

A padre helps us remember our dead

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A PADRE HELPS US REMEMBER OUR DEAD

Life after death is a question that has occupied the human mind for centuries and has not come to an end in our times, though many people seem weary of thinking and speculating about it, since they fear that it distracts people from the very urgent tasks of the present-day and seems a compensation-complex to cover up failure or an excuse for sitting back and doing nothing. But this is a superficial attitude, because if I believe that everything I do has value and will be with me for all eternity, I cannot be careless or unconcerned about the responsibilities of today.

For a Christian there is no doubt. He believes in the word of Christ: "Whoever believes in me will not die, he will live, even after he is dead", which belief is expressed in liturgical prayers for the dead: "He who believes in you, for him life is not taken away but transformed." This is certainly a help for practical man who lives in this faith, it is a challenge to his sense of responsibility and can fill him with hope even in seemingly hopeless situations. Life and human relations assume more meaning, even if a clear vision of the meaning is often darkened.

But I would like to know a little bit

more, how will it happen, under which conditions will I live on, will I continue to grow in insight and knowledge, will my human relations continue and deepen? Will life after death be exciting or boring? Or will it be a continuation like a cycle of "incarnations" or will it be something completely new? Science and Philosophies cannot give us a satisfactory answer. We have no secure data to go by. People do not come back and tell us.

There are, of course many theories from reincarnation to immortality of the human spirit or soul, but as nice as they may sound, they are above practical knowledge and cannot demonstrate a real confirmation of facts. We simply have no valid answer but in the faith and it does not provide details either.

There are some records of "revelations" to pious people and saints. But do they really give a true picture of real insight or are these pious fantasies, illusions, hallucinations as a result of their faith or their hidden desires. Of course, one cannot rule out the possibility of real revelations, but valid verification is not possible.

Some have taken recourse to

spiritualism as it has been recorded in the well known book by Bishop J. A. Pike, "The Other Side" (London, 1969). In it he recounts experiences with his son, who had committed suicide, and has contacted him with the assistance of an internationally-known medium.

Not doubting his sincerity or the sincerity of others who have given evidence of similar encounters with the spiritual world, the question remains whether the medium has had real contact with people "on the other side", whether it has reported or interpreted their messages correctly, or whether it has simply "divined" what existed in the thoughts of the questioner or the group of questioners.

Even downright deception cannot be excluded and is certainly practised on a big scale in such "circles". Usually the messages are in such an unbelievable muddle – even in the case of Bishop J. A. Pike – that no critical mind can find anything positive to go by. In the best case he can give a shrug: "May be, may be not".

A much deeper impression has made upon me the study of a

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research done by an American medical doctor, R. A. Moody "Life after Life" (Bantam Ed. 1976) in which he published the results of over 100 interviews with people who had been near death or had been declared clinically dead and have been resuscitated.

They all tell of extraordinary experiences they have had during that spell of time and all of them follow a definite pattern. The technique and practice of resuscitation has been developed only recently and while not everybody who is resuscitated is able to tell of experiences, there are a great number of people who have done so and the research is still going on.

Before the book was published Dr E. Kubler-Ross M. D. had seen the manuscript and testified that, without knowing of this research she had done the same and had a similar publication ready.

Is it really so that medical science is on the verge of giving us definite information, thus confirming the belief of over two thousand years — that there is life after death? It is perhaps rather an early stage still and one does depend on the true description of experiences people really had, the host of testimonies, conducted independently from each other, could provide some real information and, to say the least, give practical grounds for the Christian belief, that life does not end with death.

All of these patients have experienced a floating out of their physical bodies, associated with a great sense of peace and wholeness. They all have difficulties in expressing their experience in human language and talk of dimensions for which we have no words. They still claim to be with a body, but it does not confirm with the earthly conditions of time and space.

Whilst they were absolutely unable to make contact with people around and near their bodies, they understood and witnessed everything that happened. Some could tell the doctor and the nurses everything they had done to bring them back to life. A common feature is the sensation of moving through darkness, strange noises or music, and the feeling of loneliness and fear and the sudden experience of help from friends and people they held in high esteem or veneration.

Then a vision of light, that comes near and is very bright without causing pain or discomfort, a light full of sympathy and love. In a flash the entire life with all its important steps and decisions stands before them and there is a silent, no verbal question from the light "What have you done with your life?" All is experienced in a very positive way, no shame. All had the definite wish to

remain, some had all the same asked to go back, seeing their responsibilities for the family, some received the command, some were back in a flash. Their lives were afterwards changed with a sharpened sense of responsibility, of sympathy and love, but also with a sharpened interest to learn more.

The people who have reported such experiences were usually common people of sound mind, responsible and of christian background. Some simply talked about the light without giving it an interpretation, some, with deeper religious convictions, interpreted it as God or Christ. An interesting feature was noted, that no one who has had this experience, how much he regretted the fact of returning to life again, thought of suicide as a valid return to it.

Some even expressed very strong feelings: "One thing became clear to me, I would be allowed to kill myself, it would be against the plans of 'the light' for my life, nor to kill somebody else which would be against its plans with him." There were also some reports of people, who after attempted suicide summed up their experience: "The problem remained, I could not solve it, always turning round and round, I was so glad to come back and try again to solve it here".

Is medical and psychological science on the verge of a breakthrough in the line of giving us scientific facts about life after death? Though I am thrilled about the relevance of such testimonies, especially if, in the course of more intensive research, they gain in credibility, I very much doubt if science will provide more than markers towards a real possibility of an after-life which can help the "not-so-religious".

It may even help to see death quite differently, not as a break with life on earth, but a transition from one dimension into another with all ones experiences and insights, with ones imperfections and flaws and with great scope of learning and gaining of new insights never dreamed of before, also of maturing and growth. It would be a state of what the Church means with purgatory, expressed in a more positive way, not as punishment but as maturing towards a life with God.

But a definite proof can hardly be expected from human wisdom and insight. It will guide those who already believe, may make insecure those who cannot believe and may leave untouched those who refuse to believe. There is one word of Christ written by Luca (16, 29 f): "Abraham said to him: They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. As he said: Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him: If they hear not Moses and the

prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Faith in Christ will remain the basis of our hope in the resurrection and salvation of the human person. But science can shake human pride and resistance against Gods offer for hope in a rich future.

Paul Bossard.

NEW EDITION OF THE SWISS EXPORT DIRECTORY

The 13th edition (1978/80) of the Swiss Export Directory published by the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade has just come out. This 1,400 page work is of invaluable assistance to every manufacturer, dealer or servicing firm wishing to purchase Swiss machines, looking for new products or wishing to obtain information concerning business possibilities.

The Directory contains an alphabetical list of products, lists of the suppliers of all Swiss export products — under more than 10,000 headings classified by branches — from equipment goods and semi-finished products to consumer goods, as well as services.

It also contains an alphabetical index of trademarks and the 7,000 or so Swiss exporting firms. The 1,850 members of the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade are grouped in a more detailed section indicating the manufacturing programme of the firm, its telex and telephone numbers, its trademark, the number of its employees, its registered capital, etc.

The Swiss Export Directory is trilingual (English, French and German). It is available from Switzerland's official agencies abroad, chambers of commerce or the publishers.

OPENING OF THE "TEXTILE AND MODE CENTER — ZURICH"

The first and only big commercial centre for fashions and textiles in Switzerland was opened in the middle of August: the "Textile & Mode Centre — Zurich" (TMC). Articles from all production stages are displayed in the centre: fibres, yarns, fabrics and jerseys, as well as ready-to-wear. The exhibitors, representing the whole of the Swiss textile industry — including importers — hold permanent displays of their latest collections.

The 200 or so firms at present occupying premises at the TMC have formed themselves into a group and a calendar of events has been drawn up. The Centre is only five minutes away from Zurich-Kloten International Airport and has been designed in particular to cater to foreign buyers.