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E A S T E R

by

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THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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You may have noticed in the newspapers a controversy in New Zealand about life after death which has had its echos in our Sydney papers. I was asked the other day by a Humanist what evidence there is for life after death and there is, of course, none if we confine ourselves to our own experience. Of ourselves we know nothing beyond this life and the fact that, with the poet Tennyson, we think we were not made to die in itself proves nothing. But we are not left to our own resources in making up our minds on this matter, for we have a Word from God which is very clear. Only God can tell us of what is in store for us after death, for He alone has knowledge of the hereafter. But in the New Testament we have revelation from God with regard to the future.

Jesus Himself taught very clearly that for Christians death will not interrupt our fellowship with our heavenly Father. On the Thursday evening

before His crucifixion He told His disciples "In my Father's house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you... I will come again and take you unto myself that where I am there you may be also (Jn. 14:1). A little while before He had told His friend Martha as she grieved for her brother's death "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (Jn. 11:25).

The Apostle Paul, writing in the New Testament, is equally explicit. He told his young friend Timothy "The time of my departure is at hand, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life" (2 Tim. 4:8). The resurrection of Christ on Easter Day is the sign and seal of our own resurrection. Of course, if your faith in God is weak and your views of His power meagre, you will have difficulty in believing either in the resurrection of Christ or in your own future resurrection. Thus Professor Lampe, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford



finds difficulty in believing in the resurrection of Christ because he says "We clearly cannot expect to be raised in our fleshly bodies and our resurrection from death which will not be physical cannot be different in kind from His." (The Resurrection, G.W.H. Lampe and D.M. Mackinnon). But we ought not to limit the power of God in this way just because we find it difficult to see how God will bring about His promise. We are surrounded by events no less extraordinary than the resurrection, but which because they are so customary we take for granted. For example, the growth of a human being from the minutest speck, steadily growing according to a regular pattern without any guidance from anything outside its own cells is a most remarkable event. As the child's poet has put it: It is a very strange fact, as strange as can be, that whatever Miss T. eats turns into Miss T. Because it is so common and ordinary we don't sufficiently reflect how really extraordinary our life is. We can observe and

describe the process of life in great detail. But the description is quite a different thing from our explaining it. We usually speak about growth as a process of nature simply because it happens so frequently and so regularly, but God is the author and it is His power that brings it about, and it is well within the ability of the author of our nature to raise us after death with our bodies even though we cannot see how this will come about. But in the resurrection of Christ we already have the firstfruits and exemplar of our own resurrection and its proof. For Professor Lampe to say that because he cannot believe in his own resurrection he therefore cannot believe in Christ's is an extraordinary piece of inverted reasoning, especially since Christ's resurrection is substantiated as a historical fact by the evidence. Scientists can describe it detail by detail, and this is often mistakenly thought to be an explanation, but no-one can explain why it should happen



the way it does, for the explanation lies in the will and power of God. Let us consider this evidence for a moment. There is the fact that Christ Himself predicted it. At His trial His enemies testified that He said that He would destroy the temple and raise it up after three days. By this he meant His body, for the evangelists record Him telling His disciples on more than one occasion that He would be put to death and be raised the third day (e.g. Mk. 8:31).

Secondly, there is the reiterated testimony of those who said that they had seen and talked with Jesus after His resurrection on many different occasions. We know that they were men and women of integrity of character, and some were very hard headed and not likely to be taken in. In fact the Apostle Thomas refused point blank to believe what others said till he was convinced himself by first hand experience of seeing Jesus after He had risen. They were men who had knocked about the world such as fishermen and

tax collectors. Their clear testimony is not easy to set aside. If you don't believe that Jesus rose from the dead how do you explain the fact that these men said that they had been with Him after His resurrection.

There is the further evidence of the change in character of the disciples. Before the crucifixion they acted in a way we can all understand: they were frightened; they fled away when Jesus was arrested; when confronted with their relationship to Him they denied it; they kept away from the scene of the crucifixion and afterwards when they gathered in the upper room St. John tells us that they had the doors bolted for fear of the Jews. Yet these same men a few weeks later were boldly preaching Christ and the resurrection in the very place where His foes had crucified Him and when brought before the same court which had condemned Jesus, Peter, instead of denying Him as previously, said fearlessly



when told to stop preaching:  
"We must obey God rather than man. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you killed and hanged on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins; and we are witnesses of these things" (Acts 5:29-32). How are we to account for the historic fact of this remarkable change in the disciples, apart from the cause to which they themselves ascribed it, namely that God has raised Jesus from the dead and so set His seal on Him as Lord. An event as remarkable as this change of character in the disciples must have an adequate cause. Anyone who does not accept the fact that God raised Christ from the dead and that He appeared to the Apostles and commissioned them to preach, as the New Testament records, is under obligation to offer some other adequate explanation of this change, but none has been forthcoming.

Lastly, there is the very



cogent evidence of the empty tomb. The three women walking to the sepulchre early in the morning asked themselves the question "Who will roll away the stone for us?" and they were most surprised to find that it was rolled away. If it was too heavy for three women to roll then it would take at least two men, but why should anybody be about at that early hour and why roll away the stone? The Scriptures say it was rolled back by God's super natural power. When the women looked in they saw the tomb empty and a young man testified that Christ had risen. Later that morning Peter and John ran to the tomb. They went in and found the tomb empty and the grave clothes lying in it.

How is the empty tomb to be accounted for? The Jewish leaders said the whole thing was a hoax, that the disciples had taken away the body. But this, of course, is quite incredible. We know the character of the disciples in the way the Jewish leaders did not

and we also know their subsequent history, how they were willing to suffer all sorts of hardships for the truth of their message that Christ was risen. Had they been the author of a hoax they would not have sustained this sort of character throughout their life.

Some modern writers suggest that the tomb was not empty. But this is equally incredible. The place of the apostles' preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead was Jerusalem itself. The tomb where He had been laid was only a few yards away. The Chief Priest was so determined to put down the new teaching that they had the apostles arrested and Saul of Tarsus was their agent in going about from house to house arresting believers and putting them in prison. Had Jesus not risen from the dead in any literal way as some modern theologians want us to believe it would have been so simple for the Pharisees to have produced the body, and that would have brought the preaching

to a firm and sudden end. But all the opponents were able to do was to say the apostles had stolen away the body, which is confirmatory evidence that the tomb was empty. How did it become empty? Two explanations only were offered: One, by the Pharisees, that the apostles had taken away the body; the other by the apostles, that God had raised Christ from the dead, as a seal on His Lordship and as the firstfruits of our own resurrection for all who believed in Him.

The Resurrection is the most remarkable event in history. It should take its proper place in our outlook on the world, as it is the proof that God is at work amongst mankind. Easter is a festival celebrating the glorious fact that God has not left us in our sins, Christ has died for us. He has borne our penalty and has risen again to be our living Lord. We should renew our faith in God's sovereign power, come to Him for forgiveness and look forward to His fulfilment of His promises



in the future when we also will  
rise again to enjoy His eternal  
inheritance to be with Christ  
Who is crowned as Victor at  
God's right hand.

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26 March 1967.