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# *Total Immortality*

GENEVIEVE BURNELL



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Total Immortality  
*Merry Christmas*

Lecture Number  
*from*

ARRISS AND CLIFFORD ACOCKS

BERYL AND CHARLES DRINING

*in* BERYL HANEY

MARGARET KEER

APHORISMS IN ACTION  
MARIA AND JOHN KRULY

AND FELICITAS

*by* IVY McKELLAR

ESTHER REYNOLDS

GEORGE LILLY COURTNEY AND

MANUEL ROMERO

—ROSE TRUMPLER

ROSE ZAHLER

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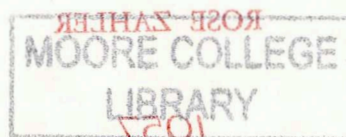
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# Total Immortality

Lecture Number

163

*in the series*

APHORISMS IN ACTION

*by*

GENEVIEVE BURNELL

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## \* Total Immortality

God created man to be immortal, and even more than immortal; He made him to be an image of His own eternity.

God, being infinite and eternal, there is no time nor place left for another than God. God is Life infinite and eternal, with no opposite of Life called death. Life is not death, and death is not death, because Life occupies all.

We have been confronted with the question, What overcomes death? It is a vitiated question that cannot be answered because death does not exist; nevertheless, we shall probe deeply into the question because it is of universal interest; and if we can throw light into the dark places of the mind, we may uncover the unreality and nonexistence of death. The truth is that you could never overcome death if God had created it.

In the Book of Wisdom it says that God made not death, that He does not delight in

\*(Class lecture, July 26, 1957)



the destruction of the living. We are assured that God created man to be immortal, and even more than immortal. "Immortal" means "not subject to death," and is a negative approach. But God has done more than that for man; He has made man to the image of His own eternity—a positive endowment of the greatest possible gift—the gift of Himself to His creature, man. If God had not created man to be immortal, then all the striving of man could not make him immortal; and if death were actually something, the efforts of man would be of no avail.

What is offered, then, as the solution; what is provided for man to meet this need in him? An awareness of life itself! We do not overcome death by pushing death away; certainly there is nothing in this but frustration. People in the world do try to do this, and how futile it all is! Try to keep death at arm's length, and somewhere along the line there is sure to be a collapse.

What is the answer then? The answer can be found only by seeing what death actually is, and that it does not need to be overcome. Instead of pushing it away, we look at it

squarely and accept it for what it is—we do not accept our false ideas of death, but true ideas of what death itself really is.

God made not death, and yet human beings seem to be constantly meeting it. In one of his lectures, my father, \*Mr. Burnell, asked the question: "How long does it take man to get over what he does not have?" How long does it take you to get rid of the things you do not have? How long is it going to take you to get rid of your pink elephants, and your dragons, and your hen's teeth and rabbit's horns? It seems quite hopeless, doesn't it, to try to get over those things? From one angle it is certainly hopeless—hopeless if you are going to attempt to overcome these things. You say, "I am going to overcome my troubles"; and it becomes a wrestling with dragons and windmills—things that are not! How long does it take a person to get over, to get rid of, to overcome these things that do not exist? Certainly no devices offered by the world have ever been successful, because they are all based upon the supposition that there is something definite to overcome.

\*George Edwin Burnell

So it is proposed today that we deal with this subject of Total Immortality—no equivocation, no counterfeits here—total immortality. Because total immortality is the truth, we propose to consider this subject from a number of viewpoints. The mind begins to wrestle around in its own ignorance, its own delusion; it proposes different methods, ways and means, devices, sciences, to overcome that which God did not create. And inevitably the result is that the more he attempts to overcome the nonexistent, the more convinced he is that there is something to overcome.

Today we are going to face this matter. It does not seem to be enough for human beings to simply deny death, to say, "There is no death, God did not create it, therefore there is no death," because this shadow seems to loom up with such ability of obscuration. Therefore we probe, probe, probe, into the very nature of death itself.

We have adequate authority for this probing. Perhaps the best analysis is offered by the mystic Dionysius, in his book "The Divine Names." I am going to quote his words because we like to feel that our findings in re-

gard to these profound subjects are confirmed by authority. Even so, even if we do analyze and dissect the subject, still death is nothing, no matter how much it looms up in our affairs and how resistant we feel toward it, how we worry about it, how frightened we are of it, how we see it happening all around us—even so, death is nothing. Yet we cannot deny the fact that it manifests itself in the seeming annihilation of anything it qualifies.

\*That which we call [death in anything] is merely a tendency of things towards nothingness. Thus sickness is a tendency towards death, and death is simply the cessation of physical vitality. And sin is a tendency towards spiritual death, which is the cessation of spiritual vitality.

It seems very simple when you hear it explained and analyzed this way, and yet it does not seem to help us too much in the situations we see; we are so convinced of annihilation and of the extermination of physical vitality and of spiritual vitality, that reasoning does not seem to dissolve our fears.

The established theory is that by one man and his woman sin entered the world and with

\*The Divine Names, by Dionysius, page 20



sin, death. This has come to suggest to the mind that death is a form of punishment inflicted because man transgressed the law of God, broke the law of his Creator. It is well to remember that man was not made and then a law placed over him; he was made with God's law inherent in him—in other words, he is made to the image of God's eternity. If he disobeys this law of his own being, he severs connection with eternity; and he is like an image disconnected from its substance, deflecting and diffusing itself so that, although the image is not entirely lost, one fails to recognize it because of its scattered appearance.

We have given the definition—there is no better one—for sin: sin is called "broken communion with God." If you break your communion with God, if you forfeit that wonderful spiritual vitality, which is the revelation of God's eternity, you experience what seems to you to be an absence from Him—yet actually absence from God is an impossibility. God does not inflict punishment for man's broken communion with Him. A child who disobeys his parents may lose his privileges as a form of parental punishment; but with man and

God, the forfeiting of original justice which preserved in man this image of God's eternity, is not a punishment laid on man, but rather a deflection sustained in man's own nature resulting from severing the precision of direct reflection. Man's *total* immortality is the perfect image—when man forfeited this, he lost his preternatural gifts; and this loss is man's punishment. Man's greatest punishment must always be his feeling of God's absence. Yet, because God made not death, death is an indirect rather than a direct result of sin.

In the first place, both sin and death are privations in the proper good of being; therefore neither can have positive qualities. How may one negative be the cause of another negative? There are two ways in which one thing may be the cause of something else: one directly, and the other indirectly or accidentally. We do not say that we stumble *over* darkness; we stumble *in* darkness; we make a mistake because we cannot see, but it is not the lack of vision that actually becomes our stumbling-block. It is simply that lack of vision interferes with our seeing. In the same way, when man broke his communion with God, he did not

have the punishment of death inflicted upon him by God Who is Himself all Life, Love, and goodness. God is justice within Himself—which means that He is just to Himself. Being all, He does not have to be just to anything else. He is true to Himself, and, therefore He does not create and then annihilate His creation. In fact, God eternally assists man to know his true Self. Yet the justice of God, being true to Himself, lets man see his own dependence on divine Life. Hence sin—which is naught, which of itself is nothing—cannot be regarded as a direct cause of defects, or of death, but as an indirect source of deflection. For example, if a pillar, which supports a statue, is removed, the statue itself falls. The statue falls because the pillar is removed, not because there is any direct attack upon the statue. In a like manner, when man turns from God Who is his Life, he forfeits the full revelation of this Life; and this lack of revelation is named “death.”

We have been speaking about total immortality which is in us the image of God’s eternity. If our communion with God is interrupted, our specific nature, which is nothingness, creeps into human pictures. We call this inroad of

nothingness in affairs “corruption,” we call it the cessation of physical vitality, we call it death in its manifest aspects of modifying reality. Yet because God made not death, there is no direct cause of death no matter to what beliefs your mind may subscribe.

People come to me and say, “What do you suppose caused this person’s death, why should this person, who has always led such a good life and been so wonderful in every way, become a victim of death?” The mind is always looking for a cause! But there is no direct cause for anything that is not. There is only one true source in all the world for anything, and that source is God; therefore, if God made not death, and does not delight in the destruction of the living, you can be well assured that there is no death and no destruction of the living.

“But,” you say, “I see death all around me, I see my friends die, I see the destruction of the living on all sides.” Your argument is based on seeing and on what you have experienced in your own circle of observation.

Actually there is nothing positive about death; it only seems to be positive because of



the life it modifies, or obscures. Death appears to be something to be overcome because the idea of being positive comes from the life which has seemed to be diminished. But life is truth—God—and cannot ever actually be diminished, therefore the lapsing continues until the true understanding of “all” and “nothing” has attained balance in the mind to the point of perfect reflection.

\*The absence of light from the center of a wooden block is nothing, . . .

says Dionysius, and we are quite willing and ready to accept the fact that light does not exist at all in the center of a block of wood, because this fits into observed patterns in our mind.

The absence of light from the center of a wooden block is nothing, for the light has no proper place there, . . .

Yet strange to say, modern science contends now that there is light in everything, even in a stone. This is a new idea to the mind, and rather puzzling.

. . . but the absence of light from the air, . . .

\*Ibid., page 22

or from your mind, let us say, is something definite to contend with, for it is quite recognizable that—

where light should be, is darkness and is a visible shadow.

It is this visible shadow modifying life that man calls death. Death is spoken of as a shadow, and a shadow is suspected of evil. Yet in the presence of the Lord shadows are not evil, according to the words of David in his Psalm:

\*Even though I walk through the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me.

And in the 91st Psalm we are informed that we live under the shadow of the Almighty. Literally there can be no shadow without light. No death without life to be constantly overcoming the shadow.

Man *ought to be* what he is; any obscuration or shadow over what ought to be, cannot destroy what ought to be even though the obscuration is interminable. Our fight seems to be with the obscuration even though of itself obscuration is nothing but broken communion

\*Cf. Psalm 23

with light. People fight with shadows, even as Don Quixote did with the windmills; so the foolishness of the human mind, in trying to overcome imaginary giants, tears itself to pieces. The mind says, "Why can I not overcome this condition or that situation?" and the more one tries to overcome, the more convinced one is that he has not yet found the right method. So something new is tried, but with equal unsuccess because always the working is to overcome that which does not really exist. No wonder people are so frustrated in their lives!

This should be remembered—that the very ground of a being, even a human being, is God—Absolute Being. Our rational soul, the principle of life to our body, must ultimately be God Who is Life. The principle of life to a man's body is the soul, but God is the principle of life to the soul; therefore life of soul and body is ultimately God. The soul, as the principle of life to the body, must in turn receive life from God; for without God there is no shadow of life in the world. The soul is the image of eternity; so, since the ground of the soul is eternity, the soul itself must be indestructible.

How can it be otherwise when the rational soul was breathed into by God Himself?

Man is made right, consequently this very rightness makes it impossible for any principle of destructiveness to deprive the soul of its authority of being. Any interruption in these rights of existence are only shadows of obscuration, which we may interpret as corruption. But actually, since the ground of the soul is indestructible, cessation of being is truly impossible. Indestructibility in the groundwork of being makes it seem to some who have not discovered the balance between all and nothing, as an everlasting perishing. But the perishing of nothing is merely another way of saying "total immortality." Nothing in the world can destroy the good that God has created, and what God creates is good because He sees it all and announces the truth that it is good. Obscuration cannot possibly diminish by subtraction that goodness which God has ordained to creation. The mind's not seeing may obscure it, perhaps indefinitely! But even total ignorance of one's own mind cannot touch what is. It can prevent our seeing what is—as a cloud may intervene between the earth and the



sun,—but even the blackest clouds have not really diminished the sun's glory; the sun continues to shine even though unseen. As the sun does not stop shining nor diminish its light, so truth is not touched by shadows and clouds of not seeing or not knowing.

No matter how dark one's life may seem to be, the truth of its goodness is indestructible; truth of being is automatic in every person, and this truth is indestructible. Anything inherently bad would of itself entirely cease to exist. There can be no absolute evil, for as such it could neither be visible nor knowable. To be absolute necessitates a positive nature which is not possible to a privation. In fact, absolute privation would not even seem evil because it has no proper being to manifest through. Consequently, there is no absolute death! And, for that reason, our fight with appearances is like trying to overcome shadows. We may not understand this, but the power of understanding is available and very penetrating when once we turn from shadows to light.

The being of each person has its indestructible characteristic of the conscious "I," yet this "I" may think of itself as separate from

all other "I's," even from God Who is the "I Am Who Am." But no one is a separate "I" from the "I Am" of pure Being. Our I Am is a gift from God's I Am, not to be kept separate, but to be returned to the God Who keeps it pure. According to psychologists it is almost impossible for anyone to conceive of nonexistence in relation to himself. He must always conceive of his own being, even of his own nonexistence as some aspect of himself. A person says, "I do not believe I exist"; but he is referring his belief to himself, and therefore contradicting his denial.

There is a post-mortem philosophy about the things that happen to a person after death; but the questions, as well as the desired answers, are based on relations to the self that is seeking the knowledge. You would be surprised at the questions people ask on these subjects: "What kind of a place is it that we live in after death? What happens to the body after it is dead? What does the soul do when death has come to the body?" This post-mortem search has been, and always must be, a complete failure to the mind of the searcher, because the mind's own relation to life and

death is on a false premise. It is the mind, in an attempt to perpetuate its own ideas and feelings, that has set forth such an irrational theory as that of "reincarnation." Our individual self, not being able to distinguish between his own ego and the true Self, thinks of himself as being perpetuated by projection into some other form of existence conceivable in his own mind. Quite irrational is this mental prison of one's own ego.

A return to rationality brings man back to the recognition of what life really is: Life is God. And God does not begin and end in different experiences; God *is*, and this includes "was" and "will be" and "ever can be."

\*"Truth is eternity—such is the perception of presence." From the viewpoint of eternity, whatever the stage or the phase of life, it is still *the* life. You may say, "This is *my* life." And you may spin out all the relationships of a human television show regarding your life. Your life, quite distinct from every other "I's" life—"This is my life," you say, "and all these people are somehow relevant to my life." But always

\*AXIOMS: Book of Health  
by George Edwin Burnell

we make our own self the center, and all the other "I's" related to what we have determined ourselves to be according to a finite perception. But, from the viewpoint of eternity, life is seen and known in its absolute and universal truth. In every place and in every time, no matter what the seeming condition of whatever specific life, life must be *the* life. And that true life, even though it seems to be completely obscured and overshadowed, must actually be God complete and perfect. Life at every point of experience must be truth, even though, perhaps, not realized as yet. Whatever the superimposed conditions, whatever the seemingly determined state, whatever the place where life is manifest, and whatever the lot life is seen in, life must ever be *the* life; there is only one life, and that life is God—the "I Am Who Am." "Person" is the individual self of a rational nature. Therefore each person is himself this rational and divine life. The life of every life is received in your soul and channeled to your body, but life itself is *the* life which is God.

The most wonderful healings have taken place when a person realizes, suddenly or gradually, that no matter what the darkness of his



experience or what appear to be the conditions of his living, that the only life there is to live, is that life of God; that there is no other life.

This perception is divinely rational; and when its rationality has taken complete possession of you—rather than you trying to hold the perception—the physical sense of well-being, mentally, spiritually, and socially, is miraculous.

No matter what the condition, no matter what the place, no matter what the lot, where there is life—even though only seen through a glass darkly—it is *the* life; and there can be no death to *the* life.

People often think that certain experiences in their lives bring them closer to God than do some other less heartening conditions. In the depths of the darkness a person cries out: "Oh, to stand in the light where God can see me and I can see God! Deliver me from this blackness and desperation; then I will be willing to die; but let me not die in these depths of despair." Then again someone may say of another: "Too bad my friend could not have seen the light before he died." Do you believe that light is closer to God than darkness?

Every point of a perfect circle is equally close to the center. We speak of the zenith and the nadir of the circle, but which is nearer the center? And which is the up and which is the down of man's relation to God?

From the eternal point of view any life that considers itself as particular and individual is as much apart from truth as life can ever be. The nadir of life can only be that aspect of life which feels itself out of communion with God, independent of its source. But no matter how glistening and bright the activity of such a living, it is darkness in so far as the perception of truth is concerned.

People tend to make their pictures of success or failure in accordance with what others have done; they seek for comparisons, and say: "What frustration this particular person has experienced; he has surely lived in vain, he has accomplished nothing, he might just as well never been born at all as to be such a failure to himself and others."

Do you think that clouds and shadows and smog of human ignorance can obliterate indestructible truth? No person's life is in vain; because wherever life is, it is *the* life. And no

matter what the aspect of life that is experienced, it must be the life that does the experiencing. Overcoming death is not by pushing any part of life away, nor by being afraid of darkness. Being horrified at the thought of death is not freedom from death. If we are to embrace life, we must do so when death seems most inevitable. The pictures your mind paints of life or of death—because they are both only pictures—must both be transcended to find real closeness to that divine center which is absolute life, which is God.

People distinguish: "That person is dead, this person is alive," yet to the eternal point of view life and death are not opposites any more than the zenith and the nadir of the circle are contradictions; actually both are circle. So with every experience no matter what the picture—life or death are all circle. Only our relationship to the circle makes us see the up and the down. The eternal Self which is the Self of all selves is the only experience of any life. From the eternal point of view there is no contradiction between the one and the many. There could not be many were it not for the one. God is a super-unity, the Supreme

One Who overflows into multiplicity, yet never is separated from One. Super-unity, overflowing into multiplicity, penetrates all phases and aspects of living experience with the true experience of life as it is. The only possible life must be that true life, that true being, that reality which is the automatic "I" in every person.

So many questions are asked by the mind—the mind that is seeking to explain why it does not see things as they really are! One of the prevailing questions is about immortality: "If God made man immortal, if He made him the image of His own eternity, why is it that this image in us so far falls short of the eternity it is made to represent? Why does the image in us reveal death rather than life?"

Saint Thomas Aquinas has given a very satisfactory illustration of this enigma, if our minds can accept and translate the mystery. Man is made right, and yet to maintain rightness man must always need God. For without God there is no subsistence to the rightness. Communion with the Creator is a prerequisite of human nature. Otherwise, the shadows which are really nothing, confuse the mind by



obscuring the light in which we must ever seek our light. Shadows in your own mind must themselves be overshadowed by the Spirit of truth, that even darkness may be freed from all sense of evil, because **only truth and goodness prevail.**

This is the illustration used by Saint Thomas to elucidate the mystery of man's dependence on God:

\*A smith in order to make a knife, chooses a matter both hard and flexible, . . .

Have you ever thought of yourself as a knife? Sometimes you may seem very cutting to your friends when you leave off the proverbial kid gloves. We have been told that the Word of God in us is like a two-edged sword of discernment, so intellectually sharp, so penetrating and keen of perception, that it can cut between the bone and the marrow of observations. In any case, God in decreeing this instrument of touch—man—chose material most suitable to the purpose in view.

[As a] smith in order to make a knife, chooses a matter both hard and flexible, . . .

\*The "Summa Theologica," of St. Thomas Aquinas, Volume 7, page 454

In the material itself there are contradictory forces that the instrument may serve all purposes.

. . . matter both hard and flexible, which can be sharpened so as to be useful for cutting, and in respect of this condition [steel out of which the knife is made] is a [substance well] adapted for a knife: . . .

The smith could have used glass for his knife and thus prevented rust. But glass lacks the flexibility necessary to a good knife. Glass is brittle and shatters, and glass will not lend itself to a sharp edge as will steel. The smith wants a knife that is made right, therefore he selects material that is suitable to the end in view.

Man's body, we are told, is made of the slime of the earth. But slime is not evil; it is a compound of the elements, water and earth. The higher elements also enter into the construction of man, but all in perfect order and balance. Where the higher elements—fire, ether, and air—predominate in power, the lower, such as water and earth, predominate in quantity; for in this way man is made right in every way for the revelation of God's perfection. The

perfection is not in the elements, not in the instrument itself, but in the capacity man has for God, in Whose image he is made. That steel be breakable and inclined to rust, results, not from the fact that the smith has selected wrong material, but from the nature of the material being intrinsically dependent on the smith to maintain its usability. From the natural disposition of man toward nothingness, there must ever be communion with God the Creator to insure man's rightness; for there is no rightness without God. God made all things from nothing, yet nothing is not the material cause of anything. Because creation is from nothing, without God creation would return to its pristine nothingness. God is not only the Creator but the preserver of all things. Creation from nothing does not constitute a duality; rather is it a revelation; for in the double aspect we have a symbol of nonduality, as a reflection in a mirror proves not another, but identity with the substance reflected. So all things being made from nothing, does not contest place with true substance. The Divine Artist chose for His Creation, man, material suitable to His masterpiece. Man is God's masterpiece because he

does not contest place with God, but reveals God in the rightness of his being.

Man is made right in that he has a capacity for God; and until he expresses God, he cannot find perfection or experience satisfaction. Man is nothing apart from God.

Like the material chosen by the smith for the knife, the material of man's physical body is chosen for its temperament and disposition to receive the light of Light. Man's soul is to reflect rational truth, and man's body to express rational truth in all phases and aspects of experience in the circle of life.

Because man is nothing apart from God, whatever man has or is must be God's gift to him. Man does not stand alone! Man must always receive from God and return to God what he has received—like the image in the mirror. What can the image do of itself? To be a proper image it must ever return the light it has received to the substance of its imagery. Were the mirror to become ambitious, the image itself would suffer, not as punishment, but as the result of contradicting its own nature.

But God, to Whom every nature is subject, in forming man supplied the defect of nature, . . .



God supplies the substance and subsistence to man's nothingness. Because man is nothing of himself, he can reveal God's eternity as the image of total immortality.

... and by the gift of original justice, gave the body a certain incorruptibility, ...

By God's gift of original justice divine subsistence is maintained, and the nothingness of human flesh receives the seal of incorruptibility. Only if man forfeits original justice by turning from his Creator does he experience a sense of death within his own heart; yet in spite of this human sense of death, man can never cease to be what he is: the image and likeness of God.

In our world we see continuous dying, but actually this is only a shadowing sense of our own nothingness. We fight this sense; we try to resist it and become angry and upset when we fail to overcome its manifold expression. But the answer is not in fighting the windmills and the shadows, but in receiving and accepting God's light of intelligence to be our illum-

ination and show us convincingly the truth that God made us immortal and even more than immortal, for He gave us as our very being, the image of His eternity.

Then, O man, thou art the image of God!

Let us not be oblivious of this benediction, and let us not fall into the delusion of being counterfeits in which is present only the very opposite of the divine image. For if in God, Who is eternal and unchangeable and perfect, all things live, and in ourselves they seem to die and perish, then we are not conforming to God's image of eternity; we are not accepting the gift He has granted us—Himself.

Let us not resemble the unhealthy, counterfeit image that contradicts truth; but let us reveal in ourselves this miracle that only the good and the perfect and the true are real, and let us become aware of this. Instruction can point out truth to us, but the actual awakening to that all-pervading truth, that only which is truly real, that eternal and unchangeable and perfect reality of Life, this real awakening must take place in our individual consciousness. We must come alive to Life. So let this

miracle come to life in us and be to us, not only our immortality, but even more—the revelation in us of the eternity of God.

\*All the Presence there is,  
All the Power there is,  
All the Consciousness there is,  
Is *Love*, the *Living Spirit Almighty*.

GENEVIEVE BURNELL

\*AXIOMS: Book of Health,  
by George Edwin Burnell, page 80



