recent small book of my own, entitled *Process Thought and Christian Faith* (Macmillan, New York, and Nisbet, London, 1968), in which I attempted to give a brief sketch of that conceptuality with special reference to its availability for the enterprise of Christian re-conception. Perhaps sufficient will have been said if I point out that process thought is based upon wide generalizations made from those experiences of fact, and those facts of experience, which demonstrate to us the dynamic, active, on-going 'creative advance' of the world; and which, in recognizing and accepting the patent reality of such a world, sees man as part of it sharing in that movement, and a principle of ordering and direction, which may properly be called *God*, explaining why and how the advance goes on as it does.

God, so understood, is not only the chief causative principle, although He is not by any means the *only* such principle (since there is freedom of decision throughout the world-order); He is also the supreme affective reality, because what happens in the world, by precisely such free decision and its results, makes a difference to and (if we may put it so) contributes to the divine principle in providing further opportunities for advance as well as in enriching the experience of the divine itself or himself.

The world is a processive order; it is also a social one, in which everything in it affects everything else, from the lowest structures and forces up to man himself -- and, says process thought, to God too. There is a mutual prehension by one occasion of other occasions, to the remotest point in space and time. That prehension may be positive or negative -- a grasping and being grasped that accepts or rejects what is offered and being offered. Since God, on such a view, is not the great 'exception to all metaphysical principles to save them from collapse', in Whitehead's by now famous declaration, but is 'their chief exemplification', He too is in a real sense processive. But He is *chief* exemplification, not simply another one of the same sort as all others known to us. He is in some genuine fashion *eminent.* He is, as Charles Hartshorne would put it, 'the supremely worshipful', who is surpassed by anything which is not Himself; yet in His own life He may surpass, in richness of experience and capacity for adaptation and provision of new opportunity for advance, that which He has been. Hence God is supremely temporal rather than eternal in the common acceptation of the word, which usually is taken to mean utterly 'time-less'.

God works in the world by providing 'initial aims' for each occasion or event or occurrence or 'entity' (which was Whitehead's word); His 'power' is in His persuasion, in His 'lure' (which is also Whitehead's word), not in coercive force. In a word, 'his nature and his name is love'. Both Whitehead himself and his distinguished American exponent (who also makes his own distinctive contribution to process thought) Charles Hartshorne are very clear about this. It is these two who have been the fathers of this conceptuality, so far as English-speaking countries are concerned, although many others have assisted, some of them (like Teilhard de Chardin) from a quite different starting-point.

Whitehead once wrote that Christianity, unlike Buddhism, is a faith -- based on certain historical events taken to be, in his own term used elsewhere, 'important' or crucial or disclosing -- seeking a metaphysic. The fact is the total impact of the person of Christ, in whom Christianity finds 'the disclosure in act of what Plato discerned in theory'. And what is this? It is, again in his own words, that 'the divine nature and agency in the world' are precisely such love, such persuasion, such tenderness. Nor was this asserted without regard for the patent presence of evil, both in man himself and in those recalcitrant, negative, retarding, occasions, with their consequences, which anybody with his eyes open must admit. Hence, in its wholeness, the availability of process thought for use in Christian thinking: Christ as the disclosure of 'what God is up to' in the world.

But I have used the term 'metaphysic' and this can provoke an instant reaction from those who think that the day of metaphysics or of ontological statement is over. Here I should respond that *it all depends.* If by metaphysics or ontology one means either the construction of grandiose schemes in which some super -- terrestrial being is set up as controlling the world, having once got it going, reducing the world to irrelevance or meaninglessness in comparison to his subsistence as absolute or *esse a se subsistens,* in Aquinas's phrase; or some privileged knowledge of the *what* of things behind all appearances, such as gives us a precise acquaintance with Kant's *ding an sich,* the realm of the noumenal as above, beyond, and unrelated (save by logical connection) to the phenomenal -- if either of these be what metaphysics means, then its day is indeed past.

On the other hand, if by metaphysics one means exactly what I suggested earlier -- the making of wide generalizations on the basis of

particular experiences, the constant reference back of those generalizations to further areas of experience, and the resultant 'vision' of how things 'are' and how 'they go'-- then metaphysics is by no means finished. Even those who denounce metaphysics in the former sense are eminently metaphysical in the latter. One has only to read such 'anti-metaphysical' writers as the earlier positivists, whether Comteian or in the Vienna Circle with its English disciples known as 'logical positivists', to see how true this is. They indeed do have a metaphysic, in my second sense; but, if I may venture to say so, it is a very *bad* metaphysic since it is not recognized as such and hence has not been exposed by these thinkers to severe and searching criticism. The same is the case with the 'anti-metaphysical' theologians. Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* simply reeks of metaphysics, in that second sense; so does R. Gregor Smith's *Secular Christianity* -- *and* admittedly Thomas Altizer's books are highly metaphysical in statement and intention, while William Hamilton for all his eschewing of metaphysics presupposes throughout his 'death of God' writing exactly the same sort of thing.

Thus I am not ashamed of the metaphysical emphasis in process thought, once it is seen what kind of metaphysics the process philosophers are talking about. Here there is no setting-up of a super-terrestrial, sheerly supra-natural, being called 'God'; since, in Whitehead's words, 'God is in this world or he is nowhere'. Here there is no claim to privileged access to the *ding an sich,* for any such dichotomy between noumenal and phenomenal is absurd -- what *a thing is* is known in, and consists of, *what a thing does;* or, in Christian terms, we know God in terms of His activity in the world, working towards communities or societies of shared good in spite of the recalcitrance, the back-waters, the negativities, or compendiously 'the evil', with which he has to deal. And when the Dutch philosopher C. A. van Peurson in his exciting article called 'Man and Reality' (*Student World,* LVI, 1963) and others who think like him contrast the *ontological* and the *functional* and insist that metaphysics *must* mean the former attitude, they do not see that there is a sense in which this need not be said at all. How things go -- their functioning -- may be, and I believe it is, *what they are.* Thus, again in Christian terms, God *is* love precisely because He *acts lovingly;* and any statement of a formally abstract sort, such as the one I have just made -- 'God *is* love', etc -- is precisely what I have now called it: a formally abstract statement made on the basis of what are taken to be concrete events or occasions, and with validity only insofar as it affirms exactly such an understanding of the functioning

which is observed, experienced, and hence must be talked about.

But I have said enough about all this. My main point is simply that I find process thought, with its view of God, eminently available for Christian use. Particularly, I find the view of God both as providing the 'initial aim' and also as being the 'supreme affect' most suggestive and helpful. In respect to the deep significance seeking expression through the traditional teaching about the last things, I find this conceptuality so suggestive and so helpful that it will provide a framework within which I shall try to urge a way of securing for ourselves those meanings or values or existentially significant affirmations.

The mention of 'existentialism' here, while I intended it in a slightly different way, brings us to the second point which I wish to make. This has to do with the interpretation of Scripture. More especially, it has to do with the enterprise known as 'de-mythologization', in relation to what the father of that enterprise calls *existenzialinterpretation* of the biblical material and most importantly of the material that has to do with the *kerygma* or the Christian gospel to which faith is a response.

I think that the word '*de*-mythologizing', in its English form, does not do justice to what Bultmann really intends; and it is a puzzle to me why he has accepted this term as a satisfactory English description of the enterprise which in German is styled *entmythologisierung.* Admittedly the English term does translate the German, but at the same time the *'de-'* suggests to the English reader almost exactly the opposite of Bultmann's intention. For what he wishes to do is not to discard the mythological material -- mistaken science, talk about the divine in this-world idiom, highly fanciful material about descent and ascent of a supernatural divine being who pre-existed this world, etc., etc. -- but to get at what it is *really* saying. I think that the term *in*-mythologizing would serve better, since the whole programme is concerned to get 'inside' the myth and there discover the *kerygma* or gospel which the myth clothes and states in a form natural at one time but impossible, because incredible, today. It is not necessary for me to recount *why* Bultmann finds this incredibility in the form; suffice it to say that he is not committed to any particular scientific world-view, although Jaspers and others have charged him with this, but is simply stating that the contemporary man does not as a matter of fact think or talk in terms of such a form. Hence, if the gospel is to speak to him with its demand for decision, it must be freed from those thought-patterns so that its essential *drive* may be made clear to him, a drive or proclamation in

action which the ancient forms today succeed in covering up or making absurd.

I ought here to admit that I should wish to go beyond Bultmann; I agree with Fritz Bun and his American exponent Schubert Ogden that we need also to *in-kerygmatize*, if I may put it so, the gospel proclamation itself. But this does not suggest that there is no gospel and that Jesus Christ is not central to Christian faith. What is involved here is exactly what the ancient 'Fathers', or some of them, affirmed when they spoke of the possibility of salvation for those who had never heard about and hence could not or did not respond to the specific historic event of Jesus Christ. The work of the Eternal Word of God, present in men spermatically, as Justin Martyr for example put it, offered this possibility of salvation, so that the historical accident of having lived *after* Jesus or having heard about Him was not the necessary condition of the salvation which God purposed for His human children. These 'Fathers' spoke of the specific activity of God in Jesus Christ as being indeed the fulfillment, completion, and adequate expression, *vis-à-vis* men, of the Eternal Word of God, but they did not regard salvation as available *only* through Jesus; even in the Fourth Gospel, it would seem to be the writer's intention to have the *Word* speak, rather than the historical Jesus in isolation from that Word 'who was in the beginning with God', 'by whom all things were made', 'who was the light of every man', and who in Jesus Christ was decisively 'made flesh and dwelt among us'.

In the sort of language which Bultmann and Buri would employ, the possibility of authentic existence before God, in which men live in faith and with love, is granted to every man by virtue of his being human. This Bultmann would deny; this Bun would affirm. I should agree with Buri and I should say that the point of the Christian gospel is to 're-present', as Ogden puts it, that possibility; to 're-present' it in starkly human terms, under human conditions, in Jesus as what I like to style 'the classic instance' of what God is always 'up to', rather than the totally other or the sheer anomaly, as so many (including Bultmann, presumably) would wish to regard him.

What is important for our present purposes in Bultmann's enterprise, however, is the insistence on getting at what the biblical material is saying without our being obliged at the same time to accept for ourselves the form in which it is said. It is exactly this method which I wish to employ as we continue in succeeding chapters to discuss the

truth found in the last things. Or once again, in Leonard Hodgson's way of phrasing it, we are trying to find what the state of things really is, how things really go, in a fashion which makes sense to us, when we grant that men and women who lived at *that* time, under *those* conditions, with *those* presuppositions, spoke about the matter in *that* way.

Furthermore, this kind of approach will free us from supposing that because this or that particular description of man's destiny is found stated in this or that particular way in Holy Scripture, we are obliged to accept it as necessarily 'the case'. This applies, I should claim, not only to Old Testament material and the literature of the New Testament apart from the gospels. It also applies to Jesus' own teaching. He was a Jew, He thought and spoke like a Jew; this is part of His being 'very man', as Chalcedon said He was. Hence with His own statements, so far as they are His own, such a 'proportionate interpretation', in a fine phrase from Bishop Westcott, is required quite as much as it is required for other pieces of biblical teaching.

I also wish to stress the importance for us, in this enterprise, of the social and psychosomatic understanding of man which has been so wonderfully recovered in recent years. The biblical perspective in regard to 'corporate personality' is now restored in quite 'secular' circles; to be a person *means* to be intimately and essentially related with other men. 'No man is an island entire unto himself'; and to come to know our personal humanity is to see it in its rich relationship with other persons. Atomistic views of man will no longer serve, not because we dislike them but because they are not accurate statements of a truth which is known to us in our deepest human existence. And with this stress on 'the body corporate' goes also an emphasis on man's corporeal nature. We are not 'souls' inhabiting 'bodies'; we are psychosomatic organisms, more or less integrated entities in which bodily existence is characterized by the capacity to think, to feel, to will. Here again it is not because we prefer this view; it is because, so far as we can understand ourselves and what human existence is like, we see it to be true. We owe much here to the depth psychologists and equally to those who in medical work have shown the relationship of mental processes to bodily ones. Man is an organic unity, however adequately or inadequately this is actualized in a given person's experience.

Furthermore, we belong to and with our environment. The *mit-welt* of which Heidegger speaks is not confined to our fellow-men; it includes

the realm of nature as well, since we are 'organic to nature', as Pringle-Pattison insisted many years ago. The evolutionary perspective makes this apparent; our animal origin demonstrates it. This is why we cannot follow certain existentialist writers in speaking about human history as if it were being played out against a background of irrelevant natural recurrence. Nature itself, the whole world of stuff or matter, is *there* and we are somehow part of it. We ought not to attempt to separate human experience and history from nature, but rather to see that nature itself is historical -- by which I mean that it is processive, with movement and change, even if on the macrocosmic scale this does not seem obvious to us. The sort of philosophical conceptuality which I urged upon you earlier is from one point of view merely an affirmation of exactly that kind of historical view of the whole world-process. But for our present purpose, it is enough to say that when we are thinking about the last things, our thought must include much more than human existence and human personality in its body-mind totality, even in its social relationships. The realm of nature itself must be in the picture.

I am not competent to speak about what may be contributed to us by the depth-psychologies which I have just mentioned. Harry Williams has written a useful little book on *The Last Things* in which he does just this; and I refer you to that book as well as to other essays, by him and by such writers as the late David Roberts, for some development of this theme. But insofar as this psychology talks of man's deep emotional drives, his purposive activity, his striving for realization of selfhood, his need to love and to be able to receive love, and with these the twistings and distortings which may be uncovered in him -- insofar as it does this, it helps us see something of what true fulfillment is about and has much to say concerning such actualization of man, with man's consequent 'satisfaction' and the joy which it provides, about which in an entirely different idiom the heavenly city was a picture. At the same time, the horror of hell, as real deprivation on the part of those who were loveless, because they could not love nor accept love, finds its parallel in the state of lovelessness and hence of utter despair, concerning which this psychology has so much to say.

My final point has been implied in everything that has so far been advanced. This is the practical consequences in actual and concrete human living which may be found in coming to some awareness of what the last things were trying to say. God, as chief causative principle and as supreme affect, is 'in this world or he is nowhere'; biblical material, and in relation to it Christian liturgical and hymnological imagery, with

the theological articulation of this, intend to make affirmations which are to be found in the pictures and forms and myths -- and these we must seek to make meaningful and valid for ourselves in our present existence; man is an 'embodied' and a social occasion or series (or 'routing') of occasions, organic to the world of nature, and can only truly *live* as he lives in due recognition of these facts and sees them as integral to himself. Each of these points, which we have so far discussed, along with whatever of value is to be found in the psychological analysis to which I have just referred, speaks directly to us as and where and when we *are.*

In other words, the talk about the last things is not only, if it is at all, talk about something that happens in an imagined future state, once we have died the death which each man must die. It is talk about us as we now live, in this world and with this world's responsibilities as well as its privileges. From one point of view, it might be said that futuristic references are by way of being *aberglaube* -- 'over-beliefs' which may or may not be necessary consequences of what is said about the here-and-now as Christian faith interprets it.

I do not wish to deny those futuristic references, as I have called them. In a later chapter I shall have something to say about them, although I shall emphasize that they belong to the realm which our ancestors used to describe as 'a religious hope' rather than to the realm of verifiable experience or the realm of concrete Christian existence as we are called to share it. I do wish to stress, however, the reference to concrete and actual existence *now*.

Many years ago, when James Pike and I were commissioned to prepare, for the Authors' Committee of the Division of Christian Education of the Episcopal Church, a book which would state in fairly simple fashion the 'faith of the Church' (so the book was entitled when finally it appeared, after much revision and re-writing), we talked with Bishop Angus Dun of Washington about the project. The two authors, with the whole membership of the committee charged with preparing the book, visited Bishop Dun and spent with him an entire day. We discussed the plan of the volume, the subjects to be included, and other such topics. I shall never forget Bishop Dun's repeated insistence that in approaching each topic, we must see to it that the main emphasis was always on what he called, as I remember it, 'what this means for living as a Christian today'. The particular topic upon which he first made this comment was the doctrine of creation; and he said that the only way in which this

could properly be approached was by being as clear as we could about what it means to a man 'to be a creature, living in a created world' with all that this implies, entails, and suggests.

I do not wish to father on Bishop Dun what I am trying to suggest in these pages, but I think that the point which he made at that time is highly relevant to what we are attempting to do here. What did the last things *mean* to men and women who accepted the scheme quite literally or with this or that reservation or re-interpretation? What is the deepest *meaning* in that scheme, which because it is somehow integral to the Christian faith we must seek to guarantee and preserve in our re-conception and re-statement of that faith? What does this *mean* for you and for me, for any Christian? And finally what can it *be made to mean*, without cheating or falsification, for every man and woman who wants to come to that profound self-understanding which is the other side of (and utterly integral to) the understanding of God *vis-à-vis* man?

So in the next chapter we shall begin by thinking about death.

15

return to religion-online

The 'Last Things' in a Process Perspective by Norman Pittenger

Dr. Pittenger, philosopher and theologian, was a senior member of King's College, Cambridge for many years, then Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, before retiring in 1966. Published by London: Epworth Press, 1970, This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

Chapter 3: Death

Many years ago a visiting preacher at the General Theological Seminary -- I *think* it was Allan Whittemore, then superior of the Order of the Holy Cross -- began his sermon with some words which startled the congregation into almost shocked attention. The words were these, as I remember them:'Everyone of you within sound of my voice will, within not too many years, be a corpse'. The sermon which followed was the one sermon about death and its meaning that I have ever heard preached; I noted that one sermon earlier.

I confess that I have entirely forgotten what the preacher said after his striking first sentence. But that sentence I have never forgotten, nor can I; since it made me face, for the first time and with utter seriousness, the absolutely inescapable fact that *I* was going to die. Of course I had always known that *men* died, and in a sense I was well aware of my own death as one of those men. What that sentence did, however, was to make me starkly conscious of the fact that not only do *men* die but that I, in my concrete actual human existence, faced death too. In a way, it was a realization of what Martin Luther meant when he said that every man dies *alone* -- in his particularity, in what Whitehead called, in another connection, his 'solitariness'. That is, it was I, Norman Pittenger, then a young man and a somewhat eager theological student, looking forward to a long and I hoped successful span of years, who was brought face to face with the inevitability of my own entirely personal death.

Now the fact that each of us dies alone, in his 'solitariness', as this or that particular person, does not for a moment signify that we do not belong to the human race, exist in relationship with our fellowmen, and find the meaning of our lives not in isolation but in solidarity with others. Far from doing that, it emphasizes our belonging, relationship, and solidarity, since it makes plain that in this mortal existence of ours, before that 'moment of truth' -- not the *only* such moment, but a determinative one in so many ways -- which is our own death, we can find our deepest satisfactions and our best fulfillment only in companionship and in the giving-and-receiving which is love. Once we know that we are to die, each for himself and each by himself, we are brought to value all the more highly and treasure all the more carefully that companionship and that giving-and-receiving which is life in loving. Every moment of our existence before death is now colored by the realization, however dim it may be at any given moment, that *now* is the time -- 'the accepted time', if I may use here St. Paul's phrase in a very different context -- when we must find ourselves in others and become what nowadays we have learned to style a man 'for others'.

Death is not simply a biological fact. Obviously it is that, since as a matter of human biology men do and must die. As Heidegger has said, death is indeed human life in its finality; and, in a very profound sense, all of our existence is 'towards death', precisely as a biological fact which we must accept. Yet it is not *this* sense, the straightforward biological reality, which gives to the fact of our dying both its high significance and its peculiar poignancy. What does that is the related and equally inescapable truth that death is also 'the finality of human life'. By this I mean that it is the qualifying of human life in such a way that we know ourselves to be mortal men who have no claim to anything else and who must honestly and bravely face the truth of their mortality. If they do not do so, they are less than men. Someone has said that a distinguishing factor, as between human life and animal life, is that while the animals die, as do we, they do not know that they are going to die, whereas we die, as do they, but we know that we are going to do so.

Not only does each man die, and because he is going to die recognize himself as mortal, but all men, each for himself and as himself, are also to die. Thus it is not only *I* who know myself to be mortal; every other man, and all men together constituting the human race, are able only to understand himself and themselves, when the mortality which I am stressing is accepted for what it is.

If we agree, as surely we must, that the one inescapable and inevitable fact about every man and about the whole race of men is this death, we should also agree that it is in no sense morbid to face up to it and endeavor to come to terms with it. On the contrary, it is the measure of our humanity that we live daily as those who know that they are going to die, and hence are mortal, and that we can, as it were, adjust ourselves to that stupendous fact.

Indeed, at no time in his history has man been content to consider death 'a mere incident', however much he has been tempted to do so and however many times he has sought to cover up the fact in one way or another. Or, if this statement seems too extreme, at least we can affirm confidently that those who have thought longest and deepest about human life have never been able to dismiss death in a cavalier manner. They have seen it, rather, as a tremendous event which is to be regarded seriously and respectfully, often fearfully; and, if they have been 'religious' in any sense, they would add that they must approach death and regard its importance faithfully, too. In recent years, more especially, we have learned to take death with high seriousness, not only because there has been so much of it through war and famine and other ills but also because our literature, whether in poetry or novel or drama, has been so conscious of the fact and so insistent on bringing it to our attention. In this there has been a return to the attitude of an earlier day, although with marked differences because of loss of faith or enfeebling of it. The easy dismissal of death, or the assertion that 'for those who believe, there is no death', is taken to be, what it often is, an easy evasion of the dread reality itself -- escapism, childish refusal to face facts, and above all (in our special interest) unwillingness to accept our human mortality.

Death is *there,* then. The question is, how can we come to terms with it?

Death is not there alone; it is there, as I have argued, with a finality about it. For if it is true, on the one hand, that death is the end of human existence for each and every one of us, it is on the other equally true (to repeat the words I have already used) that death is human life in its finality. That is, it is the distinctive event which colors, conditions, and qualifies every moment of our existence. And as I have also said a few moments ago, man is the only animal, so far as we know, who is aware of his mortality and who may therefore meditate on the fact that he dies. He who has never pondered this truth, and, in this sense, if in no other, 'prepared for death', is by that token less than a true man. His life is less

than authentic; it is properly to be described, by the phrase that Heidegger uses, 'inauthentic' -- that is, false, based on wrong understanding, cheapened and superficial. Such a man is living under an illusion because he is out of touch with 'things as they are' in human existence.

One of the most familiar ways in which people seek to evade both death *as* finality and the finality *of* death is through the notion of the 'immortal soul' which 'survives' the fact of our biological death. The ideas associated with that notion are specifically Greek in origin, so far as our culture and our Christian theological development are concerned. We are well aware of this ancestry. The classical statement of the notion is to be found, of course, in the speeches which Plato records from Socrates, or which he has put into the mouth of Socrates, in the dialogues which tell of the last days and death of that great and noble man.

The rational principle in man is individuated; it inhabits a corporeal 'house' for this present time. But since it is one and simple it is indestructible. It participates, in some mode, in the eternal realm of forms, although it is not identified with that realm. When a man's body dies and suffers corruption, the soul is not affected by this occurrence; it 'escapes' from the body which is dying and returns to its true abode. Thus no matter what may happen to the body, man's soul is immortal and since it is this which constitutes his distinctive human quality, death is an important and tragic incident, certainly to those who loved and cared for the one who dies, but it is not a final incident -- there is more to come, so to say.

The old American song,

> *John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave,*
> *His soul goes marching on . . .'*

puts the idea succinctly and popularly.

A great many Christians have thought that this was the teaching of the Christian faith on the subject. They have confused 'immortality of the soul' with whatever may be intended by the biblical phrase 'resurrection of the body'; while theologians have attempted, as we have already observed, when I described the older scheme which comprised the last things, to bring the two conceptions together in a fashion which will

retain each of them and yet relate them so that a consistent pattern may be provided. But of course the two conceptions cannot be brought together in that way; and the internal conflicts, the lack of balance, and the arbitrary way in which the two have been associated, demonstrate this plainly enough. We shall have something to say about 'the resurrection of the body' at a later point. For the present, my argument is simply that the talk about 'immortality of the soul' has served to provide for a great many Christian people what they wrongly took to be the right and proper Christian way of escaping the stark reality of total death.

Years ago, in my course in Apologetics in the General Seminary, I put what I take to be the truth of the matter in the following words: 'We all die; and all of us dies.' Perhaps that was too glib a phrase; and I know that, when my students repeated it to their friends, and later in their ministry to their parishioners, my intention was misunderstood by the auditors. Yet I remain convinced that what I was seeking to say in that phrase is the truth. And it is the truth which traditional talk about the last things has served to emphasize, however uncomfortable it may be and however men may have sought to evade it. All of us *do* die; that we know. And all *of us* does die -- that is the point which I am now making.

In the Old Testament we find that even the Jews could not quite easily find their way to accept this. *Sheol* was certainly not much of an existence; in that dim realm, 'the dead praise not thee, O Lord', we read. And for a Jew a 'state' in which God could not be praised was hardly a condition of genuine life. But apart from the teaching about *sheol,* borrowed or inherited from more primitive modes of religious thought, the Jew at least was prepared to recognize the full reality of death. Until the time of the Maccabees, Jewish faith was not dependent upon nor did it presuppose a kind of 'immortality' or 'resurrection', call it what you will, which alone made it possible to commit oneself wholly to Jahweh and to the doing of his holy will. And I should say that this plain fact of Old Testament faith stands as a judgement upon any effort in more recent times to insist that *unless* 'immortality' or 'resurrection' -- again call it what you will -- is in the picture, there can be no deep and genuine faith at all. Christians may wish to say some- thing more, but they simply must not suppose that God, faith in Him, commitment to Him, service of Him, *and* a denial of the reality and inescapability of death go together. Above all, they must not suppose that it is integral to faith in God, with its consequences, to believe that all *of us* (in the special sense I have given that phrase) does not die.

While this is the fact, the very reality of our mortality has emphasized our responsibility for what we do and thus what we are during the time which we have. 'We shall not pass this way again'; yet while we are *in via,* as St. Augustine puts it, we have both our duty to fulfill and our contribution, such as it may be, to make to the ongoing creative advance of the cosmos. That contribution may be very slight, to all appearances, but it is *ours* to make-and unless *we* make it, it will not be made. This statement introduces us to other ideas, about which something must be said in another context. Among these is the point that with the 'perishing of occasions', as Whitehead has described *one* side of the process, there is also the reception into God and hence both the preservation and use, of whatever good has been achieved within the process itself, to the end that the advance may continue, that further good may be actualized, and that the purpose of God (which is just that actualization of good, through love which is shared in the widest conceivable degree) may be realized in more places and times and in more ways. That is the *other* side of the 'perishing of occasions' which includes our own perishing through the inevitability of the death which awaits us.

In St. Paul's letter to the Romans there is a celebrated and much discussed passage: I quote it in the version found in the New English Bible: 'It was through one man that sin entered the world, and through sin death, and thus death pervaded the whole human race, inasmuch as all men have sinned.' Or, in the Revised Standard Version: 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned' (Romans 5:12). The meaning of this passage has been a matter of dispute among New Testament experts, although it is quite obvious that if it does nothing more it asserts that the Apostle believed that there was some connection between the fact of death and the reality of human sin. But whether he intended to tell his readers that death, as a biological fact, is the consequence of one man's sin (namely, Adam's) becoming contagious and hence affecting all men, is by no means entirely certain. Some think he intended to say just this; others seem to believe that St. Paul is working up towards his plainly stated conviction that sin in itself *is* death -- shall we say, death as loss of God whose service is not only, as the collect tells us, 'perfect freedom', but also true *life* as men are intended by God to live it. If the latter be the correct interpretation, then 'the sting' in death, as a biological happening which all of us must experience, is to be found in man's sin which is his alienation or separation from God. It is not that because Adam, or anybody else, or

the whole race of men, have sinned that they come to die; rather, it is that in facing death, as they must, they know themselves to be in a fashion *already* dead, because to live as 'the enemy of God' is really to be a dead man, however 'alive' one's physical body might be.

Whatever St. Paul was trying to communicate about his own belief, there has been a strain in the Christian tradition which has taken the first of the two meanings and has talked as if death were the punishment inflicted on man for his failure to obey God's commands. Had Adam not sinned, it has been said, man would have been immortal, although what this might entail has not been worked out in any great detail. The second of the two possible meanings has been stressed by another strain in the Christian tradition, with more probability so far as our human experience can guide us. And it is this aspect which seems to me to be of significance for us as we see what the scheme which included death among the last things has to say to *us.*

At this point it would be desirable to spend considerable time in discussing the meaning of the word 'sin' itself, but we shall not do that. I take it that we shall agree that 'sin' does *not* denote the various particular acts of this or that man which in some ways contravene God's purpose -- the sort of acts with which codes and commandments and sets of rules or laws concern themselves. These are manifestations of something more basic -- and that more basic 'something' is what we are getting at when we speak about 'sin'. I should define this in two ways; or rather, in one definition with two aspects.

First, sin is a condition or state or situation in human existence in which men find themselves impotent before the requirements which they see, however dimly, are laid upon them simply by virtue of their being men. It is a 'grace-less' state, as one might put it; because it is a state in which there is failure in harmonizing the ideal and the actual, failure in integration of the self -- always, mind you, the self in its relation with others, for we know of no other human selfhood -- and failure to move towards the actualization of the possibilities which are present as the 'initial aim' of our lives is made into the 'subjective aim (in Whiteheadian language) whose realization constitutes our 'becoming' in manhood.

That is one aspect of the meaning of sin -- it is the humanly understood side. The other aspect is introduced when we are aware, as we ought to be, that God's purpose for man, as Paul Lehmann has so admirably told

us, is 'to make and keep us human'. That condition or state or situation in which we are *not* realizing our subjective aim and find ourselves impotent in the face of the requirements which it makes upon us may be summed up simply by saying that although we are made to become men, we do not actually get very far along the path, knowing ourselves to be both incompetent and impotent, however grand may be our projects and however optimistic may be our hopes. God's purpose for us, his will, is nothing other than that we should become ourselves as he initially aims us to become -- and I have put it in this somewhat clumsy way because I wish to stress the *aim* which is integral to human nature.

Sin, the noun in the singular, is a religiously freighted term whose purpose is to point to *that* state: our failure to become what we are created to become and hence our failure to 'obey' God's command which is precisely that we shall become what we are created to become. With that definition in mind, we may (if we wish -- and moral theologians *have* wished) go on to speak of the particular acts, in thought or word or deed, in which this situation manifests itself. But as every sensitive person ought to know and as every councilor (and every priest who has 'heard confessions') does know, man's root problem is not in these particular acts. They are symptomatic of something much more serious and those who think that by dealing with symptoms they have cured a disease are only deluding themselves and harming the patient. The disease, if the word may be permitted, is the situation or state or condition which I have described and it is *that* which requires attention. One central element in the Christian gospel is the affirmation that in a very real way God deals with that situation -- this is the meaning of what we call redemption or salvation or atonement.

For the moment, however, that is not our concern. Our concern is that the fact of human death, as an inescapable biological event which is also the qualification of our humanity as mortal, brings vividly before us something else. It makes us realize, with a startling clarity and with sometimes terrible anguish, that *at our best* we are mortal failures. I quite realize that this may seem an exaggerated, even an emotive, way of stating it; but I am quite sure that any honest man or woman, conscious of his mortality, is also conscious of the fact that he is not what he might have been, that he cannot shift the blame to somebody else's shoulders (however many extenuating circumstances he may feel justified in adducing), and that, in at least one sense, the sense I have indicated above, he *is* a mortal failure. 'I am an unprofitable servant, for I have done only what was commanded of me' -- yes, but more than

that, 'I am a *very* unprofitable servant, for I have not even done, nor been competent and willing to do, that which was commanded of me.'

This at once introduces us to the responsibility which is ours, as men, to become what we are intended to become. Such responsibility is not imposed upon us from without, by some alien agent or a *deus ex machina;* it is the law of our being or, in much better language, the law for our becoming. If it were thrust on us from outside, it might be only a threat with penalty attached. Because it is integral to our very 'routing', to ourselves as a series of occasions constituting our personality-in-the-making, it is a lure or an enticement or solicitation. But our failure involves penalties, none the less. The penalties are not imposed from outside, either, as if by an alien agent or a *deus ex machina.* They are the ineluctable working-out, in our own existence, of decisions which have been made by us in whatever freedom we possessed. And those decisions, as Robert Frost once wrote of 'The Road Not Taken', 'have made the difference'.

God is love: every Christian would agree with that Johannine affirmation, based as it is on the certainty that God *acts lovingly:* 'Herein is love, not that *we* loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son that we might live through him.' I wish to gather together what so far has been said and relate it to this basic Christian affirmation of God as love, 'pure unbounded love', and nothing but that sheer love-in-action.

We die, physically. All of us dies. Death, as giving our existence its specific quality, shows us to be mortal, along with all our fellow-men. This mortality includes the responsibility that we shall become what we were created to be, which is authentic or true men, fully and completely human. Our failure to become what is initially our aim, and subjectively our intentional aim as well, means that we are, in at least one sense, precisely that -- viz., 'failures' -- although God may, and Christians at least believe that He does, deal with that situation if we permit Him to do so. These things the fact of death makes clear.

This is what we have been saying so far in this chapter. But now, as I have said, we turn to what I might call, as I heard a young man put it, 'this love business which Christians talk about'. How, it must be asked, does *that* come into the picture? My own reply would be that it comes in at every point and in every way. Far from being an addition, it is the very heart of the matter. For as God *is* love, so that the affirmation of

His love is no afterthought or addendum to a series of propositions about His omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, transcendence, etc.; in similar manner in respect to human nature and activity, to human becoming, to human existence as such, love is no addendum, no afterthought, no extra, but the central reality itself. This needs development, however. The mere statement of it will not suffice.

Man is intended to be a lover. It is for this purpose that he comes into existence and it is for this purpose that he lives. This may seem to be sheer sentimentality; but it can only seem so when we do not properly understand the nature of love. In another place I have attempted to provide what might be styled a phenomenology of love (*Love Looks Deep*, Mowbrays, 1969). In that book, written for the general public and not for scholars, I suggested that love includes the following elements or aspects: commitment, mutuality, fidelity, hopefulness, union -- and that its goal is fulfillment in and with another or with others. It is obvious that none of us is a 'perfect lover', for none of us achieves anything like perfection in these several ways in which love is and in which love *expresses itself.* But the question to be asked is not whether we are thus 'perfect'. The answer to *that* question is plain enough. The question which ought to be faced is whether we are *moving towards* fulfillment, with our fellows, in the several ways which love includes in itself. In other words, are we *becoming lovers*? Is our actualization of the potentialities within us in the direction of our becoming more committed, more open to giving-and-receiving, more faithful, more hopeful in relation with others, more in union with them? And we have only this mortal span in which to *become* in this way, for death always stands as the end, the terminus, of our loving and of our mortal learning to love.

Our human responsibility is to become what we are intended to become. Thus that responsibility is that we shall become the lovers we were meant to be. Our tragic situation is that we fail, at so many places, in so many times, and in so many ways. It is not only that we are frustrated in this. The frustration may be due to the concrete conditions in which our existence is set; about that we can often do little or nothing. Nor is it found in the fact that within the space of years which is ours we are frustrated in another sense, the sense (namely) that we do not have time, as we say, to bring to fruition that which we would wish to accomplish. The frustrations such as I have just mentioned, and other frustrations like them, are inhibiting factors but they are not the decisive factors. What is decisive is whether we are or are not open, within the imposed

limits, to the loving, the receiving love, the life in love, which will make us into authentic men whose very authenticity is in their 'becoming in love'.

It is astounding to notice that popular songs, so often contemptuously dismissed by the sophisticated and so frequently condemned as cheap or vulgar or sentimental or lustful by those who think of themselves as 'religious', have got hold of the truth which I have been suggesting, while the sophisticated and the self-consciously 'religious' fail to see what this is all about. It is so easy to dismiss this sort of lyric because it is usually replete with sexual allusions. Yet this may be the importance of the popular song -- and that for the reason that human sexuality and the capacity to love (in all the aspects which I have listed) are closely associated. Repression of sexuality can produce precisely the lovelessness which is man's chief trouble, while the expression of sexuality, under the control of love in its aim to be related in mutuality to another or to others, can be a way for realizing love -- and realizing it both as a matter of consciously grasped experience and also as a concrete movement towards the fulfillment of self in association with others of our race.

I may refer here, perhaps immodestly, to the book which I just mentioned, where I have sought to show how this comes to be, while in still another book, *The Christian Understanding of Human Nature* (Westminster, Philadelphia, and Nisbet, London, 1964), I tried to relate the theme to Christian theology in a wider sense. Daniel Day Williams, too, in his *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* (Harper and Row, New York, and Nisbet, London, 1968) has worked on the same lines. With these books, and especially Dr Williams's, in mind, I shall not pursue this subject here.

I must make one further point, however. We are thinking about the traditional scheme of the last things and we are doing this as those who in some fashion would wish to confess ourselves as Christians. For us, then, the faith in God enters the picture in a special way. God is love, we have said; He has declared this love in His loving action in the total event of Jesus Christ. Let us not forget that this love, declared in action, went to the limit of identification with humanity. Not only is God present in and with men, through his activity in the man Jesus -- and elsewhere too, in varying degree and mode. God is also participant in the death which every man must die. To put it mythologically, as nowadays many would phrase it, God in Christ experiences everything

in human existence including the death which puts an end to it. 'He learned by the things which he suffered' -- and the Greek of that text suggests that what is meant by 'suffered' is what we should call 'experienced' or 'underwent'.

So the love which was worked out in human terms in the life of the Man of Nazareth was a love which knew mortality in its fullness, of body and of soul. It knew the responsibility of becoming itself, completely authentic and therefore entirely free, under those conditions and in that fashion. It is our faith that in that Man it did not 'fail', not because it had peculiar privileges or unique divine prerogatives, but because it held fast to its 'initial aim', making that its own 'subjective aim' and thus through 'the travail' which mortal existence imposed upon it finding the 'satisfaction' or fulfilment which was its destiny. To participate in that love which is humanly worked out in Jesus is truly to live in authenticity. Christian life, I should urge upon you, is just that authentic life in love. Because it is 'life in love', shared with Jesus Christ as the One who did thus realize and actualize love-in-action, it is also 'life in Christ'. And since life in Christ, shared with His human brethren, is both the reflection of and participation in the life which is truly divine -- *God's* life -- such 'life in love' is 'life in God', for God *is* love.

But none of this is possible without our facing the reality of our dying, any more than it was possible for Him whom we call our Lord and Master. To put it figuratively, the triumph of Easter Day is achieved in and on the Cross of Good Friday -- it is not some 'happy ending' which cancels out the suffering that preceded it. Easter triumph in love is God's writing his 'O.K. That's the way things are and that's the way I am' -- writing it across the tree on which Jesus hung on that fateful day.

For us this means that we must undertake the responsibility of loving, for that and that only makes possible the authenticity of living. In some lines that W. H. Auden once wrote, in *Letters from Iceland,* there is a compelling statement of this responsibility as it reflects itself in the call, so well known to us today, to social action in the world where we live out our days.

> *And to the good, who know how wide the gulf, how deep*
> *Between ideal and real, who being good have felt*
> *The final temptation to withdraw, sit down, and weep,*
> *We pray the power to take upon themselves the guilt*
> *Of human action, though still as ready to confess*

The imperfection of what can and must be built --
The wish and power to act, forgive, and bless.

16

return to religion-online

The 'Last Things' in a Process Perspective by Norman Pittenger

Dr. Pittenger, philosopher and theologian, was a senior member of King's College, Cambridge for many years, then Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, before retiring in 1966. Published by London: Epworth Press, 1970, This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

Chapter 4: Judgement

In speaking of the momentous significance of the fact of death, not only as the *finis* or clear terminus of earthly life for every man and for the whole race of men, but also as the event which qualifies and colors each life, we introduced in our conclusion the possibility and the necessity of love.

Man is made to become a lover, we said. In this mortal existence, known as such by reason of our dying, this 'becoming' is frustrated by factors which prevent its complete realization, but much more importantly for each of us the failure in loving is due to our own incompetence and our own impotence in accepting love, both as a giving and as a receiving of self in the mutuality which love is. For this we must somehow shoulder the responsibility, since we know deep within ourselves that we *are* indeed responsible. However difficult it may have been, however many obstacles circumstances set in its way, man senses that he *could* have loved more than he did. A mature man is prepared to accept the responsibility for his not having responded to the opportunities of loving which in various ways, some great and some small, were open to him. Death is there; and it makes it plain to each man that during his mortal span he has both the opportunity and the duty to love.

What on earth and sky can *judgement,* with which in this chapter we are concerned, have to do with *love?* Perhaps that is the first question which we may feel obliged to ask. My answer would be in the Pauline phrase,

'much every way'.

One of the reasons, if not the only one, that this question can be asked is that we are the victims of a sentimentalized notion of love and its manner of working. I have commended popular songs for their stress on love and I have said that one thing about them that I find valuable is their association of love and sexual desire. This is commonly regarded as what is wrong about them; on the contrary, in my view, this is what is right about them. The thing that I believe is often wrong is not their use of sexual images and their talk about sexual desire, but the tendency (in some of the songs at least) to sentimentalize love. By this I mean to make it seem soft, cozy, sweet, comforting, and nothing else.

But it is not in such songs that we discover the worst manifestations of this tendency. It is in the devaluation of the very word itself, which for so many of our contemporaries, and even in many Christian circles, has come to suggest a kind of sloppiness, a simple and quite uncritical acquiescence in anything and everything. In that common misunderstanding of love we discover exactly the softness, the coziness, about which I have spoken. Thus love becomes niceness. It is taken to be sweet, which indeed it is, but it is not grasped as being 'bitter sweet', if I may use here the title of one of Noel Coward's songs, found in a musical play of the same name. It has not seen the truth in the Spanish folk proverb, that 'to make love is to declare one's sorrows'; nor has it noticed that the deepest expressions of love are not only painful to the one who loves but can also make inexorable demands on the one who is loved -- demands which are not arbitrary and certainly not coercive in their manner of expression, but which are inexorable none the less, since they expect of the beloved the full and complete realization of all his possibilities as a lover.

The sort of love about which I was speaking in the last chapter is such love as was shown in Christ, who 'having loved his own that were in the world, loved them unto the end'. . . the end of death on their behalf, which demanded (again, let us recall, in no arbitrary and coercive way) the response from them of a returning love which would show itself in their loving one another. The discourses put in Jesus' mouth by the Fourth Evangelist and the remarkable summary found in the fourth chapter of the first Johannine epistle are very pointed here -- love is seen both in its wonder of identification and its mutuality in giving and receiving *and* also in its strange inexorability.

Love *hurts*, too. The identification to which I have just referred is no easy affair; it implies and it involves such a total sharing that the pain experienced by the one who is loved is also the pain of the one who loves. And even more profoundly, the anguish in such identification is the more terrible when the lover knows deeply and inescapably, as in all honesty he must, the failures of the one who is loved. These too he shares; and the anguish is compounded when, knowing these failures -- these defects and lacks, shall we say? -- he *still* loves. As St Paul tells us in the most famous of all the bits of his epistles, 'there is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance'. And he adds (I am using in my quotation the New English Bible) that 'love will never come to an end' -- it never fails, as we more usually quote the Pauline passage. Or, in our own idiom, 'love can and does *take it*'.

Once we have come to understand that love is like that, we shall never be guilty of sentimentalizing. We shall see that love is comfortable in the meaning of that word in Elizabethan times: it is strengthening and invigorating. It is thus comfortable precisely because it has 'gone through many waters' which have not defeated and cannot 'drown it'; it is 'terrible as an army with banners', not because like such an army it uses force, but because it is in itself the only really strong thing in the whole world and in human experience. It is strong *because* it is patient, not strong in spite of its requiring patience.

Now all of what I have been saying ought to be perfectly obvious to anybody who professes and calls himself a Christian and who has learned what love is from contemplation of the figure of his Lord and Master. God is love *like* that -- indeed we ought to put it more forcefully and say that such human love as we see in Jesus is the very reflection of the reality of divine love on the stage of human affairs. That is the way the world goes; the grain of the universe is exactly like that, however the appearances of things may seem. I should say that the basic affirmation of Christian faith is just there: the commitment of self to a love like that as the disclosure of how things go, most profoundly, and the 'life in scorn of consequence' (in Kirsopp Lake's grand words) which follows when such commitment is undertaken.

But if that is 'the disclosure of God's nature', known through his 'agency in the world', as Whitehead would put it, then it is also true that each man is intended to actualize in his own existence that love. He is to 'live in love' because to live so is truly *to live.* The English recusant

poet Robert Southwell wrote lines that I delight in quoting: 'Not where I breathe, but where I love, I live.' He spoke not for himself alone but for all men -- as all men, once they have been opened up to the understanding of themselves, may be brought to see. This is 'the life which is life indeed'.

It is with this background in mind and in this context that we can see why judgement is related to love. Although the word 'judgement' is not a happy one, as we shall see, what it intends to say is utterly integral to love. The relationship is no incidental or accidental one; it is tied in with the very reality of loving in itself. Indeed we might put it briefly by saying that love always *is* judgement, in the meaning which I shall try to give to that not too satisfactory word which traditionally has been employed to denote what I am talking about.

But what *am* I talking about?

Simply, one could state it in these words: I am talking about the honest recognition or facing of things as actually they are, with the consequences they have had, exactly as those consequences have been. I am talking about a brave and fearless *appraisal* both of the situation and of those who are in the situation. So I shall use the word 'appraisal' in the remainder of this chapter, rather than the word 'judgement'; the latter fails seriously, for us today at any rate, because it is so tied up with notions of law-courts, assizes, and the other paraphernalia of 'justice' in the legal sense. *Such* notions have little or nothing to do with love; they are a matter of human justice which *may be* a mode of love's expression in certain situations but they are also very misleading because love is ultimately not concerned with 'justice' in the vulgar sense -- it is *above* justice, whose interest is either retributive or distributive, for the interest of love is with *persons*, persons in society with their fellows, and the fulfillment of selves in the giving-and-receiving which is mutuality or union.

Furthermore -- and this I wish to stress -- the rewards and punishments motif is not part of the kind of appraisal that I think love entails. The only reward that love can offer is more opportunity to love; its only punishment can be failure on the part of the lover to continue in loving. If we import into our thinking ideas about rewards and punishments, as these are commonly understood, we turn God into 'the ruthless moralist' who, as Whitehead once remarked, is one of the false 'gods' that men have worshipped to their own frightful hurt. I say this with full

recognition of the fact that in the gospels we find something of the rewards and punishments motif. But if one looks at what is said there, interpreting it in the light of what Jesus Himself was, as the community of Christian faith remembered Him and His impact upon them, we shall see that the reward promised to those who love God or do His will is really the presence of God and the joy of 'seeing him'; while the punishment is the alienation from His presence and that joy, the result of not loving which the victim has imposed upon himself. In any event, as we shall see when we discuss the meaning of the heavenly promise, as part of the scheme of the last things, it is not genuinely Christian to think that anybody can want God *and* something else. In having God, or better in being had by God, we have *all* that 'we can desire', as the collect puts it; it is not a matter of 'God and a lollypop', as I have heard it said. St Francis de Sales once commented that 'he who seeks God in order to have something more, does not know what he is seeking'. To seek God *is* to seek all good; and to live 'in God', which is to live 'in love', is in itself the *summum bonum.*

As mortal life in its finality, death introduces into our mortal existence the fact of appraisal. This is a concept which many have sought to remove from our thinking about human life. The reason for this is not only that it seems to give a somewhat unpleasant note to the portrayal of that life. Rather, as I see it, the reason is two-fold. First, the pictures of 'judgement' have been drawn so often from law-courts and the like that they bear little relation to the Christian insistence on God as love. Hence when that insistence is taken with the utmost seriousness, the whole idea is dismissed as mistaken -- once again, to use the familiar aphorism, 'the baby is thrown out with the bath-water'. But second, the understanding of love itself has been sentimentalized, as I have said, and hence it has been thought that love has nothing to do with appraisal, evaluation, and the honest recognition of things as they are and persons as they are, however much we may love them.

Whether people like it or not, appraisal is a genuine and persisting factor in human existence. Appraisal means that each man is responsible for his life and for the decisions which he has made in the course of it; and it means also that each man must be prepared to give what traditional thinking describes as 'an account of his life' -- in the face of whatever ultimately determines and assesses true values in the whole scheme of things. If that 'ultimate' is love, as Christians believe, the appraisal is all the more searching and it is all the more terrible to be aware that one must face it. 'It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of

the living God', we read in *Hebrews.* On which we may comment that it would indeed be 'terrible' to fall into the hands of one who is what Whitehead styled 'the ruthless moralist'; but it is even more 'terrible', in the most profound sense of that word, when one must look at the love which we have pierced by our own lovelessness, the cosmic Lover (as I like to put it) whose readiness to give love and to receive love is so devastatingly complete. The Love 'that moves the sun and the other stars', in Dante's final words in *La Commedia Divina,* cannot be faced with nonchalance or ease.

Appraisal, in the meaning I am giving to the word, is not necessarily 'final', if by this is suggested that it is not also *present;* indeed I would wish to say that it is essentially present, in this and in every moment. Every man, day by day, is appraised. The question which is being asked is insistent in all moments and in every moment of our existence: 'How do I "stack up" against the way things really "go"?' That question is asked, I have said. But by whom?

It is asked by each man of and for himself. That is the measure of our human responsibility and thus the determinant of our humanly moral earnestness, precisely as death is the measure of our humanity as mortal. And by 'moral earnestness' I do not mean the sort of moralism which centers itself in obedience to codes or laws or sets of commandments, whether they be ten or of any other number. These have their place, doubtless, in the living of human life; but it would be wrong, I think, to assume that 'moral earnestness' means only a meticulous 'keeping of the commandments' in as devoted a manner as possible. Christian, or even human, 'obedience' is not exhausted by anything like that. 'One thing you lack', Jesus is reported to have said to the 'rich young ruler' after that youth had said, doubtless in complete honesty and with entire accuracy, that he had kept the commandments all his life. What was lacking was genuine 'obedience', not to a set of moral requirements imposed from on high, but in a certain quality of spirit. And I think that the 'Follow me', in that *pericope,* is not simply a call to be a disciple in the obvious meaning of the word. It is a call to be *like* Jesus -- which is nothing other than to be a lover, to become what one is intended to become, and thus to find oneself fulfilled as a man.

Thus our self-appraisal is in terms of our love. The question comes down to this: in what ways, to what degree, have I or have I not opened myself to love, to give love and to receive love, to commit myself in utter faithfulness, to live in real mutuality, to look at others with 'eager

expectancy' (as Baron von Hügel defined 'hope'), and thus in the truest sense to have been *a man?* It is obvious that when this question is asked, by each of us for himself, the answer must be in terms of failure. Yet the *direction* which we have taken, the aim which has been ours, is the determinative factor. Is *that* the end which has been ours?

But none of us really knows himself completely. It is not to us that hearts are open, even our own; desires known, even our own; no secrets hid, even our own. Nor is it to our fellowmen, who also appraise. This is true, whether we are thinking of the contemporaries whom we know and who know us, of the wider society of which we are a part, or of history in its great sweep. By each of these we are evaluated; but none of these can know the complete truth about us. The appeal to the 'judgement of society', like the appeal to the 'judgement of history', is an appeal which is inescapable; whether we like it or not, that appeal is always being made. But because the society of our fellowmen, intimate or remote, is marked by the same mortality which is ours as persons, while the whole sweep of history as we experience and know it is also a mortal history -- under the sign of death -- any appraisal made in this way is also limited and partial.

The point is not that such appraisals are made 'in time' and not 'in eternity', as some would like to phrase it; I have already tried to make it clear that such a dualism will not serve us and that God himself is 'temporal' although in what we may style 'an eminent manner'. The point is that the human capacity to understand, in the most profound sense of the word, is so slight that nobody ought to venture to make what he can never in fact make, 'a final judgement' about anybody else, or even about himself. 'Judge not, that ye be not judged'; no man, no society of men, and no long historical sequence of men in society, knows enough or knows fully enough to make any appraisal that can claim to be entirely accurate and that can suppose itself to have seen everything that should enter into the making of such an appraisal.

But *God* is 'the fellow-sufferer who *understands',* as White-head says. *His* understanding is the supreme wisdom which knows things as they are; and it is unto him 'that all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid'. This is simply another way of phrasing the Christian faith itself -- the faith which declares that God *is* love and that we are assured of this because he *acts* lovingly, above all has acted lovingly in the total event of Jesus Christ. People often smile when it is said that only love can really see another person as he is; we are inclined

to think that love is 'blind', failing to see defects and always ready to discover values and virtues. This is indeed the case with human love, which is mortal and under the conditions of that mortality cannot be 'perfect', while at the same time it is under the 'condemnation' of failure. But the divine love, God himself as cosmic Lover, is in a different situation -- or so a Christian must believe. That love *knows;* and knowing, that love *understands.*

I claim, therefore, that the only 'just' appraisal, the only 'judgement' which can take *all* the facts into account, is God's. And only He can make a 'final' judgement. His appraisal will be accurate, while at the same time it will be merciful. In stating it in this way, I am trying to indicate what seems to me the insight in the traditional view that God is just, not in the human sense of meting out, distributively or retributively, the proper rewards or punishments according to some prior set of laws or regulations, but in the divine sense (if I may say it this way) of complete understanding. Further, I am trying to indicate, by the word 'mercy', that God's appraisal is more than accurate, in terms of complete understanding; it is also characterized by God's *chesed,* his 'loving-kindness', his never-failing mercy, which always makes the best out of every situation and finds the best in every person. In saying this about 'the best', I do not intend the idea that this is read into the Situation or the person. On the contrary, I suggest that precisely because God does know all desires, the secrets of human hearts, and the depths of each situation, He also knows there the 'initial aim' which in the first instance He gave, the entire condition of things which was there present, the possibilities which were offered, the efforts that were made, the failures that were experienced, and *everything else.* Knowing that, God's appraisal is 'charitable' appraisal in the true sense of that word -- that is, it is *really* loving and thus can both see the best that is there and be prepared to use that best in the augmenting of good in the creative advance which is the cosmic process.

To speak in this way leads naturally to some further considerations in which (as I think) process philosophy can be of great assistance to us. In Whitehead's works there are two words which I wish to mention: one is 'decision'; the other is 'prehension', both negative and positive. I believe that these words, and the ideas that are associated with them, can be fruitfully used at this point of our discussion.

'Decision' means, of course, 'cutting off'. It should not necessarily imply conscious activity of the sort that we know in our own

experience, when our 'decision' is or may be made with awareness of what is being done. If, as Whitehead claims and as process thought in general would assert, the element of 'decision' is found everywhere in the creative process, this should not be taken to mean that a quantum of energy, say, knowingly 'decides' for this or that among the relevant possibilities that are 'offered' to it. Similarly, the view which I share that 'subjective aim' is not only present at the level of conscious human movement towards the actualization of potentialities, in a dynamic process, but is also found at every level and at every point in that process, does not imply that such an aim is consciously, knowingly, with full awareness such as we may assume is ours, 'subjectively' apprehended when the various occasions or occurrences or entities' in the order of creation move towards their own appropriate mode and degree of actualization.

For these reasons I think that Professor Hartshorne's use, at one time, of the word 'panpsychism' was misleading, although I agree completely with what Professor Hartshorne was really concerned to assert. 'Panpsychism' (pan all, psyche soul) suggests some kind of *vitalistic* view, in which 'entelechies' (i.e. souls as opposed to bodies) are operative at all points and on all levels, after the fashion of the vitalistic biology of Hans Driesch and others. What I should claim, however, is that in a manner appropriate to the particular level and in a fashion suitable for the particular occasion, however 'large' or 'small', there is such 'decision' as entails a 'cutting off' of this or that possibility for actualization and an 'acceptance' of this or that other possibility. It is in this way that the creative advance goes on. Thus I think that human decision, in the self- conscious sense in which commonly we use the term, is related to and part of a general movement in which 'decision' is always a determinative factor. In this sense it is one of the 'metaphysical principles' which we require for our understanding of how things go in the world, even if in exactly that phasing it is not part of a given categoreal scheme.

At the human level, with which we are concerned, such decision is made with some awareness of what is involved in it and certainly with a degree of self-consciousness in the making of it. This is part of what is intended when we speak of human responsibility. In any given situation, each human person brings with him from his past the totality of what has gone into making him what at that moment he is; this is his 'memory', in the most serious meaning of that word, including not only conscious and (as we might say) sub-conscious factors which might by

the process of psychoanalysis be brought to the surface, but also the organic, physical, yes the physiological factors, which are 'viscerally' 'remembered'; including also the whole series of past prehensions -- of graspings and being grasped -- which have had their part and contributed their share in making him what he is *now*. Each human person too is *in* his relationships, contemporary with him although there is some slight span of time between their origination and their reception by him. And each human person is *towards his future*, as he moves in the direction of realizing or making actual the 'subjective aim' which is his on the basis of that 'initial aim' which has been provided for him in his beginnings.

Human decision is the way in which choice is made, among all possibilities offered at a given instant, so that actualization may occur. This happens constantly, since every occasion or occurrence is involved by necessity in the process of 'going on'. Most of the decisions may seem relatively insignificant or unimportant, but some of them are different -- these are the decisions which respond to this or that possibility that may be strikingly determinative of the future direction to be taken. As such, they are responses to certain lures or solicitations of a peculiarly intensive sort. Every decision is a response to a lure or solicitation; that is how God effectively 'acts' in a creative process from which he is nowhere absent, by permitting things to 'make themselves' as decisions are undertaken that 'decide' the degree and kind of actualization that will occur. But *some* decisions are peculiarly significant; they are the response made to what is proposed as *important*, to use another Whiteheadian word. For a Christian, the event of Christ is important, m that sense, as providing a clue to 'the nature of God and his agency in the world'; the decision made for or against that clue is important, since it is determinative of whether or not life will be lived -- that is, man will move towards becoming himself -- in terms of the love which is there both manifested and released.

The decision may be negative or positive, because, in the process, prehensions, or graspings both of and by each occasion, may be either in terms of a 'yes' or a 'no'. A negative prehension means that the occasion rejects this or that which is offered to it, a rejection which may be made for a variety of reasons, the details of which we need not here investigate. A positive prehension means an accepting of what is offered, a receiving of it into the occasion which is presented with it as a possibility to be grasped, and this also may be made for a variety of reasons about which we shall not speak. But the *fact* of such rejections

or choices is highly significant; and above all, to put it in a form of words, it is highly *important* that the *important* which is offered to each occasion as a possibility shall be decided for or against in an *important* way. Which is to say, in a decision that signifies commitment or determination against commitment.

What has been said in the last few pages may seem to some to be illicit metaphysical talk. But I would remind any who think this that it all depends on what one means by 'metaphysics'. I do not believe that what I have been saying is anything like the erection of some grandiose scheme in which super-terrestrial realities are being set up and the whole apparatus of a quasi-Hegelian metaphysic is proposed. On the contrary, I should claim, what I have been saying is metaphysical in the second sense of the word which I proposed in an earlier chapter; it is the making of wide generalizations on the basis of experience, with a reference back to verify or 'check' the generalizations, a reference which includes not only the specific experience from which it started but also other experiences, both human and more general, by which its validity may be tested -- and the result is not some grand scheme which claims to encompass everything in its sweep, but a vision of reality which to the one who *sees* in this way appears a satisfactory, but by no means complete, picture of how things actually and concretely *go* in the world.

But to return to decision as an enduring factor in the world process. In men, that decision manifests itself in self-conscious choice. With choice goes the responsibility for what is chosen -- granted that there are qualifying and conditioning factors, that human freedom is limited in many respects, and that what we deeply *desire* is much more significant than what we may perhaps have been able effectually to accomplish in consequence of our decision. In the perspective of Christian faith, what is suggested here is that in the appraisal which is part of human mortal existence, we ourselves can be at best but partial judges. History, as well as the society of our contemporaries, is in the same case -- not enough is known of human 'depths', as the psychoanalysts put it, for any appraisal to be entirely accurate. But God, who *is* love, who is 'the fellow-sufferer who understands', and whose wisdom penetrates all that is actual and is aware of the relevant possibilities (but *as* possibilities, not in whatever may be made actual among them, for that is 'open' until it happens and God's omniscience cannot mean that He knows, hence must determine, what will occur *before* it occurs), can make an appraisal that is both accurate and merciful -- that is 'just' and loving.

The appraisal that God makes is worked out in what He does -- or, in words that describe the creative advance as we know it, the appraisal is worked out in terms of what is taken into, and what is rejected from, the 'consequent nature' of God, God as He is affected by what occurs in the world; and then, in what use is made of what has been thus taken or received in the furthering of the project or purpose of God, the implementation of good 'in widest commonalty shared'.

What did this particular life contribute to God's experience, we might then ask, as God receives into Himself what that life has been on the way to becoming and what it has achieved as it has proceeded on that way? In a similar manner, we might ask the question, What has the total life of the human race contributed to this ongoing process of good? At every moment, such an appraisal is being made, in the most serious sense -- not as a juridical pronouncement, but as acceptance or non-acceptance. When death comes, appraisal must also be made in the same way, for the total pattern of a given human life, made up as it is of a particular 'routing' of occasions bound together in the fashion we indicated earlier, has also contributed, or failed to contribute, in its very totality, to the creative advance in good. Indeed the whole of the created order, as we style it, is also being appraised in the same way. Each man, each community, humanity as a whole, the range of historical development, the realm of nature . . . all are knit together in an organic totality; all have played, or failed to play, their part in the good which is being achieved by God. God, however, is not aloof from His creation; He is 'in the world or nowhere at all' and by virtue of this He is participant in, identified (but not identical) with, and enriched -- or, maybe, impoverished -- in His own life by what has gone on, does now go on, and will go on, yet remaining always unsurpassed by anything not Himself. He is the supremely worshipful because that is true of Him and of no other. He is also supremely worshipful because He is the love which is both the depth and the height in all occasions and the enticement or lure which leads those occasions, by their own free decision, to their satisfaction or fulfillment in the context of the wide social pattern which is the world.

God can and does 'make even the wrath of man to serve him'. That means that in every way and in every place, God makes the best of everything, including human lovelessness and the failure which it entails. But the evil is still evil, the wrong is still wrong, the lovelessness is still lovelessness; this is no case of 'partial evil, universal good', in the cheery phrase of Alexander Pope's. While evil is

not radical, if by that is intended 'at the root of things' -- for it *cannot* be, if God is love and is Himself 'at the root of things' through His creativity at work in them -- it is most certainly not to be dismissed or minimized or talked away. Yet God in the creative advance can be trusted, says Christian faith, to use whatever is usable for His purpose of love; and some of us may be surprised to see how this is possible to do when the use is made of what may seem to us extremely unpromising material. But when we judge in that way, we are ourselves appraised for the unloving creatures we are.

Finally, the divine appraisal very likely has little to do with what we would think to be the 'religious' areas of experience. Those are necessary for us; so I should wish to insist, in opposition to the contemporary writers who regard *all* religion, in any sense, as necessarily bad. But God's appraisal, because He is what He is, disclosed in what He actively does, and precisely because the world is what it is, in terms of what happens in it, is an appraisal of real worth, wherever it may be found and however it may be expressed. By this I mean that since God lures, entices, invites, and solicits His creation towards the actualization of its 'initial aim' which becomes its 'subjective aim', in each of its occurrences or occasions, so also He appraises -- takes into Himself and receives and uses, or must reject because it is un-usable -- whatever is done, including the doing which is man's 'becoming', in a very great diversity of ways. Most of them, doubtless, are 'secular', not specifically 'religious'.

The lure of God is known in every channel and area of existence, not just in those that have a 'religious' tinge. And in those 'secular' channels or areas, God is working 'secularly', as Whitehead put it long before 'secular theologians' appeared on the scene. When He works in such a way, His 'incognito' is to be respected, not denied. But none the less it is *He* who is 'acting' there -- and God always acts in love, to secure a freely given response from those who are made to be lovers too and the appraisal of whom is in terms of the degree of their contribution to love's purpose in the creative advance of the cosmos.

St. John of the Cross, using the word 'judgement' where I prefer the word 'appraisal', put in one sentence what I have been trying to say: 'In the evening of our days, we shall be judged by our loving.'

15

return to religion-online

The 'Last Things' in a Process Perspective by Norman Pittenger

Dr. Pittenger, philosopher and theologian, was a senior member of King's College, Cambridge for many years, then Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, before retiring in 1966. Published by London: Epworth Press, 1970, This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

Chapter 5: Heaven and Hell

Man dies and his death is both the end of his life, biologically speaking, and the qualifying characteristic of his life, marking him out as mortal, as aware of mortality, as responsible in that mortal existence, an existence during which he is intended to actualize himself as a lover, becoming what he is made and meant to be. He is under appraisal, both by himself and his fellows and by the God who has provided for him his 'initial aim' and who will either receive the good which his becoming has achieved or find necessary the rejection of that which does not contribute to the creative advance at which God Himself aims.

And each man, in every age and at every time, like the whole race of men, and indeed like the whole creation, is faced with two possible 'destinies', one or other of which will turn out to have been his, in terms of the direction he has taken in his mortal existence. Nor am I speaking of 'destiny' here in a merely futuristic sense, as if it were coming after a long time or at 'the end of the days'. It is in the *now* that these destinies are made present as possibilities. For just as the myth of the creation of the world is significant in its existential confrontation of man with his dependence and with the equal dependence of the world, so the talk about the last things is *essentially* a matter of *existential* import, if I may be permitted that odd combination of words.

The possibilities which are presented are blessedness which comes from self-fulfillment and the acceptance by God of that self-fulfillment -- all of this, of course, in relationship with others and not in any presumed

human isolation of self hood -- or the disintegration or failure which comes from self-destruction or rejection by God because there is nothing to be received by God in His consequent nature for the furthering of His purpose of good in the course of the process of creative advance. If ever this double-presentation of possibilities has been portrayed in literature, it is to be found in Dostoevski's *Brothers Karamazov.* In that novel, the great Russian writer shows Ivan, Aloysha, and Dmitri as caught in this dilemma of choice; and they are appraised, in their personal quality, as *blessed* or *damned,* as we might put it, not by the arbitrary *fiat* of a *deus ex machina,* but by the ineluctable working out of what they have made of themselves, what they have become, as this is evaluated in terms of what in an earlier chapter we called whatever ultimately determines and assesses true values in the scheme of things.

Thus for each of us, the exacting and inescapable question, which must be faced and answered, is the question of our total mortal life as we are now living it, a question which arises from our mortality with the responsibility which that entails, which puts itself to us in the form of our measuring up to the possibility of becoming authentically ourselves, and which issues in our realization (not so much in thought as in deeply felt experience as *existing* men) of blessedness, as we know ourselves becoming what we truly are, *or* in destruction or damnation, as we know ourselves both frustrated men and failures in our human fulfillment. Heidegger in his own way has made this point about men -- not about men in the 'mass' or 'lost in the crowd', but about each and every man -- although he has made it in his own way. So also have others, many others. They have seen that each of us is a mortal project, so to say, responsible for our actions and for the character which both reflects them and which they reflect, and hence either 'blessed' or 'damned'.

The Christian faith speaks to men who are in this situation. When it is true to itself it does not gloss over the facts, nor does it sentimentalize them. Above all it does not deny them. On the contrary, it is exactly at this point -- in the context of such facts as we have been outlining and with full awareness of the concern, the uncertainty, and even the despair which can come to every man as he looks at himself with unblinking eyes and in utter honesty -- that the Christian gospel has its special relevance and the faith which it awakens has its special significance. In the sequel we shall say more about this. At the moment it will be useful to speak of the presuppositions with which that faith starts in giving its account of men in such a situation.

I wish to notice three of these presuppositions, although I am aware of the fact that they are not exhaustive. The three which we shall consider are: (a) that man is indeed a sinner but that he is also capable of 'redemption' and hence of 'glory'; (b) that history is not a senseless enterprise -- someone has described it as 'meaningless meandering' -- but a purposeful movement; and (c) that the natural world, in which history and each human life in community with other human lives have their setting, is not evil but good and also shares in 'redemption'.

As to our first presupposition, or (a), the truth of man's sin is surely given in our experience. Only a little observation and a little introspection are sufficient to bring us to see this. The associated traditional doctrines of 'the Fall' and 'Original Sin', with all their historical absurdity and however much we may wish to put in their place some better way of stating what they affirm, tell the truth about man. He is indeed a sinner, fallen from 'grace'; he is not 'able of himself to help himself'. This is *not* a statement of 'total depravity', at least as that idea has been commonly interpreted; what is at issue is the patent reality in every man's experience of something very seriously wrong with him. In the sort of language we have used in these pages, man knows that he should be on the road to love, but he finds himself frustrated on that road; while at the same time he knows very well (once he is honest with himself) that he has so decided, often against his better judgement and in contradiction to his deep desires and purpose, to reject the opportunities to love and to receive love, that he is a failure. Oddly enough, as it may seem, it is precisely those who to others appear most adequately to have realized in their lives (to have made actual) their possibility of love -- it is precisely *those* who are most conscious of themselves as failures.

The truth about man is that while he is indeed created 'in the image of God', he is in a state of spiritual insufficiency so pervasive and so disturbing that he cannot live authentically as a man, much less as a 'son of God'. In the divine intention, he was made for the fulfillment of himself, with others, in free and open relationship to his Creator. In actual fact, he lacks that capacity for communion with God and his own fulfillment -- which are the same thing, seen from different angles -- and in his concrete humanity he is frustrated *and*, what is more important, he is responsibly aware of having made himself, by accumulated decisions, incapable of right relationships with his brethren. In this way he has succeeded in putting himself in the position where he is *privatus boni,* 'deprived of good', and *vulneratus in naturalibus* 'wounded in his

natural human existence'. Of course he is never completely 'deprived' of the good which is God, nor is he destroyed in the 'wounding' of his human existence. But his situation is such that he feels this most intensely; and in consequence he finds himself possessed by a tendency which makes him rest content (save in moments of deep awareness) with the lesser 'goods', with the immediately obtainable goods, a tendency which perverts his best instincts, and which prevents him seeing things 'steadily and whole'.

But this is only one side of the Christian picture of man. As someone has put it, if the first volume of a study of man's existence is about his 'fall' the second volume is about his 'redemption'. Indeed the whole point of Christian faith is here, so far as human experience is concerned. Man can be redeemed; or rather, man has been redeemed. Man's possibilities are tremendous. He was indeed created 'in the image of God'; that image has been damaged but it has not been destroyed. When St. Irenaeus wrote about this he took the text from Genesis: man as created 'in the image and likeness of God'. He distinguished, in bad exegesis, between 'image' and 'likeness'. The Reformers corrected the exegesis but they did not see that despite his exegetical mistake St. Irenaeus had hold of a profound truth. For he had said that the 'image' is not lost, but the 'likeness' is. In traditional terms of Christian theology, what he was asserting was that man still has the capacity, but he lacks the power, to be 'righteous' -- that is, to be authentic. To say that the capacity is lost would be to denigrate God's creation of man as *good.*

Thus when we have admitted all that we must admit concerning man's helplessness in his concrete situation, we must go on to affirm all that we can affirm concerning man's possibility of perfection -- which means, in this context, his potentiality for becoming completely ('perfectly' or in full actualization) the man who loves. Human mortality shows plainly enough that this 'perfection' is not achieved in the span of our mortal life and under our present circumstances; that is true enough. But it remains *as* the possibility; what is more, Christian faith declares that God already accepts those who acknowledge their failure and commit themselves utterly to Him -- so that they are already, as we might put it in mythological language, 'in heaven' or in other words discover themselves to be 'blessed'. Hence no Christian can despair of any man, even of himself; for each man is 'a sinner for whom Christ died', each man is loved by God, each man can direct his life in response to that love made manifest in diverse ways but 're-presented'

(in Schubert Ogden's word) in Jesus Christ. Therefore each man can 'work out his salvation in fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in him both to will and to do his good pleasure'.

A silly optimism about man, such as we knew 'between the wars' and in the 'golden days' of the liberal era, is not Christian. Our contemporary theologians often appear to wish to revive that optimism, perhaps in violent reaction from the other extreme which appeared between the wars in certain of the dialectical or 'neo-orthodox' theologies. But they are lacking in realism. On the other hand, the total pessimism of much traditional Reformed theology, whether Calvinist or Lutheran, and its more recent revival, as well as the perverse denigration of humanity not stated but implied in Catholic penitential theology with its fear of human impulses and its dread of sexuality, is not Christian either. I think that one reason for this, on both sides, is that a look at man, as he is, may give us too much confidence when we are superficial in our looking or too much despair when we only regard man's condition as 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confined' and as failing so terribly in its accomplishment. If by 'heaven' we mean the possibility of blessedness, whatever else we may find it necessary to say on the matter, it might be asserted that if we do not believe in the possibility of heaven, we shall not believe in the possibility of good for man. But more about this will be suggested at a later point.

Our second presupposition, or (b), was that history is a purposeful movement. The origin of that presupposition is deep in the Jewish conviction that 'God is working his purpose out', despite everything that appears to deny or impede that activity. Once again, in reaction from a notion of 'progress' which was a secular substitute for this Christian conviction when Christian faith had become an absurdity to so many, recent theologians have 'given up' this belief to all intents and purposes. Not all of them, but some of them, have transferred 'the divine far-off event' to some realm outside history altogether. They, more than any other thinkers perhaps, have indeed 'emptied out the baby with the bath-water', to return to the image we have used earlier. But it ought to be clear that 'the increasing purpose' is neither automatic progress without relapse or defection, nor 'heaven' *in the sense of a completely non-historical state.* 'The hope of heaven', as I shall argue, need not mean this at all; I should say, *ought not* to mean this. Too often it is taken to do so. But the purposeful movement in history signifies that every moment *counts*, every moment makes its contribution of the divine life, and every moment is related to God who is intimately

concerned with all the variety and content of history. Furthermore, it signifies that something is being accomplished in history, even if it is not always obvious to us.

Mother Julian of Norwich relates that in a 'shewing' she saw the entire creation as 'a little hazel-nut'. She asked how it could continue, since it was so tiny, so insignificant, in relation to the vastness of God. The answer came that it continued 'because God made it, because God loves it, because God keeps it'. In respect to history, then, we may say that God sustains its every event and is the chief (not only) causative principle behind all causation. God loves His world and everything in it; He is *there*, in the world, with cherishing care 'tending it' and bringing it on towards final good, while at the same time He redeems it from triviality and frustration. The movement of history is part of that care. Finally, God keeps His world -- there is His purpose which sustains it and moves through it, towards 'the manifestation of the sons of God'. Whatever may be the remoter intention of God in the awe-inspiring stretch of space and time, it is all of a piece with what He is doing in the historical experience of men -- in a way, that is what the *homo-ousion* of the Nicene Creed affirms. In the historical realm, as in the natural order (if the two may properly be distinguished in this way), God's activity is two-fold: first, to secure from each moment and each event the good which may be actualized there; and second, to work towards such a 'completion' of the process of creative advance that He may say of it, with a joy that includes but transcends all suffering, that it *is* good.

Thus the historical realm is characterized by a purpose which is nothing other than God's incredibly cherishing love, shared with His creatures and moving through their free decisions towards a great end. And when things go wrong, as they do, God is like the sculptor who can turn an artisan's mistaken and distorting chiseling into a lovely figure. His purpose can make history meaningful even when man has done his utmost to destroy its meaning.

The third presupposition, or (c), insists that the natural world is good and that it shares in redemption. Like the second presupposition, this has its origin in the Jewish insistence, found so clearly throughout most of the Old Testament, on a *positive* understanding of the creation. As against all Manichean or dualistic philosophies, as also against all those religions which offer escape from the world into an ethereal realm of pure spirit, Christianity has denied that the world of *things* is evil. It is good, because God created it; it is good, because He loves it; it is good,

because He is in it and works through it -- to repeat Mother Julian's 'shewing'. Nature is an instrument for the divine purpose, not something alien to that purpose and hence to be rejected or denied.

On this matter the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church has much to teach the rest of us. For that theology, the whole cosmos is to be redeemed'; everything in it, from the very dirt under our feet to the loveliest configurations and harmonies, has its place in that redemption. There is no reason to fear or hate 'dirt', to sniff at 'matter' or material things. These may be misused and they can be abused; but in themselves 'dirt' and 'matter' and the whole world of nature, to which we as men in our history are organic, are 'good stuff' and must not be despised nor rejected.

It is interesting in this connection to compare the two greatest English poets of our time. T. S. Eliot seems never to have overcome his dislike of the material world -- he was not like Aldous Huxley, who dismissed it all as illusory, but he hardly appears to have *included* it in his great vision. On the other hand, W. H. Auden, in his *Christmas Oratorio*, writes superbly and lovingly of the possibilities of the natural world and speaks tenderly of man as *there*. The conclusion of that work, with its use of a Whiteheadian theme, is magnificent witness to what I am urging here. Auden writes: 'At your marriage/All its occasions shall dance for joy.' It is the marriage of man with God, with his fellowmen, and with the world itself that he has in mind.

We cannot picture or describe or even imagine the way in which the whole creation serves as 'the body of God'. But to be afraid of that phrase is to be afraid of the deepest intention in what Christian faith has to say about creation and about redemption. The cosmos, as God receives it and uses it, is *what the world means to God*, in terms of what has been done in it and with it, in terms too of the response made in and by the cosmos. And although what I have been urging is based upon Christian faith, as I anyway understand it, and is immediately related to human experience (for it is from that experience, in its context, that anything we say must begin), the corollary is that the cosmos has value *in itself*, not just as a stage of man's existence and for man's redemptive possibility. Such a cosmic setting for, involvement in, and relationship to what we know by faith about ourselves gives the Christian faith a sweep and range that saves it from the charge of parochialism or mere anthropocentrism. As I have said in the second chapter, this is one of the ways in which a process conceptuality seems to me to be of enormous

use in Christian thinking.

I hope that this long discussion of presuppositions has not seemed an unnecessary intrusion into the subject of this book. I do not think it is an intrusion, since it has provided for us some ground on which to stand as we return to the particular topic, heaven and hell, with which we are immediately concerned.

Some years ago a novel appeared with the title *All This and Heaven Too.* I have completely forgotten the novel but the title has stuck in my mind. When one hears a discussion of Christian faith as promising abundant life, giving meaning to present-day existence, and substituting for broken personality the authenticity of an integrated and forgiven, accepted and accepting personality, one thinks of that title. Can it be, one wonders, that the 'heaven too' has significance for us today? I think that it does have such significance. And perhaps I can get at what I mean by recalling a popular saying of some years ago. When young people who wished to convey the idea that something was superlatively good, splendid, and *real* ('That's *for real'*, they also said -- and it is a significant phrase), they would often use these words: 'It's out of this world'.

Now that *might* have meant that this good, splendid, and real experience or thing was quite literally 'out of' the concrete world and in a completely spiritual realm which made that world irrelevant and ridiculous. But such was not the intention with which the phrase was used by young people. What they intended by it was something like this: Here is an experience in which we have found a wonder and glory, a beauty and splendor, such that it seems to be *more than,* although most certainly not opposed to and in flight from, the day-by-day experiences which are so familiar. I do not wish to exaggerate, but it might be suggested that in the famous line, 'bright shoots of everlastingness', something of the same sort is being said. There is a suffusion of ordinary experience with a glory that is very much present, very much here and now, yet unexhausted by the here and now and in a strange fashion evocative of a certain reverence. I am convinced that this 'more' in man's mortal existence is known to people of every type and under every condition, although they do not quite know how to express it. At any rate, it is plainly the case that they do not experience it *or* express it, for the most part, in specifically 'religious' terms.

It is easy enough to interpret what I have been describing in 'other-

worldly' fashion. It is easy to speak of it as if it had to do with 'pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die'. A good deal of Christianity has been vitiated by this very unbiblical way of interpreting human life; as one of the recent popes said, 'true life' or 'real life' is not here but 'beyond death'. I am paraphrasing here some words of Pope Leo XIII in his very this-worldly encyclical about social justice, *De Rerum Novarum; in* his writing about that demand and necessity for social justice he could not emancipate himself from this false 'otherworldliness'. Nor is he alone in this, for it has been very much a part of traditional Christianity as commonly taught, preached, and understood. Yet it constitutes what Professor Bethune-Baker once described as the greatest 'apostasy' in Christian thought, for it made it possible to think that we could put off to 'another world' what it was our duty to do in *this* one. But if it is easy to fall into that sort of escapist 'other-worldliness', it is also easy to exhaust the significance of the experience to which I refer by entirely 'humanizing' or 'mundanizing' (if I may coin the word) what it delivers to us. Above all, it is possible to exhaust what the gospel has to say by talking about and working for the immediacies, assuming that there is in that gospel nothing more than an imperative for better relations among men, classes, races, and nations, with the building in the not too distant future of a society in which opportunity of fulfillment will be guaranteed to everybody.

I do not wish for a moment to decry the stress on the 'secular' import of the gospel nor to seem ungrateful for all that men like Harvey Cox and Gibson Winter, to name but two, have been teaching us. Nor do I wish to reject the truth of Bonhoeffer's insight about the gospel being concerned with *life*, right here and right now, rather than with some 'future life' which is promised to those who are 'saved'. To put it vulgarly, I am *all for* this recognition of the 'secular' import of the gospel in its impact on a society that is becoming more and more secularized'. And I agree that this relative autonomy of the 'secular' is a consequence of the whole development of the Jewish-Christian understanding of God and of history and of the world. At the same time, I believe that precisely *in* the 'secular' as we live it in a 'secularized' society, there is something 'heavenly' -- if I may phrase it so. But I must explain what I am trying to say, lest I be completely misunderstood and my meaning misinterpreted. Perhaps I can best do this by commenting on a passage from one of St. Augustine's sermons (Sermon 256, section 3). He used these words:

'O the happy alleluias there . . . There, praise to God; and here, praise to

God. But here, by those who are filled with anxious care; there, by those who are freed from care. Here, by those whose lot is to die; there, by those who live eternally. Here, on the way; there, in our fatherland. Now, therefore, my brethren, let us sing -- not for our delight as we rest, but to cheer us on in our labor. As wayfarers are accustomed to sing, so let us sing and let us keep on marching. For if you are going forward, you are *indeed* marching; and to go on marching is a good thing, if we go on in true faith and in right living. So, brethren, sing, and march on.'

That is a beautiful passage, as we shall all agree. But what is wrong with it? I should say that what is wrong with it is that it seems to urge that the 'there' is *after* this existence and *only so.* But we need not to read it in just that way, although doubtless that was the way St. Augustine intended it. We can just as well read it as speaking of the double nature of human experience as men exist in 'true faith' and as they seek after 'right living'. In the very *here* of our existence there may be the *there* of blessedness; and if perhaps something is added about what happens *after* that, it is no contradiction of what happens now, *here*, in this *present* moment of our Christian belonging. There is more in man and in man's experience, there is more in history, and there is more in the natural order than meets the eye. There is 'the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain', as it is being 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God'. *All* things, as St. Paul says in another place, are somehow of God, for God, to God, 'whether they be things in earth or things in heaven'; and the 'heaven' need not be seen as a 'beyond' which is not also in the world in its travail, moving as it is in creative advance under and in God who is love.

Exegetes may say that St. Paul did not 'mean' what I have been saying, any more than St. Augustine meant what I have said is a possible way of using his words. Very well, I admit this. But just here I recall to you what I have urged earlier about the need for 'in-mythologizing', in the attempt to make clear to ourselves, what the case actually is as we can see it, if men like that, in their time, under their conditions, with their patterns of thought, spoke as they did. At the very least, I should claim, what I have been saying is a *possible* interpretation, for ourselves, of what they were driving at in their own way and in their own terms. So far as I can see, this is the only way in which we can be delivered from a literalism of the text which so often prevents us grasping what might be styled 'the deep intentionality' which is there. What is at stake, in my own conviction, is the seeing that it is not so much *beyond,* as it is *in*

and through, 'the flaming ramparts of space and time' that redemption, re-integration, and the fulfillment of the divine purpose of love takes place. It is in *this* way that I should wish to understand the point of that eschatological motif which is so much a part of the biblical picture.

Christian faith affirms that man's action and character in this world have a determining quality in respect to himself, history, the world, and God -- or so I am convinced. This confronts us again with those two 'destinies', those two 'ultimate possibilities', for man.

The first possibility which we shall consider is that he shall so terribly and persistently fail, in his ignorance and impotence and in his own decisions, that he must suffer a continuing rejection. That is hell; by definition, it is the absence of God. Hell is always a real and live possibility, although I shall wish to qualify this later and to say something on behalf of 'universalism'. None of the Church's theologies, however it may have been with this or that particular Christian writer, has consigned any single person to that fate. But the possibility of willful alienation from God, and persistence in that alienation by free decision, is there. And since God cannot, by His own nature, coerce any man, but must win that man by His love, there is always the possibility that the offer of acceptance may be declined. Notice that I have said, throughout, 'the *possibility*'.

The other possibility is enjoyment of God, in which God accepts and receives into Himself the man who, in his ignorance and impotence and by his free decisions, has yet been possessed of the kind of 'becoming' which makes him thus acceptable and able to be received by God. Everything that was said in the last chapter is relevant here, in respect to these two possibilities or possible destinies. We are not talking about some state 'after this life'; we are talking about the negative and positive prehensions by God of what is going on *in* this existence. That granted, the traditional scheme was *right* in speaking of 'heaven' as it did, with the 'beatific vision' and the bliss or happiness which is granted through that vision. Furthermore, popular hymnody was *right,* however unfortunate its images, in picturing this in terms of full satisfaction; it took the *best* moments of contemporary experience and used them in an eminent fashion to describe what this would mean. Homely fields in *Green Pastures,* the 'heavenly city', 'being with those I love', 'gardens and stately walks' in the Elizabethan lyric -- all these were symbolic and suggestive of fulfillment. 'When I wake up after his likeness, I shall be satisfied', says the Psalmist. Such pictures need be misleading only if

they are taken to be purely futuristic in reference, as if what was meant by 'heaven' was only compensation for the pains of earth. But we have already rejected any such way of understanding the deepest intention here.

The assertion of hell and heaven in the out-worn scheme of the last things confronted men with these two destinies or possibilities. But what about that other, found in Orthodox and Catholic theologies -- 'the intermediate state'? I believe that this too says something important and meaningful. I should put it in this fashion. *If* any occasion or 'entity' is accepted by God, for His own enrichment and for His use in the development of further good in the process, it is accepted with and in its obvious imperfections and its partial but real failures. It requires 'purification'; which is to say, it requires the negation of those elements or aspects or factors which are *not* acceptable and which would not enrich God nor provide material for His employment in the creative advance towards further and fuller good. To say it figuratively, those who might be prehended in an entirely negative way are those who have in them *nothing* -- but are there any such? -- which is enriching and useful. Those who are acceptable, precisely because there *is* a good which is enriching and useful, are not however *perfectly* 'good', as they themselves would willingly and honestly admit in the light of the appraisal with which our last chapter was concerned. Yet they can be accepted and received, they can be enriching for God Himself, and they can be employed in His purpose -- but only if and when, in a phrase of Rupert Brooke's (in a different context but not entirely unrelated), 'all evil' is 'done away'. That 'evil' is *negatively* prehended; but the occasion as it is constituted, because it has such 'good' in it, is *positively* prehended. Nor do I think that such an interpretation is fanciful; indeed, I believe that it is precisely in this manner that the creative advance does go on, under God and with God participant in it, with God Himself 'in process' (if I may again use here the title of a book of my own which sought to say this in a relatively popular manner).

The very natural and very human desire to 'pray for the departed' might also be fitted into this pattern. Such prayers need to be cleansed from the medieval superstitions about them, to be sure. But if they are genuinely 'remembrance before God' of those whom we have loved, they are by way of adding our strong desire for such use of accomplished good as may be possible by the great cosmic Desire-for-Good which is God Himself, for such reception to God's enrichment,

and for the 'communion' of those who have prayed with that same God, so that they too may have their share in that movement of love which is what God is up to in His world.

Finally, we must speak of the imagery of the 'resurrection' and of the 'consummation'. This rich imagery, found especially in I Corinthians 15, cannot readily be transposed into the language of prose, yet if it is taken literally it seems to most of us impossible and absurd. Traditional theologians attempted to put what the images portrayed into a system of concepts that hardly fit together and that for us today are as absurd as the literal pictorial presentation. Yet *something* is being said here, something which is integral to the Christian faith.

I suggest that the important thing that is being said is that the love which God manifested in the life, death, and victory of Jesus Christ is indefeasible. What is even more important, in the way in which the picture is presented to us, is that this love is indeed victorious -- the story of Christ, we may recall White-head's saying, is told 'with the authority of supreme victory'. Love, 'the love of God which was in Christ Jesus our Lord', *reigns* -- *but* reigns as love can only reign, not in the grandeur of some oriental Sultan's court nor with the coercive omnipotence of a dictator, nor as a 'ruthless moralist' who imposes his righteous will, but in the sheer fact of loving faithfully and unceasingly, through all anguish that His creatures know and that He shares. The 'joy of heaven' incorporates and transmutes but it does not deny that anguish.

Second, I suggest that the talk about 'resurrection of the body' is an assertion that the totality of the material world and of human history, as well as of every man in that history who, with his brethren, has achieved good in his existence in the world, is usable by God who through it has been enriched in His own experience without changing in His supremely worshipful deity -- the God unsurpassable by anything not Himself, but open to enrichment in being what He is and in terms of what He does.

Thirdly, I suggest that the 'body' which is 'raised' is *Christ's* body. I do not mean here the chemicals, the biology, of the flesh which walked in Palestine two thousand years ago. I *do* mean the wholeness of that which Christ was, taken into, received by, enriching to, and usable for, 'the glory of God the Father'. Those who have shared in the life of Christ as the diffusion of His love in the world are by that very fact

'members incorporate in his mystical body', as the Prayer Book phrases it. Which is to say, they live in *his* love and they are a part of *his* life. The resurrection is for them a sharing in Christ's being taken into, received by, enriching to, and usable for God the Father. Thus the resurrection is not something that will take place in the distant future, when the 'scroll' is opened and a grand assize held. It is a present reality in the faith of the Christian. The 'Christian hope', grounded in the Christian faith, is a present experience; indeed, that hope, like the love which is participant in Christ, *is* in that faith. The living in Christ -- by which I mean, as I have indicated, living 'in love' as a human possibility which has been 're-presented' for us in the Man Jesus -- as Christ lives in those who respond and hence know what love is: this *is*, at this very moment, 'our hope of glory'.

What this comes to in practical experience needs to be said, as we close this chapter. It means courageous trust in the God who 'raised Jesus from the dead' and has given us confidence and hope. It means profound concern for and dedicated action in the world, yet with a certain 'detachment' which gives us perspective on what we undertake. It means the adoration of God as our 'refuge and strength', with the implementation of that adoration in daily experience, so that the faithful man becomes 'an other Christ' in this mortal existence, a personal channel through whom the 'Love that moves the sun and the other stars' is an almost tangible reality in the affairs of life. It means a life which, in New Testament idiom, is 'in the heavenly places' even while it is lived here; for belief, worship, and action are seen as worthwhile, since they can never ultimately be frustrated or useless -- God receives them, enjoys them, employs them, to 'his greater glory', which is nothing other than His continuing loving action in the advance of the creative process towards the good. He is indeed the supreme affect, as well as the giver of all initiating aims.

16

return to religion-online

The 'Last Things' in a Process Perspective by Norman Pittenger

Dr. Pittenger, philosopher and theologian, was a senior member of King's College, Cambridge for many years, then Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, before retiring in 1966. Published by London: Epworth Press, 1970, This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

Chapter 6: Question and Hope

At several points in these chapters I have spoken of God as 'supreme affect'. This term I have borrowed from Schubert Ogden, who uses it in his fine book *The Reality of God*, a book to which I acknowledge my debt in the preparation of these chapters. At the same time I acknowledge him as the author of this phrase. In Ogden's book there is a chapter called 'The Promise of Faith' and I should like to commend it to you, for it seems to me that with a rather different approach, yet much more adequately, Ogden says in it much that I have been trying to suggest in what I have been putting before you.

Ogden's essay concludes with an honest statement that he does not, at the time of writing, see that such a portrayal of 'the promise of faith' as he has drawn -- and I remind you that since he and I have said much the same thing, this would be true of my own presentation -- necessarily entails what he calls 'subjective immortality', the persistence beyond death of the conscious self. Yet the portrayal still holds good, he claims; and he goes on to say that it is precisely because he is trying to think and write as a responsible Christian theologian that he feels obliged to affirm that such personal persistence is not in and of itself, by necessity, utterly integral to Christian faith. And I agree with him.

But the very reality of 'the promise of faith' raises the question of such personal persistence beyond death -- raises it *as a question* which should be discussed. And it does not exclude the possibility that such persistence, in some mode, may be a legitimate consequence of the

indispensable 'promise', even if it is not absolutely entailed by it. Interestingly enough, the fact that in so many prayers used in the Christian fellowship and in so many books dealing with Christian theology, this is spoken of *as* 'the Christian hope', or 'a reasonable, religious hope' (in one familiar prayer), may have its lesson teach us. At least it warns us against the wrong kind confidence on the matter, and it prevents us from succumbing too easily to that odd variety of self-centeredness, in the worst sense, which demands 'immortality' because it is determined to play 'dog in the manger' in God's universe.

In this chapter I plan to discuss the *question* and to say something about the 'hope', although I know that I cannot provide an adequate answer to the former and I am in no position to speak with certainty about the latter.

In his recent study of process theology, Peter Hamilton has noted that he has found among the young people with whom he has worked as a chaplain and teacher of divinity a willingness to consider very seriously the reality of God but a feeling that talk about 'personal immortality' makes no sense. That book, *The Living God and Modern World,* is the most important British study of process theology; and it should be read. Furthermore, Mr. Hamilton's remarks on this particular subject should be considered with care, for he represents, I think, in his comment about his own students what is also a prevalent attitude in other circles as well. I mention this for what it is worth, realizing quite well that what people think is no indication of what is true; realizing also that Christian faith is not to be 'cut' to the measure of popular opinion. None the less, if it should turn out that one *can* be a Christian without holding firmly to personal persistence beyond death, this is significant; and since, as I have just been saying, I think that such is indeed the case, I believe that nobody ought to *require* acceptance of some variety of personal persistence as a pre-requisite for a welcome into the Christian community which is grounded on that faith in God in Jesus Christ which the community exists to make available to men and women in every age.

But this may be beside the point. Let us proceed to the question and to the possible 'hope' and see what may be said about them.

First of all I should like to set side by side a negative and a positive consideration, each of them relevant to our question. The negative consideration has to do with that kind of selfishness to which I have

already alluded. The positive one has to do with the intrinsic value of personal human existence.

I think that there can be little doubt that a good deal that is said in support of personal persistence after death is based upon a strong individualistic stress on the self. One can have no sympathy with the variety of humility which turns itself into a doormat and invites others to walk on one, in a manner which becomes a strange sort of self-pity masking as humility. Nobody is asked to be Uriah Heep! But it is also possible to be assertive about the self in a less obvious and equally unpleasant fashion. *I* am what matters; *my* destiny is the important thing; if God does not preserve *me,* the universe is a mess and nothing is worth while. 'Glory for me', the old gospel-hymn is supposed to have sung -- but the very words show that the hymn is not about *the gospel,* for the gospel speaks of 'Glory to God', in whose 'glory' all good is contained.

There *is* a concern about the self which is healthy and, as a matter of fact and observation, essential to each of us; but there is also a concern about the self which is vicious and unlovely -- and also, I should say, destructive of the very thing it seeks to assert. In the Christian tradition, *that* sort of concern about the self, 'the glory for me' variety, serves as part of the picture of hell. I introduce here, both for a little 'light relief' and because it makes my point so accurately, a poem by Rolfe Humphries which he entitled *Hell.* It may be found in his *Forbid Thy Ravens,* published some years ago by Scribners (New York):

> *Hell Is A Place Of Solitude Enforced*
> *On The Great Host, Cut Off By Sorrow, Going*
> *Under A Wind Intolerably Cold,*
> *A wind from no direction, always blowing.*
> *Hell Is A Place Of Everlasting Noise,*
> *Where Voices, Plaintive And Obnoxious Cry*
> *Over And Over Again Their Favourite Word*
> *In constant iteration: I, I, I.*
> *Hell Is A Place Where Mirrors Are Black Water,*
> *And Rivers Salt, And Atmosphere Like Lead,*
> *Where Suffering Is All The Rage And Fashion,*
> *And everything is dead except the dead.*
> *Hell Is All Right To Visit, If We Have To,*
> *And Hard Enough To Miss, In Any Case;*
> *But, I Insist, I Would Not Like To Live There,*
> *Not if you gave me all the God-damned place.*

It is the 'I, I, I' that I find significant in that poem. We all 'visit' hell, as Humphries has it, from time to time; it is indeed 'hard enough to miss', as the possible destiny to which I have referred. But the horror of it, the death in it, and the 'solitude' known there, are all summed up in those words 'in constant iteration: I, I, I'. That is why hell is a 'God-damned place'. William Morris was right in calling fellowship heaven, and lack of fellowship hell. Sometimes I incline to think that those who selfishly seek for personal persistence, for their own sake, and in the demand that they shall not 'lose themselves' in the 'love and service of God', are really asking for hell -- and if that is what they are asking for, the *kind* of person who does ask in this way has already obtained what he sought. He is already in hell.

The positive consideration which I should set alongside this negative one has to do with what I have styled the intrinsic value of personal human existence. This is not a matter of concern for myself; it is basically a concern for the value known and the love seen in others. John Baillie has written eloquently about this in his *And the Life Everlasting,* where he speaks movingly of the incredibility to him of the thought that this or that friend, whose love has been shown towards him, shall not be accepted as being indeed a lover, with a worth that nothing can destroy. It is for his friend, for the one he loves, that Baillie asks personal persistence beyond death, not for his own self such as it is.

However we phrase this, there is a point here. And I think that within the systematic statement of process theology, a place has to be made for that profound feeling. If, as we shall be arguing in a moment, we may be sure of 'objective immortality', the taking into God's life of every good that has been achieved in the creative process; and if, as that understanding of the world order implies, *one* of the goods is the agency by which these given goods have been achieved, including at this point the human agent as a peculiarly significant focus -- may it not be the case that not only the good which has been achieved but the agent who has achieved it (himself good, despite defect and the instances of his failure in this mortal existence) will be preserved beyond the 'perishing of occasions'? If value is never lost, as Whitehead claimed in his Ingersoll lecture on *Immortality;* and if value is always associated, in the process, with fact -- may it not be that exactly in receiving all that has been done which is valuable, the doer of the valuable is also to be received? May not something like the 'communion of saints', in the divine life and usable by the divine agency, be a possibility? After all, 'personality *is* in relationships.

I put these two considerations side by side, for what they are worth. At least they help us to see what the *question* is asking. Now I wish to make three statements which seem to me to be plainly true, either from a serious acceptance of the conceptuality which I have been assuming or from the deliverances of the Christian faith itself. These will help us to get the question in even more accurate focus.

My first statement is simply a repetition of what I have just said about 'objective immortality'. That each and every occasion or occurrence, each 'entity', makes its contribution, negatively or positively, to the creative advance is clear enough. The *way* in which this is done is by the good which has been accomplished being taken into God's 'consequent nature' -- God as concretely he is, not abstracted from the world but in unfailing relationship with it. Everything that can thus be received *is* received; we might say that God is a good husband-man who wastes nothing. Anything not received, anything that is negatively prehended, is utterly use-*less;* it is 'cast as rubbish to the void', in Tennyson's words, because it can make no contribution to the abiding good and its implementation in the creative advance.

Is there anything that is like that? Obviously we do not know. Equally obviously the horror of evil, in all its forms, is not to be denied. But again with equal obviousness, God's capacity to transmute and transform what is most certainly evil into an opportunity for good cannot be denied by any Christian who has contemplated what we say God did with Calvary. Love such as God is, demonstrated in what God does in *that* instance, is able to 'work wonders' with the very worst of events and (may we not believe this?) with the very worst that men can do and even, I dare to say, with the very worst that men can be. 'Nothing is lost that can be saved' -- is there anything or anybody who *cannot* be saved? Not against its or his free decision, that is to say; for in that case it would be coercion and hence literally nothing worth doing would be accomplished. But love can solicit, invite, lure, entice, in so many different ways and through so many different channels, 'secular' and 'religious', that one need not be hopeless about the matter. I have said that the only *really* strong thing is love; and I now add that the divine persuasion, working tenderly yet indefatigably, may very well be able, in the long run, to win free consent. That free consent would be to *God*, yes; it would also be the realization or actualization or fulfillment of creaturely potentiality.

My second statement has also been intimated at an earlier point. The 'resurrection of the body of Christ', in the sense in which I have presented it, is an assurance of faith. I do not need to develop this further, since I have already discussed it at some length.

And my third statement is simply a reference to what I have borrowed from Schubert Ogden, about God as 'supreme affect'. To him, into him, all good is a contribution. He knows, as such affect, the sting of anguish; he also knows the reality of joy. He takes them all, accepts them all, uses them all, in so far as there is any usability about them. And he does this *now*, not in some remote future. Mortal men strive and struggle, labor to do their best (and fail), move in the direction of fulfillment through the decisions they make. They die . . . 'and with God be the rest', as Browning puts it. To be able to say that, in complete confidence, *is* Christian faith; and 'the promise of faith' is the assurance that this *is so.* Thus the theocentrism so basic to the biblical witness is reaffirmed. As from God all initiating aims were derived, so to God all fulfillment must go as its 'final rest'.

Having made those three statements, I must confess that for me personally this is *enough.* But I have left it still as a 'question', not as a complete answer -- the question, namely, whether or not there can be and is *personal (viz.*, conscious) persistence after the death which is the terminus of our mortal pilgrimage. Yet there is what I have called 'the hope'. I must say something about it.

John Baillie, in the book to which I have referred, places the grounds for this 'hope' in two Christian convictions. The first is that God is good -- that He is 'pure unbounded love'. The second is the resurrection of Christ. For him it is inconceivable that a genuinely good and loving God would permit the annihilation of those persons whom He has created, whom He has so lovingly sustained, and upon whom He has showered such superabundant grace. And it is inconceivable to him that the communion with the 'risen Lord', which the fact of resurrection has made possible, should ever be brought to an end -- a communion like that, in which love is shared so richly, has about it the quality of everlastingness, even (as Baillie would doubtless say) of eternity. Nothing, certainly not the moment of mortal death, can destroy it.

I believe that Baillie has singled out the two *big* matters, thus reducing any other 'arguments' to triviality. In effect, he says that if God does permit the annihilation of human personality, in its self-conscious

awareness as recipient of God's love, there is something oddly selfish about God Himself. Now I should wish to say that it seems to me that this is a very strong point. If God is truly love, and if love is relationship, and if relationship means sharing, then it would be more like God as He relates Himself to the Creative process to wish to 'share' with others that which is good, that which is being done towards good, and that which leads to enjoyment in good. Whether this means also something like the 'communion of saints', where the divine love is indeed 'in widest commonalty shared', I do not know. But I may be permitted to *hope* that it does.

As to the resurrection of Christ, I have already spoken about what this means, at least so far as I can understand its meaning. It is life 'in Christ', triumphantly victorious over everything evil -- which is to say that it is life 'in love', of a type that does indeed have about it the quality of everlastingness and even, maybe, of eternity, although I dislike that word because of its suggestion that temporality is a lesser good or perhaps an evil. If one should seem to be thinking only of those who have encountered' the historical Jesus, then there would be a kind of unlovely and unlovelike selectivity which would make such talk seem a little absurd. But if one is thinking of life 'in love' as an authentic possibility for every man, wherever and whenever he has happened to live out his mortal existence, then I must say that I both understand and find strength in the argument.

As so often, a human analogy helps; and although some contemporary theologians have been chary of using such analogies, one can be encouraged by the dominical employment of them and continue to find them useful. When I think of the love that I know so well between a particular person and myself -- and I am in fact thinking of one particular person with whom I am so bound in love that it remains for me a source of wonder and joy -- I am aware, in a fashion that words cannot adequately express, that there is something so *enduringly* real in our mutuality in giving and receiving, in our commitment one to the other, and in our hopefulness one about the other, that the thought of its having a terminus cannot enter my mind. 'This thing is bigger than either of us or than both of us', lovers often say in one form of words or another. The *thing* that is 'bigger' in such love is the activity of God Himself, I should dare to affirm. Yes, but the two lovers *share* in that; and by their sharing, they seem also -- at least to themselves, each for the other -- to share in the sort of endurance through all vicissitude which is characteristic of God who is never-failing love.

I do not know whether this also means conscious and personal persistence beyond the death of either partner or of both of them. But I may be permitted to *hope* that it does. And quite seriously I must add, 'with God be the rest'. Which, by the way, is exactly what Browning was prepared to say for himself and for his Elizabeth.

We have seen the question, in all its depth. And we have heard about the 'hope', with its poignancy and longing desire. It is almost time to end, but I wish to say one or two things more as I bring these chapters to a close. Since I have just used the word 'desire', I want to speak of it for a moment -- or rather, to speak of what it is pointing towards. Then I want to return to that grand 'shewing' of Mother Julian of Norwich which I quoted earlier.

Desire . . . how much that word has been abused and how much derided! Yet it points towards something that might almost be taken as a definition of what it really means to be a man, even of what it means to speak about God. To say this may seem ridiculous; to many it will seem the sheerest sentimentality. But I wonder if it is either ridiculous or sentimental. In fact I do not really wonder; I flatly deny both charges.

For consider what desire is, as we know it in ourselves, in all our own desiring'. Often desire is used to signify sexual impulses, which are thought to be evil or at the best not very worthy. I have already indicated my rejection of such a view and my conviction that all love, so far as we know it humanly, has a physiological sexual aspect. The only question, in respect to sexual desire, is how it should best be expressed, both for the fulfillment of each person and for the best shared life of the community. Thus sexual desire is a good enough place to start when we think of what desire comes to, in our experience. To say briefly what I believe that to be, let me put it this way: desire is the yearning, affective, deeply-felt urge for fulfillment. It is how love works, when it is not a chilly matter of 'rational approval' or a Kantian affair of willing the good -- both of which, in my judgement, are so absurdly inadequate that they need no further comment.

If this be what desire in man comes to, what about desire in God? Here I wish to contradict the thesis of Anders Nygren's great work *Agape and Eros.* As you will recall, Nygren insists that in God there is no *eros* (the Greek word, by the way, for what I have been calling 'desire', which significantly also in Greek means 'love'); in God there is only *agape,*

which Nygren interprets to mean the love which gives without regard either to the value of the recipient or the urgency on the part of the giver to receive a returning love. I believe that this notion is biblically unsound, in view of much that is said about bride-and-bridegroom, husband-and-wife, lover-and-beloved as symbolic of God's relation to the world. I know that it is psychologically untrue; I am sure that it is existentially nonsensical. Theologically, it is disastrous. God *is* love; and in His loving He both gives and receives. He shares; He opens up and delights in mutuality. Unless this be the case, the Christian faith is sheer absurdity and should be rejected out-of-hand, for the God about whom it is talking cannot be the God Nygren presents. In fact, as somebody has pointed out, Nygren's God of sheer *agape,* in the meaning he gives that word, is a moral reflection of the untouched, unmoved, self-sufficient deity as *ens realissimum* -- note the neuter gender -- which Christian theologians have tried to join with the living, loving, caring God of the Hebrew-Christian scriptures -- and have failed.

God as *desire,* or as I have put it earlier as the great Desire-for-good, is the yearning God, seeking to fulfil others in relationship with them, and by that very token seeking their returning love, which because it is given to Him freely is also His own fulfillment, His own enrichment. A view of God as one who can receive nothing because He already has or is everything is a pagan conception; it is an idol which no Christian should pretend to worship. Nor does he, since worship can be given only to the lovable, the perfectly lovable. Cringing fear is appropriate in the presence of such an 'absolute' as sometimes has been named God and only humiliating cringing is appropriate in the presence of a deity conceived after the analogy of the worst type of man we know -- namely, the one who is so self-contained and unrelated that he wants and needs and welcomes nothing, since he is entirely self-sufficient. Aristotle's so-called 'magnanimous man', in the *Nichomachean Ethics* seems to me a ghastly model for God, with that man's 'remarkable condescension' but with his incapacity genuinely to *share.*

Furthermore, as G. K. Chesterton once acutely remarked, the Buddhist image of Gautama is a squatting man, with eyes closed, absorbed in inner thought, and possessed of the kind of peace which is had through rejecting all desire. On the other hand, the Christian symbol is a Man hanging on a Cross, with His eyes wide open, embracing in passionate yearning the whole of the world. So George Tyrrell wrote. The contrast is significant. Certainly the one God is at work in Buddhism, but it must

be *in spite of* that image of Gautama. Yet the Buddha was right in saying that desire is the cause of the world's suffering. It is, because to love with desire *is* to suffer. He forgot to say that it is also the cause of the world's joy, since to love with desire is the only way to abiding happiness, in the true meaning of that much mis-used word. God both suffers and rejoices -- and the picture of Him as experiencing both is the unique thing about the Christian affirmation of Him.

Now I must say something more about that quotation from Mother Julian: that the world continues because 'God made it, God loves it, God keeps it.' It seems to me that we have here the basic grasp of 'how things go' which enabled Mother Julian also to see that 'all shall be well, all shall be well, all manner of things shall be well'. The two together give us the ground for the ultimate optimism which in Christian faith conquers all provisional pessimism. She knew that 'the world is in God's hands', as the negro spiritual says -- God made it, God loves it, God keeps it. Everything is safe that is worth saving. So no Christian need fear. Hence, as I have quoted Kirsopp Lake as saying, faith is not 'belief in spite of evidence', although the evidence from time to time may be very powerful and disturbing to us; it is 'life in scorn of consequence' and it is an adventure and a risk and a challenge.

Faith is an invitation to become lovers. That is what it works out as, in practical experience, when its significance is rightly apprehended. It points to God as cosmic love and cosmic lover, who gives to everything its beginning by providing its 'initial aim'. It points to God as active lover as it sees Him supremely active in the Man Jesus and in all who participate in His Spirit. It points to God as the lover who not only gives but receives and cherishes what He receives, as it sees Him to be 'the supreme affect', in whom all good finds its home. It points to Him as love faithfully and everlastingly at work, as it recognizes that He will use whatever good He receives, along with His own urgent desire for good, in furthering the expression of love in the creative advance which is the world.

The traditional scheme of the last things will no longer serve us, I have said; yet that scheme did confront men with the Christian faith and it did make them face 'reality' with honesty and humility. The purpose of this book has been to suggest ways in which what that traditional scheme did for our ancestors may still be vital for us today. That is all I tried to do; and I hope that with all their inadequacies and imperfections, these chapters have brought to your attention some, but not of course all, of

those consequences of the faith which we share.

Let the conclusion be, not mine, but Robert Browning's, from *A Death in the Desert:*

> *For Life*
> *With All It Yields Of Joy And Woe*
> *And Hope And Fear. . .*
> *Is Just Our Chance O' The Prize Of Learning Love,*
> *How love might be, hath been indeed, and is.*

0

return to religion-online

The 'Last Things' in a Process Perspective by Norman Pittenger

Dr. Pittenger, philosopher and theologian, was a senior member of King's College, Cambridge for many years, then Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, before retiring in 1966. Published by London: Epworth Press, 1970, This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

Chapter 7: The Centrality of Love

Almost a quarter of a century ago Professor Dorothy Emmet wrote these words in her *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking:* 'In the great positive religions, and pre-eminently in Christianity, the life of the founder is directly relevant. The religion does not simply grow from developing the content of the founder's teaching; the life of the founder is held to be one of the crucial moments, perhaps the crucial moment, of history, in which some new relation to the transcendent has been established. The historic religion seeks continually to re-affirm and express this relation; in rite, celebration, meditation, way of life; and its theology makes it the key to an interpretation of the world' (*op. cit.* pp. 155-56).

I believe that what Miss Emmet said is of enormous importance; and I wish to apply her words to the contemporary theological situation, especially in regard to the various 'radical' movements of our day.

The first point is that in all significant groups working towards the re-conception of Christianity today, Jesus Christ is taken to be 'directly relevant'. If there is any one fact universally present in today's Christian thinking, in all quarters, that fact is its 'christo-centric' character. All too often, it seems to me, the christo-centrism is exaggerated, so that Jesus stands in complete isolation from everything else; He is often regarded as being, not the central or definitive fact, but the *only* one which needs to be considered. This is a great mistake, for it removes Him effectively from His context, de-historicizes Him, and hence

reduces (perhaps even negates) that 'direct relevance' to which Professor Emmet refers. None the less, Jesus *is* taken with utmost seriousness.

Furthermore, thanks to the work of a hundred years of biblical study, we no longer regard Christianity as simply 'developing the content of the founder's teaching.' It is His *life* -- the whole reality of what nowadays it is fashionable to call the 'Christ-event' -- which is seen to be 'crucial'. So we are delivered from the 'imitation of Jesus' type of theology and from that kind of reductionist thinking which interpreted Christianity as 'following a great prophet' and nothing more.

All this is on the positive side. But I think that a considerable number of 'radical theologians' are not prepared to go along with Miss Emmet when she says (rightly, I am convinced) that the 'life of the founder', in this instance Jesus, must in authentic Christianity be seen as both establishing 'some new relation to the transcendent' and making that life 'the key to an interpretation of the world'. It is not only that some of the anti-metaphysical theologians, not to speak of the American 'death of God' writers (theologians I will not call them, for to do so is to engage in a contradiction in terms), reject any reference to 'the transcendent' and hence can hardly talk meaningfully of a 'new relation' to it. What I have particularly in mind is that while there is much talk about taking Jesus as a key to the interpretation of *human* nature, as it is often phrased, or to the meaning of *human* life, or to the point of *man's* existential situation, there is a lamentable tendency to stop there and not to go on to talk about 'the world' -- by which Miss Emmet meant, I assume, the totality of things including physical nature; in other words the cosmos in its basic structure and its chief dynamic energy.

Existentialist theologians, for example, seem to forget entirely that human existence, about which they talk so much, has a location in time and space and in a given part of the natural order. As I have put it elsewhere, all history has a geography. I find that many others, too, appear to be content to see Jesus as relevant to human affairs but hesitate to draw any conclusions about His relationship to the cosmic situation in which such affairs take place.

One of the reasons that some of us have been attracted to process-thought is its emphatic insistence on the cosmic structures and the cosmic dynamic. Process-thinkers have seen that man is a product of the

evolutionary movement, just as much as anything else. If that is true, as obviously it is, the natural order must be interpreted in such a fashion that it permits us to account for human life -- and if we do that, we must account also for the fact that in human history there has appeared the Man Jesus, with whom also we must come to terms. Or arguing in the other direction, if we take Jesus as significant for human life and history, He must also be seen as having some relationship to the setting of that life and history -- the natural order -- and hence be as much a 'disclosure' of that as He is of *man's* existence.

Historically the Christian tradition has spoken of Jesus as the incarnation of God, the manifestation of the divine reality 'in the flesh'. It has not presumed to think that we can get to that divine reality by some escape from the human situation; nor has it taken the view of a friend of mine who once said, to my astonishment, 'Let's look at this as God Himself sees it'. We cannot do anything of the sort; we are men and our knowing of anything whatsoever is as men and in terms of human experience. As Aquinas said, all knowledge is *ad modum recipientis,* and the 'mode' of our human receiving is the human mode, which is tautological but none the less true and never to be forgotten. This truth of our human situation is met, in Christian faith, by the claim that God 'has come in the flesh'. Hence, in St. Augustine's words, 'we do not need to climb up to heaven to find him (we could not do that, in any event), since he has come to us where we are'.

But it is *God* who has come to us where we are, not just the truth about human life in supposed isolation from 'the transcendent' and from 'the world'. I am convinced that until and unless the modern theologians who are calling for a 'radical' reconstruction of Christianity recognize this, they will fail us utterly in our need to see Christian faith afresh. The *way* in which this was done in an earlier day certainly cannot be ours in this time; but the vision, insight, intuition, conviction -- call it what you will -- that Jesus Christ establishes with the transcendent a 'new relation' into which 'in rite, celebration, meditation, way of life' (to use Miss Emmet's phrases) we are permitted to enter and to have it made our own -- notice I did not say 'make our own', which would deny the divine priority in this event -- is Christianity. And the consequence is a 'key to the interpretation of the world' which includes *everything* and not simply human life in a presumed separation from that 'everything'.

Somewhere in *Appearance and Reality* the English idealist philosopher

F. H. Bradley remarked that 'the man who, transported by his passion, feels and knows that only love gives the secret of the universe', is not engaging in proper metaphysical discourse. That is rubbish, in my view. I do not think that a Christian can for a moment accept Bradley's pejorative judgement. Precisely *that kind of man,* 'transported by his passion' -- in this case his being caught up into a relationship with God in Christ, although it may very well be true in other ways as well, since to be 'transported' by passion is to enter upon the most profound experience possible to human beings -- precisely such a man does feel and know what is nothing other than 'the secret of the universe'. The secret is that *God is love;* and it carries with it the corollary that God who is love 'works in all respects for a good end to those who love *him',* in the natural order as well as in history.

Of course this does not mean that everything becomes sweet and cozy; the fact that Love incarnate suffered crucifixion negates any such sentimentality. The 'good' towards which God works 'in all respects' is not comfort; nor is the Christian religion 'a research after comfort' (Whitehead properly denounced such a conception). None the less it is a 'good': it is, indeed, the Kingdom of God which is the sovereign rule of love into which those who respond to God's love are admitted -- and in being admitted given the task of conforming this world of human affairs to the pattern of the Love 'which moves the sun and the other stars'.

Thus I am obliged to say, with H. H. Price, that theism, at least in a Christian sense, is 'a metaphysics of love'; and with this, I am obliged to affirm that 'the world', including nature in its farthest stretches as well as in the intimacy of human existence, is given its proper 'interpretation' only when 'the key' to it is found in Jesus Christ. That, essentially, is what Christian faith is all about -- it has a cosmic sweep and is not to be accepted as an affair of human importance only. Its message, accepted on the grounds of faith and in the continuing activity of utter self-commitment to that which is spoken forth in the event of Christ, is precisely that 'love is all and more than all', in E. E. Cummings' telling phrase.

The tragedy of Christian theology is that this faith, this message, has not been given the central place which it not only deserves but demands. For far too many of the great theologies of the Christian tradition, the recognition of love has been a peripheral rather than the central concern. This manifests itself not only in the way in which Aristotelian notions of the 'unmoved mover' or neo-Platonic ideas of 'being-subsisting from-

itself' have been taken to be the proper definition of what is meant when we speak of 'God', but also in liturgical language where all too often the basic concept implied or (as most often seems to be the case) affirmed is the utter immutability of deity, along with the rigidly legalistic moralism which it is suggested should mark those who claim to 'obey' the divine mandates. Of course I have exaggerated here. There are plenty of instances, in the traditional liturgies, of emphasis on the sheer love of God, His being affected by human attitudes and responses, and the tender relationship which He intends between Him and His children. Yet I think that I do not exaggerate when I say that the chief impression received by an observer is precisely the divine impassibility, the intransigence of the divine demand, and the requirement from men of a servile obedience rather than life in 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'.

At the same time that Christian theology has so emphatically insisted on the divine absoluteness (taken in the sense which I have indicated), there have always been elements in that theology which have suggested another idea. In some of the greatest of the Church's teachers there has been a strange ambiguity. In St. Augustine, for example, the personal relationship of man with God, as well as the deepest nature of God Himself, has been interpreted in terms of a love which the theological structure would seem to render almost absurd. St. Thomas Aquinas was also a 'double-man', in that while he accepted and sought to develop a Christian interpretation of Aristotelian ideas in which Aristotle's 'unmoved mover' was given priority over the relational view of God, at the same time in his own sermons, prayers, and occasionally throughout his writings there is the stress on exactly that relational view. This kind of internal contradiction seems to run through much traditional theology; it finds explicit expression in Luther's dichotomy between the terrible God, who put him not only in awe but in utter terror, and the tender and loving God whom he knew in Jesus Christ as the savior, the loving friend, and the gracious Father of men.

The real question is whether we are to make absolutely central in our thinking the 'love of God which was in Christ Jesus our Lord' or in one way or another regard that love as so adjectival to the divine substance that it appears to be irrelevant. Indeed, to talk of 'substance' here is in itself misleading; for the use of that term, despite all the protests of the neo-Thomists and others, is certain to bring us to think of God in terms of unchanging and unchangeable inert stuff -- and to do that is to deny, *ab initio,* the possibility of a God who responds in complete faithfulness

and with the utter integrity of His own nature, yet with deepest awareness and sympathy. In other words, we find it difficult if not impossible to move from the model of deity as primarily substantial being, existing in and of itself, to the model of deity as genuinely participant and really affected by what goes on in His world.

It is the purpose of this chapter to argue, from many different sides, that another way is required. This is the way which is provided if we adopt, not the so-called 'classical' view of God, but the 'neo-classical' view -- a view which stresses the relational aspects as being much more than *merely* aspects -- as being, in fact the basic reality of God Himself. Unquestionably this will present very difficult problems for Christian theology and especially for the sort of theology which has been conventional during most of Christian history. Yet there is nothing sacred about that theology as such; for what is abiding in Christian faith is not this or that theological formulation, however widely accepted, but exactly what Professor Emmet has said: 'the life of the founder', the 'new relationship to the transcendent' which that life has disclosed, and hence the total impact of Jesus Christ on men, in all its richness and depth. If *this* is the abiding Christian 'thing', then theologies may be subject to change, as we come to understand more and more adequately what is being disclosed to us in the person of Jesus Christ. And what is being disclosed, I repeat, is the utter centrality of love.

We need not *blame* our fathers in the Christian tradition for what they did, although we may regret much of it and wonder how ever they could have said what so often they did say. What is required is to understand how, under the particular circumstances which were naturally theirs, they took the positions they did. But this does not entail *our* taking those same positions, especially in respect to such a central point as this one. The requirement from us is to do for our time, in the light of a deeper apprehension of the centrality of love, what in their own way they sought to do in their time. This will mean, I am certain, that we shall be obliged to give up that model of deity which, with the best intentions, they accepted from the general philosophy of the time. But it will not mean that the true 'intentionality' (as I may phrase it) which was theirs will be forgotten.

If we have available a philosophical conceptuality which is more congruous with Christian love, we shall be prepared to use that conceptuality in the task of theological re-construction. Yet in doing so, we must have the wit and wisdom to discern that in their insistence on

the divine changelessness and even on the divine impassibility, they had hold of something important. We cannot phrase it as they did; but we can see that what they were talking about was the utter reliability of God, His faithfulness to His purpose, His inexhaustibility, His never ceasing to be and to act in accordance with His undeviating purpose of love. If *they* felt themselves forced to express this 'intentionality' in terms of a philosophical concept which for us is incredible, this must not suggest that the between the deepest instinct and desire which was theirs and 'intentionality' in and of itself was wrong. There is a difference the particular language (and with that language, the philosophical notions which it entailed) which they employed in stating that instinct and desire.

In any event, the point of this chapter, intended to prepare the way for further discussion of what I have styled 'another' (and I am convinced a *better)* theological approach, is simply to insist that we can only be loyal to our ancestors in the Christian tradition, but above all loyal to the chief stress in the faith which that tradition has conveyed to us, if and when and as we are ready to put stress on love's centrality -- and to use *that* as our key to the whole theological enterprise.

Now almost all Christians would agree that Wesley was correct in writing of God that 'his nature and his name is love'. It would seem obvious to them that this is the Christian claim and many of them would say, if they heard us stress the absolute centrality of this assertion, 'Of course, that is taken for granted'. Right there, I think, is the problem. We simply cannot 'take it for granted' that 'God is love' and let matters rest there. Failure to go further, failure to see the shattering nature of that assertion, is the reason for an enormous amount of misunderstanding and the occasion for an even larger amount of misinterpretation of the Christian doctrine of God.

This was brought home to me not long ago when, after a lecture on the subject of 'process-theology', in which I had stressed the Johannine text, a member of my audience rose to put the following question: 'Of course it is the Christian faith that God is love. But unless God's love is backed by His power, what guarantee have we that it will triumph in the end and that Mother Julian's conviction that "all shall be well" will be vindicated?'

The short answer to the question would have been that my questioner obviously did not himself believe that God's love is very important. *If*

love, in order to be truly effective, must be associated with coercive force -- as he indicated was to him essential -- then it is apparent that love is *not* recognized as supreme. What *is* supreme is power. He was saying that love is a very fine thing, that there ought to be more of it, that in some way or other God does care, but that in the long run the really effective instrument in God's control of the world is His capacity to coerce. It is as if someone offered us, with his left hand, the gift of love; and then, with his right hand, made a fist at us and said, 'If you won't accept love, I'll knock you down'. In other words, in such talk love is *not* the basic dynamic in the world; it is *not* the deepest and highest reality; it is *not* the essential definition of God. And so all the verbal assertions that 'God is love' really amount to nothing; they are *only* verbal assertions, with no genuine grounding in the structure of things and in how things go in the world. In my judgement, this is a denial of the central insight of Christian faith; it is the ultimate treachery.

Part of the problem, of course, lies in the meaning of *power*. If by power we intend to signify, as most often *is* intended, the use of coercive measures whether these be overt or subtle and hidden, then it would seem that to ascribe such a quality to God as His chief characteristic -- as in fact, if not in word, is suggested when people talk as did my questioner -- is a denial of the point of Christ's disclosure of God. Yet there is a sense in which love itself is powerful. By this I mean that although love will not use coercive measures, driving people to do what they will not do otherwise, *making them* (as the phrase has it) act in contradiction to their own freely chosen decision, love is the *most* powerful of all agencies in the world. This is because love can win response when nothing else can do so; it can lure, elicit, attract, incite -- and in this way it can accomplish its ends.

Yet at the same time the ends which love would accomplish are not the selfish sort which would imply that the lover is seeking his own fulfillment without regard for the loved one. On the contrary, the ends which love seeks to accomplish and which only love can accomplish are always ends which are mutually shared and in which the loved one finds his fulfillment too. In other words, when love is central to the picture, we see *ends* and *means* to be 'of a piece' -- the end is loved shared, the means is the sharing of love.

I believe that considerations of this sort are of quite enormous significance today. It might be said that the history of the past half-

century is the story of human attempts to secure world-community, the triumph of righteousness and justice, the establishment of understanding among the peoples of the earth, but always through the exercise of some variety of coercion. The result has been anything but what was initially desired. The utter bankruptcy of power, in the coercive meaning of the word, is apparent.

This, I take it, explains the revulsion of so many young people -- to take but one obvious example -- from the political game, their contempt for warmongers and their unwillingness (as in the United States) to participate in a conflict which they feel will accomplish nothing save further suffering. Hence there is a surprising rediscovery of love among modern youth as the only means to the end, and at the same time an insistence that love is *also* the end to be sought. We may dismiss these young people as 'idealistic', even when at the same time they are criticized for being too 'realistic' in (say) their approach to human relations, especially in sexual matters. We may dismiss youth as being unwilling to be, as we think older folk are, starkly 'realistic' about the fact of power and its necessity in national, international, social, economic, industrial, and other areas of human society. But such criticisms, either of the 'idealism' of youth or of their 'unrealistic' appraisal of the situation, come very ill from people like ourselves. It is precisely *our* settling for the use of power, *our* unwillingness to 'try love', and *our* cynical distrust of the possibilities in love as means towards love as an end, which has brought us to the state we are in.

That force must sometimes be employed is not to be denied -- very likely there was no other way in which Nazism, for example, could have been defeated in the short run; I am not advocating complete pacifism in every situation. But I am insisting that for Christians at least their religious conviction should be clear and the consequences of that conviction in their list of priorities as to means should be equally clear. If we *must* use coercion, then let us know that we are doing so; let us admit honestly that insofar as this is done we are not obeying the perfect divine will; let us recognize that at best the use of such force is a *pis-aller,* not the entirely right thing. And if and when force is used, let us not hallow it by thinking of *God* as essentially such coercive power. Above all, let us be repentant of the use we make of force and let us act, once force *has* been used, in such a manner that its evil sting is (if not removed then) drawn and the poison which it injects into the life of men is drained Out by the renewed employment of loving action, concern, caring, and self-giving. Only so can we in any sense justify the force

which we may have felt impelled to use in this or that given circumstance-we can never *glory* in coercion.

But I must return to the main point of this chapter, which is that we must decide, once and for all, whether we are to give priority in our thinking about God to the concept of love or to the concept of power. Yet that is not quite the right way to put it, since we are not dealing with concepts (which are abstract ideas) but with what nowadays would be called 'models'. What *model*, then, is to be chosen? If we chose power for our model, thinking of God in terms of a person known to us who exemplifies this quality (we must think in this fashion, however anthropomorphic it may appear, although we must carefully qualify' our model), it will follow that love will be adjectival and in a secondary place. On the other hand, if we decide for the model of love, thinking of God as more like a human lover (but with defects, imperfections, frustrations, distortions removed), it will follow that whatever power *is* exercised by Him will be loving in its essential quality.

This theological decision has consequences in practically every area -- I should venture, even, to say in *every* area -- of faith. An obvious instance has to do with the relation of grace and freedom. For centuries, men have worried about this problem: *if* God's grace is indeed His activity, coming before and present in every good human act, how *can* such acts be truly free and responsible acts on the part of the human agent? If God acts, then man's response is not truly his own. If a human act is genuinely free, then where does God come into it? So the problem has been posed. But surely that way of stating it presupposes that God's grace is coercive power. The model which has been assumed, before the problem is discussed, makes possible only the absolutely over-riding quality of God's action, man being only a puppet in God's hands. Or, from the other side, it is human agency which is in control and God can 'enter in' only as a sort of extra.

If the model of God is taken from the realm of loving relationships, however, things are seen very differently. In that case, God does not force His human children, nor do they act in entire independence of God's concern. The divine love is prevenient to, active in, and unfailingly related to everything that is done by men; but the way in which love works is through the luring, attraction, solicitation, invitation, to which we have referred. God's action is first, since He always loves men and surrounds them with His loving action -- but it is genuinely loving action and hence not pressure of a coercive type. On

the other hand, man too is active, but his activity is also in love; he responds freely to the love which is given him and in that response he knows that he is truly 'being himself', for he was intended by his creation to be a responding lover and in no sense a marionette pulled by strings manipulated by God -- certainly not the victim of the divine coercion.

One could go through the catalogue of Christian doctrines and discover how in each of them a radical alteration will follow once we have decided that love, not power, is the decisive fact in God's 'ways with men'. It is obvious that a corollary is the recognition that love is always a *relationship;* and a relationship involves two who are in it -- God to man, man to God -- in which each of them is not only acting in a causal manner but also being acted upon in an affective manner. How different would be our thinking about the Atonement in such a context -- to take but one other example. To take still a third, the understanding of the Incarnation would no longer fall into the dangerous trap of *either* 'God-made-man' or 'only' a very good Man who knows and serves God in a unique fashion.

Thus we can see that many, if not all, the most difficult questions in theological discussion have been vitiated by a peculiar variety of what Gilbert Ryle has taught us to call the 'category-mistake'. We have taken a set of ideas from one category -- the force category -- and have applied them almost without qualification to another category -- the God-man relationship. What we should have done is to see that in the 'Galilean vision', as Whitehead called it, we have the clue to the proper category for use in the God-man relationship; the category is 'love in action', the divine Lover acting and the human intentional lover acting too. And then we should have found that the situation was very different from what it seemed to be when power was used as the interpretative key. Once accept the disclosure of God in Christ (and in all that is Christ-like in human experience, for we ought not to be exclusively christo-centric in the narrower sense); once take that disclosure with utmost seriousness -- and then God as 'pure unbounded love' becomes central in our thinking. It makes *all* the difference-and in my judgement, this difference is what Christian faith is *about.*

To take that key with such utmost seriousness and to use it with equal seriousness in the re-framing of Christian theology, will obviously require some very drastic changes in our ways of envisaging what the theological enterprise is all about. We may fear such changes; there is a

tendency on the part of theologians to like things to continue as they have been. Yet risk is an element in life and it is also an element in all faith that is worth anybody's having. But on the other hand there would be a wonderful release of energy in thus accepting love's centrality, since love *is* a releasing (as well as a demanding and dangerous) matter.

Let me close with a little story -- one which happens to be true in essence, even if there is a bit of embroidery in the way in which it was told to me many years ago. Perhaps it will illustrate my point about love and at the same time show that this emphasis is not entirely new in Christian thought.

In the reign of Charles I there was in Scotland a covenanting minister Samuel Rutherford, who was minister of Anworth in Galloway. One Saturday evening he was catechizing his children and servants. There was a knock at the door. He went to it, and the stormy wind blew in so that the tall tallow candles flickered and he could hardly see a venerable old man who stood muffled up in the rain. 'May I come in?' said the old man, 'And wouldst thou give me shelter for the night?' Rutherford at once said, 'Yes, right gladly. Come in and we will give thee porridge, but not before we finish our catechism.' 'I thank thee', said the stranger, 'and I shall be glad to take my share in the catechism with the others, if thou wilt.' So Rutherford went on asking questions around the family circle. It so chanced that when he came to the stranger, the question was, 'How many commandments be there?' 'Eleven', answered the stranger. 'Alas, sir', said Rutherford, 'I had thought that one so wise and venerable of aspect would have given a better answer. There be but ten.' 'Nay, kind host', replied the stranger, 'in truth there be eleven commandments.' Said Rutherford, 'But that cannot be; there are but ten.' The stranger then went on, 'Hast thou forgotten? There was One who said, "Behold, I give you a new commandment, that ye love one another."' Rutherford sprang to his feet. "Who art thou?' he gasped. 'I am James Ussher', said the stranger, 'and I have come hither in private that I might have speech with thee.' It was the famous Archbishop Ussher, Primate of Ireland and one of the most eminent scholars of that day. 'Welcome indeed thou art', said Rutherford, 'thou wilt remain here, but tomorrow thou wilt preach in my church.' 'Yes, gladly', said the Archbishop; his eyes twinkled as he added, 'I think I have chosen my text already. Shall it not be from St. John's Gospel, Chapter 13 verse 14?'

The text which Archbishop Ussher proposed runs like this: 'If I, then,

your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.' It is found in that place where the Fourth Evangelist gives the account of the foot-washing in the Upper Room and where he cites the words of Jesus about the 'new commandment'. It is based on, indeed made possible by, the earlier words which the Evangelist writes as he begins this account: 'Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came from God and was going to God . . .' And *that* sentence assumes the truth of the even earlier words in the gospel narrative: 'Jesus . . . having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. . .'

The Lord came from God precisely in order to love, in order to be the humanly visible instrument of the divine Charity. Christian theology, in my conviction, is nothing other than the explication and application of what that statement *means.*

return to religion-online

The 'Last Things' in a Process Perspective by Norman Pittenger

Dr. Pittenger, philosopher and theologian, was a senior member of King's College, Cambridge for many years, then Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, before retiring in 1966. Published by London: Epworth Press, 1970, This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

Chapter 8: After the 'Death of God'

The furore over the 'death of God' theology seems to have died down in the United States, but to Continue undiminished in Britain. Perhaps this is because the publication in Britain of the writings of the advocates of this position was rather delayed; hence the impact which they make is very much a present reality. In the States, William Hamilton, among the first who talked and wrote in this vein, has said that the 'death of God' emphasis belongs to the past -- the recent past, surely -- and that today we must go beyond it. Whatever may have been the contribution it made, the contribution *has been* made; what comes next?

I do not myself subscribe to the view that theology works in the fashion which Hamilton's remark suggests -- a sort of drunkard's progress, with no real direction and without obvious continuities. But I agree on three points: first, that the 'death of God' literature has made a contribution to theology, even if it is not the contribution which its spokesmen might think; secondly, that the movement is just as dead as its leaders said that 'God' was dead; and thirdly, that we must go forward to a doing of theology, in the Christian mode, which will take account of what that particular literature had to say. I wish to speak about these three points.

The talk about the 'death of God', I believe, was an extraordinarily misleading, even if highly provocative, way of saying something important. For what was really involved in the talk was the death of certain concepts of God, rather than a supposed death of God himself. One realizes that this interpretation has been denied by Thomas Altizer

and other advocates of the view; they insist that they are talking about a genuine death of God as an historical occurrence. But even they show that the contrary is the case, as Altizer himself demonstrates when he claims that he is talking about the absolute immanence or 'presence-in-this-world' of the Word or Spirit, in consequence of the radical *kenosis* or self-emptying of the transcendent deity usually denoted by the word 'God'. That Word or Spirit most certainly is *not* dead; and Altizer's 'gospel' is precisely the reality in human experience and in the world-order of that Word or Spirit with whom men must reckon whether they wish to do so or not.

I am convinced that what has died, that whose death has been announced, is a series of models, images, pictures, or concepts of deity which for a very long time have been taken by considerable numbers of people to be the Christian way of understanding God. It is important in this connection to note that each of the three leading advocates of the position is in reaction against a notion of God that represents just such a series of models. Paul van Buren was a disciple of Karl Barth, under whom he wrote his excellent doctoral dissertation on Calvin's teaching about Christ as the true life of men; Hamilton was an opponent of natural theology in all its forms, even if he studied at St Andrews under Donald Baillie -- but it was the so-called 'rico-orthodox' line which had attracted him, theologically; Altizer is a slightly different case. He worked under Paul Tillich and with Mircea Eliade, but his reaction has been *against* the aspects of Tillich's thought which stressed 'being-itself' in God and *for* those aspects which emphasized the need for radical re-conception of Christian thought.

Whitehead, to whom I shall return, wrote in *Process and Reality* many years ago that the Christian theological tradition has tended to conceive of God in three ways, each of them mistaken: as 'the ruling Caesar, or the ruthless moralist, or the unmoved mover'. It has failed to give central place to what he styled 'the Galilean vision', in which God is shown as persuasion or love. Hence, in his striking phrase, 'the Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar', seeing him 'in the image of an imperial ruler', 'in the image of a personification of moral energy', or 'in the image of an ultimate philosophical principle'. With certain qualifications I should say that Whitehead stated the facts here.

In various combinations and with differing emphases, the concept of God with which many Christian thinkers have tended to work has been

composed of exactly those ingredients; absolute power, stark moral demand, and unconditioned (essentially unrelated, in the sense of a two-way movement) 'being-itself' as the ultimate cause of everything not-God, but not in anyway affected by that which was not itself -- and the neuter here is highly significant, *ens realissimum.* Great theologians, like Augustine and Aquinas (to name but two), have worked in this fashion; but they were also strangely discontented in doing so, since their *real* faith was in the biblical God of unfailing love-in-action, effecting his purpose of love in nature and history, and most profoundly open to and receptive of what went on in the world. Hence the ambiguity which (as I think) one can see running through so many of the great theologies.

But it was the stress on power, on 'ruthless moralism', and on transcendence in the sense of non-relationship, which many took to be demanded when one talked of God, although one might also add, as a kind of afterthought, 'Oh yes, he is also loving'. I do not parody here, for I myself have found often enough that when I have tried to present a theological point of view which made the reality of love absolutely central, and put the other so-called divine attributes in a place secondary to that love, I have been met with the response, 'Of course God is loving, but we have to begin with His omnipotence, or His transcendence, or His aseity (self-contained and self-existence), or His absolute righteousness with its consequent demands on men.

This procedure seems to me to be entirely wrong, however traditional it may be. What we ought to do is to start with God self-disclosed in human affairs as love-in-action. Then, and only then, can we use (adverbially, as it were) the other so-called attributes. God as love-in-action is more than any particular expression of His love (hence He is transcendent); God as love-in-action is always available (hence He is onmipresent); God as love-in-action is able to envisage every situation in its deepest and truest reality and accommodate Himself to it, so that He can indeed achieve His loving ends (hence He is omniscient and omnipotent); God as love-inaction is unswerving in His love, unfailing in its expression, unyielding in His desire to confront men with the demands of love (hence He is righteous). If we had worked in that way, we should have been saved from many of. our supposedly insoluble theological problems, most of which are based on taking the other, and as I think wrong, approach.

However this may be, the fact is plain that for contemporary men and

women, not only of a sophisticated sort but also of quite ordinary attainments, the notion of God as absolute power, as unyielding moral dictator, and as metaphysical first cause never Himself affected, has gone dead. There are many reasons why this has happened; this is no place to discuss them, but among others we may mention scientific constructions, psychological discoveries, awareness of sociological conditions, and all that Bonhoeffer summed up in saying that man has 'come of age' (by which he did *not* mean that man is an entirely mature and adult creature who now can take the place of God, in a fashion not unlike the claim made by the Provost of King's in his recent utterances; but he *did* mean that we now know our own responsibility and that God treats us, not like slaves nor like little children, but like sons to whom He entrusts such responsibility). This 'going dead' of the notions I have mentioned is stated plainly for us in the writers who speak of 'the death of God'.

So much for my first point. My second is that the movement called by that name is now itself a matter of the past; it has made its contribution and that is that. It has taught us something, and by now we ought to have learned what it had to teach us. Of course the learning has not been done simultaneously in all parts of the Christian world or anywhere else. Hence for some of us, it might be said, the situation is still pre-'death of God'; and, for those who are in this situation, the lesson is still to be learned. But for those who have got an inkling of what this is all about, who have learned the lesson, the situation is post-'death of God'; we must now go on to the constructive task.

I shall not spend time in showing how and why we are in that 'post' era. I only call in witness the remarks of Hamilton which I have already cited. He at least feels that the 'calling in question', the denials, the stark affirmation of the 'end of sheer transcendence, sheer moralism, sheer power' (as I like to put it), has been accomplished. So the problem for us, as for him, may be phrased in a typically American way: 'Where do we go from here?' And it is with that question that the remainder of this chapter will concern itself. But the one thing that is quite clear is that we do *not* 'go back', as if we could return to the older ideas and concepts, quite unchanged by what has happened during the past few decades. If we cannot retreat, rest content in the denials, the 'calling in question', and the like, neither can we into one of the theologies of the past. If I may say so, this is what I find troublesome in the writing of Dr Mascall on the subject. He is usually very sound in his criticisms of the 'death of God' school and, indeed, of the whole 'radical theology' which in one

way or another is associated with it. But because of his failure to understand *why* such a theology in its various forms has appeared, he is unable to see any other solution than a 'return'. Leonard Hodgson, in his review in *Theology* of *The Secularization of Christianity,* made this point about Mascall; and he made it with such clarity and precision that I need only mention it here.

In going forward, then, with Christian theology *after* 'the death of God', we have several options. Let me mention some of them, assuming that we cannot work with Thomism (either 'classical' or 'revised'), nor with that peculiar Anglican affair known as 'liberal Catholicism' in the style of *Essays Catholic and Critical* or the writings of Charles Gore, nor with 'liberalism' in its reductionist form as found in Harnack or Harnack *redivivus,* nor in sheer biblicism in its fundamentalist dress. So I mention the following possibilities, getting some of them from an excellent little book of lectures given in Chicago a couple of years ago, *Philosophical Resources for Christian Faith:* (1) existentialism in some mode; (2) phenomenological (and in that sense non-metaphysical) enquiry; (3) analytical philosophy and its talk about *bliks* and various 'language games'; (4) process thought in its several forms. To these four I should add the so-styled 'secular theology' often advocated today, with a side-glance at revived and restated 'biblical theology'. Here are six possibilities.

Of some of them I must speak very briefly. For example, the kind of 'biblical theology' sometimes advocated assumes that we should go forward by taking with utmost seriousness the biblical images or motifs -- not the literal, textual stuff of Scripture, which would involve us in a kind of new 'fundamentalism', but the main-line of biblical images. I am very much in sympathy with this approach, so far as it goes. For Christians the biblical images and patterns are of *first* importance, since it is from them that the Christian picture of God takes its rise. But it must be pointed out that these images and patterns are most diverse; further, they belong, in their explicit shape, to ages in which we do not ourselves live. Hence what is required is just what Leonard Hodgson has so often, and rightly, demanded: we must ask ourselves what the case *really is,* so far as we can grasp it today, if people who thought and wrote *like that,* phrased it in the way they did. Otherwise we shall be using the Scriptures in a very wooden and unimaginative fashion, even if we do not succumb to literalism in its obvious sense. Furthermore, if we wish to communicate the deepest meaning of those images and patterns, we dare not rest content with them as they stand. That would

be to resemble the Chinese who, when shipwrecked on a desert island, made their living by taking in each other's laundry. We must translate if we wish to communicate.

Again, the use of analytical philosophy will help us enormously in the way in which we use words. It will enable us to clarify our language, to avoid contradiction, to stop talking sheer nonsense, to look for some kind of referent which will give the necessary verification to what we are saying as Christians. All this is of great importance, lest we fall into the temptation to use high-sounding words for the evasion of difficulties. It has been said that whenever some older theologians got to a hard place they simply quoted a few lines of Wordsworth or Tennyson, thinking that ended the matter; or they made a few biblical citations as if that were the complete answer; or (at worst), when the attack was most fierce, they used the word 'mystery' as a kind of 'escape-hatch'. But analytical philosophy is a neutral discipline-for which we may be grateful -- and it gives us no working conceptuality for the statement of the theological implications of Christian faith with the claims that faith makes about 'how things really go in the world'.

The kind of phenomenological method which is often advocated is of a non-metaphysical type; that is, it is interested in description, in terms of how living religion, as a matter of deepest intuitive observation, effectively operates in human experience in the world where men live. This seems to me to be most valuable; a van der Leeuw, an Eliade, and others like these, can help us a great deal. How does faith function, what embodiments does it have, what attitudes does it demand? These are questions which ought to be answered. But I cannot think that their answer will provide the general conceptuality which we require if Christian faith is to be grounded in the stuff of reality and if the case for it is to be made in a manner which speaks meaningfully to the men and women for whom it exists and to whom it is supposed to address itself.

We are left with three possibilities: 'secular theology', an existentialist theology, and a process theology. I shall say something about each of them -- and, as my ordering indicates, I shall come down in favor of the last of the three, as offering us the best conceptuality available today as we go forward from 'the death of God'.

The phrase 'secular theology' may be taken to mean one of two things: either a theology of the secular or a theology which *confines itself to* the secular realm. Since I have spoken critically of Dr Mascall I am glad to

say here that I believe that he has written admirably about this distinction in the last part of his recent *Theology and the Future.* He has pointed out that a theology which is strictly *confined* to the world of 'here and now cannot take account of the ultimate questions which men must ask, whereas every sound Christian theology is required indeed to speak of that 'here and now', but to relate it to God as a creative principle and to see God at work in the immediacies of human existence in the whole range of what we style 'secular existence'. In other words, I agree that Christian faith must see God *in the world* but that it cannot remain content with 'the world' as if it exhausted all there is of God. 'Whitehead once said that 'God is in this world or he is nowhere'; that is entirely sound. But Whitehead also said that the world and God are not identical; and I should interpret this utterance, along with others by him, to mean that there is in the divine life an exhaustibility which makes possible the wonderful novelty which the created order manifests, disclosing what Gerard Manley Hopkins named 'the dearest freshness deep down things'.

In any event, if a 'secular' approach to theology thinks that it avoids all metaphysical conceptions, it is profoundly mistaken. Of course one can mean what one wants by the word 'metaphysical'. If one intends to speak of a grandiose construction in terms of supernatural entities, with a schematic ordering of everything according to some superimposed pattern, metaphysics may very well be denied. It seems to me that the present-day attack on metaphysics is nothing more than an attack on idealistic constructions of this type, after the fashion (say) of Hegel or Bradley. But metaphysics can also mean -- and process thinkers would say that it ought to mean -- the inevitable human enterprise of generalizations widely applied, on the basis of a particular point or event or experience taken as 'important', to the rest of our experience of the world and the world which we surely experience. It can mean, then, the development of those principles which most adequately express what we experience and know, in the full range of our human encounters; and the result is a 'vision' which can be tested by reference back to experience and to the world experienced. Metaphysics in this mode is not some highly speculative system imposed on the world. It is an induction from what is known of the world. Everybody engages in this, usually in a very naive manner; the 'philosopher', so styled, is only one who in a more sophisticated and critical manner engages in this attempt at making sense of things, including human experience.

But the self-styled 'secular theologian' is doing exactly that. You have

only to read Gregor Smith, whose untimely death we all lament, to observe this. Both in *The New Man* and in *Secular Christianity* Gregor Smith is actively setting forth *this* kind of metaphysics, taking as his 'important' moment or event the historical encounters of men, specifically with Jesus, and from these developing a view of the generalized situation of man-in-the-world which, in my sense of the word, is inescapably metaphysical, even if he himself rejects the word and thinks that he is also rejecting the enterprise. What he is rejecting, it turns out, is only that 'supernaturalistic' species of metaphysics which idealistic philosophers have set forth in a pretentious claim to encompass in their thought all things in earth and heaven.

Thus, as I see it, the options which remain are in fact two: either an existentialist approach or a 'process thought' approach, since the 'secular' theology in itself does nothing more than deny a particular kind of metaphysic and leaves us open to the possibility of interpreting the secular world, and everything else in human experience, in some appropriate manner.

The existentialist approach in contemporary English-written theology has been associated with two names: one is Paul Tillich, the other John Macquarrie. I cannot mention the name of Tillich without reverence, for that great and good man was a dear friend of mine and I respect, honor, and love him, though he has now gone from us. His theology was an attempt to combine an existentialist analysis of the human situation with a Christian faith interpreted along the lines of German idealistic thought; he himself confessed that Schelling had been his great master. His method of correlation is, I believe, very suggestive and helpful; his masterly analysis of what it is like to be human is almost beyond criticism. But his final 'system', as he used to call it, seems to me to be too abstract in its statement to convey the Christian gospel, although in his preaching he was anything but abstract. I think that Professor Macquarrie's efforts, especially in *Principles of Christian Theology,* offer a much more 'available' approach for most of us. His insistence that every existential analysis presupposes and includes ontological affirmations seems to me right and sound; his way of using Heideggerian thought is instructive. He takes the biblical images with utmost seriousness and employs them effectively as being determinative of the total picture of God -- world -- man in the light of Jesus Christ.

If I were to make any criticisms of this existentialist mode of theologizing it would be to say that it is not sufficiently regardful of

nature, in the strict sense of the physical world and the material stuff of things. And I should add that it lacks something of the dynamism which I believe is required of any Christian theology, not only because of the dynamic quality of biblical thought itself but also (and more significantly) because of the evolutionary way of things which men like Teilhard de Chardin have so insistently pressed upon us. But I confess that *if* I did not find process theology more appealing I should opt for Macquarrie's approach. At the same time I must say that if those two criticisms of mine were met sufficiently, there would not be too much (I think) to differentiate *his* way from the one to which I now turn in conclusion.

It is not necessary for me to outline my reasons for preferring process thought; I have already indicated these in my book *Process Thought and Christian Faith.* It will suffice if I note that process thought regards the world as a dynamic process of inter-related (and hence social) organisms or entities, whose intentional movement is towards shared good in widest and most inclusive expression; and that it interprets deity along *those* lines. God is no unmoved mover, dictatorial Caesar, nor 'ruthless moralist'; He is the cosmic lover, both causative and affected, 'first cause and final affect' as Schubert Ogden has so well phrased it. He is always *related,* hence always *relational;* He is eminently *temporal,* sharing in the ongoing which *is* time. His transcendence is in His sheer faithfulness to Himself as love, in His inexhaustibility as lover, and in His capacity for endless adaptation to circumstances in which His love may be active. He does not coerce; He lures and attracts and solicits and invites. He waits for free response from the creaturely agent, using such response (which He has incited by His providing 'initial aims') to secure the decisions which enable the agent to make actual his own (the agent's) 'subjective aim'. In the historical realm and in human life He discloses Himself, precisely as love-in-action, in the total event which we name Jesus Christ. Since His love-in-operation is His essential nature -- He *is* love, which is His 'root-attribute', not *aseity,* as the older theology claimed -- the other things said about Him (transcendence, immanence, omnipotence, omniscience, omni-presence, righteousness, etc.) are to be understood, as I have already argued earlier, as adverbially descriptive of His *mode of being love* rather than set up as separate or even as distinct attributions.

We live in a 'becoming' world, not in a static machine-like world. And God Himself is 'on the move'. Although He is never surpassed by anything in the creation, He can increase in the richness of His own

experience and in the relationships which He has with that creation. He is the *living* God; in that sense, we may say (as the title of a recent book of mine dares to do) that God is 'in process'. In other words, the basic point of the biblical images of God as the living, active, loving, personalizing agent is guaranteed.

But above all, since He is no dictator after the model of Caesar, no self-contained being after the model of the worst sort of man we know, no moralist after the model of the puritanical and negative code-maker, He is truly to be worshipped. Worship means 'ascribing worth'; and this we can do only to a lovable because loving One. We cringe before power expressed coercively and arbitrarily; we tremble in the presence of rigid moralism, when we do not react against it in wild and desperate efforts to be ourselves; we can only be puzzled by the kind of absolute essence which is without affects from what goes on around and about it. But we can worship, truly 'ascribe worth', to the perfection or excellence which is love in its eminent and supreme form. God is that; hence He is adorable.

What is more, He is imitable. And with that affirmation I must end. We are to imitate God; both Aristotle and Plato said so, whilst Jesus gave it content by saying that we were to be 'like our Father in heaven'. Known as love-in-action, disclosed as that love by the event in which Jesus is central, caught up into life 'in love' (which, if I John 4 is right, *is* life 'in God'), we are enabled to become what God intends us to be, created lovers. That is why we are here; that is our destiny -- or else Christianity is a fraud.

16