

# Theology of death



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While all people are so different in the way we live our lives, what is definitely common for every human being from every part of the world is the inevitable prospect of death. The understanding of this fact has shaped the whole religious and cultural traditions, and is shaping our individual world views in both visible and implicit ways. Some people almost always remember about the looming death and try to value life more, and some people may ignore the disturbing thoughts and find peace in the idea that if one forgets about death at all there is only life that remains as if after our demise there is nothing at all then life is the only reality accessible for humans. Still, whatever we may think, death is with us virtually every day - in news reports, in films, books, and, sadly, sometimes right around us when somebody whom we have known passes away. That is why everyone is instigated by circumstances to form a peculiar vision of death, which could be called ones own theology of death.

Personally, I try to base my theology of death not only on some banal reasoning but on ideas advanced by theologians and philosophers as well. For example, an interesting and thought provoking opposition of views on death can be found in the account of a symposium " Extended Life, Eternal Life". There, one speaker, a terminally ill Diogenes Allen, voiced his view of the fundamental inferiority of human life, which, if indefinitely extended, at some point would no longer be able to satisfy us because of its repetitious nature. This, as Allen reasons, turns death into a kind of blessing, as it finally opens the way for Gods perfect love, the tempting essence of which one may anticipate already during our earthly being. In his turn, another speaker Neil Gillman sees no redemptive function in death as he proclaims it to be mans enemy. He supports his logic by a simple and effective argument - life as it

exists in a human body is a miracle, and should be valued as much as possible, as even God is often associated with life. While I mostly agree with the last point of view, I believe that both positions may in fact be considered complimentary as if one is able to get rid of the fear of death as of something terrible and only negative he or she may appreciate the miracle of life even more.

As another source of inspiration of my theology of death have served the writings of John Wesley (1703-1791), one of the founders of the Methodist movement within the Protestant Christianity, namely his sermons " The Great Assize" (1758) and " The New Creation" (1785). In them, Wesley in a poetic and at the same time almost documentary language lays out a vision of the Judgment Day, and the consequent rearrangement of the world by God. What was interesting for me in those sermons is the ability of the religious world view to put death into a perspective and connect it with life in such a way that the significance of death depends on the our morality during life. And even if some people would perceive the vivid descriptions of Wesley as an allegory, in his sermons I find the support for the idea that a person can continue to live in a certain sense even after death if her deeds and the impressions left by that person in people continue to persist in memories of the living. This view is actually consistent with the element of the Methodist doctrine, which states that personal salvation, which constitutes the real meaning of death for any religious individual, depends on ones service to the world in frames of the Christian mission.

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