

9. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

On the basis of our baptism and the forgiveness of our sins, the creed concludes with the promise of the resurrection and the life of the world to come. As Christians we believe, and therefore hope, that just as Christ is risen from the dead and lives for ever, so after death we will live for ever with the risen Christ who will raise us up on the last day. The belief in our resurrection has been an essential element of the Christian faith from the beginning. St. Paul is quite clear that 'if there is no resurrection of the dead' and 'Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and our faith is in vain.' It was Tertullian who spoke of this belief in the resurrection as 'the confidence of Christians'.

But just how confident are we for there are a number of questions that need to be addressed if our minds are to be set at rest? For 'How do the dead rise' – What does rising mean? The new catechism says that in death there is the separation of the soul from the body, the human body decays and the soul goes to meet God while awaiting reunion with its glorious body. The scriptures and indeed the Prayer Book assure us that Christ 'will change our lowly Body to be like his glorious body. 'But how? Well, says St. Paul, 'the perishable nature will put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality', so what's the problem? 'Where is death's sting, where is death's victory?' It still, however, leaves a lot to the imagination; so the catechism wisely concludes that the 'how' is beyond our imagination and our understanding.

That's the how, so what about when? It isn't quite so simple as the stuff I say at funerals. We are told it will be on 'the last day', but how long is that? Have I got to wait for the Parousia to be recognisably me again? The moment when 'The Lord will descend and the archangel will sound the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first.' Do I have to wait that long, for don't we believe that believers already participate in the heavenly life of the Risen Christ? Yes we do. The catechism says 'the believer's body and soul already participate in the dignity of belonging to Christ... and on the last day will appear with him in glory.'

So where are we going? It all sounds a bit complicated so far when all we want to know is what is going to happen to us wouldn't we? To simplify things we'll forget the last judgement, Purgatory, the final purification, Hell, (after all we are having a celebration today!) and set our sights on Heaven! Again its more complicated than I make it sound at the crematorium, there's what happens when we die, and then there's the end of time, when, as the Book of Revelation tells us, God will 'wipe every tear from our eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.' Whatever else may happen in the meantime, for us believers who have been members of the Church, we will form that community of the redeemed in 'the Holy City of God', assured of that Beatific Vision – God himself – when, as St. Augustine of Hippo put it in his great tome, 'The City of God', 'we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise, for this is to be the end without end of all our living, the kingdom of God, the real goal of our present life.' Being an Anglican I want this now, or at least as soon as possible after this life, for me and those I love both here and who have gone on ahead!

So, where do I place my hope, my faith? Are we really all going to end up in purgatory, not really aware of who we are or not aware of the presence of those we love who have passed from this life before us? And so I turn to an Anglican theologian, again our old friend Professor John Macquarrie to see what he has to offer! He certainly doesn't seem to like the idea of some disembodied existence after death, the soul separate from the body, he says this 'should probably not be called existence at all – for, he says, one only exists in relation to other persons and things and such relations are only possible through the body.' He says the New Testament is quite clear resurrection means just that, a full existence and that includes having a body of some sort rather than a disembodied soul. If we want to talk about eternal life, and isn't this what St. John talks about in his gospel, well Macquarrie says, eternal life lies somewhere at the limit of our capability for transcendence, what he calls the limits of our self hood as human beings. Again he makes it sound quite complicated, but tells us to look at what happened to Jesus, including his cross and resurrection... then we will see what is destined to take place in all mankind. He quotes, St. Athanasius, who wrote, 'He was made man, that we might be God.' Such, he says, 'will be the completion of that eternal life into which in varying degrees, man enters now... and we are impelled to seek.'

So what of Heaven? Does Macquarrie bring it any closer for us? It's a difficult one. Heaven, says Macquarrie, partly because it has become 'entangled in so much mythological imagery', but perhaps more importantly, because it so easily becomes associated with egocentric longings – especially if we think it is some kind of reward for good conduct.' No, he says, it's not a reward that gets added on to the life of faith, rather it is the end of that life, and stands as a symbol for fullness of being.... The fruition of our own increasing closeness to God so that the individual being converges upon Being (his name for God) 'The Beatific Vision' as described by St. Augustine. Not an egocentric craving but a closeness to God that we see in Christ himself, especially his self offering, an outpouring of self. It was, Macquarrie reminds us, this insight which led the early church to believe that only martyrs might enter heaven immediately but that other Christians would need purification. In the martyrs we see the perfecting of self giving love, a love that seeks

no reward! For Macquarrie Heaven is simply the goal of human existence, a kind of upper limit and yet with further possibilities beyond it! He believes in purgatory too but only as a process by which we become fitted for Heaven, surrendering our ego-centred self to a God centred self. As in Christ we see the universal fact of physical decay and death, so it becomes in him the sacrament of the inward and spiritual truth that life must be wholly surrendered before it can be wholly won!

Whilst acknowledging that Christian theologians are still in quest of a metaphysic that does full justice to the Easter Gospel, Professor Quick takes up similar ideas to Macquarrie, including that surrender of the self! Reminding us that none of what we believe is about personal survival as such but rather as the New Testament shows us, it's about life restored and glorified through and by means of death, an idea that goes beyond a doctrine of immortality! He speaks of our movement towards this life as 'a process of increasing tension and conflict leading to a crisis in which the earthly man must wholly die in order wholly to receive life.' He points out the confusion of ideas that many of us have about life after death focused around two in particular, first the idea that the soul or personality of a man goes on existing when the Body dies. He says this idea doesn't have any particular connection with any particular belief about God. However that doesn't mean we can't believe in a life after death that is not based on the faith we have about the being of God himself. The thought that we can be partakers of an immortality or eternity which is properly divine is not beyond our grasp, and so the question is not about the human soul surviving the death of the body rather the question is 'Is the human soul capable of rising into or receiving a higher kind of life which is somehow akin to God's?' He says that in answering that question we reach the religious doctrine of immortal or eternal life for man, based not on the nature of the human soul but upon the relation which exists between the human soul and God.

Quick says that as we look at the scriptures where he says there is 'a lack of any positive information as to what happens to the human soul when the body dies. He also says that for all its emphasis on the glorious hope of resurrection, the New Testament gives no kind of answer to those who want to know what's happened to their loved ones! In drawing his conclusions I found he did help me in my own believing even if I am still searching for an answer that in fact does full justice to the Easter Gospel I say I believe in. There is so little information and yet we Christians long for some definite knowledge about the condition of our dear departed loved ones. We may not find the answers we want in this life yet as Christians we surely believe there is a difference between just surviving and eternal life, a life which begins now by giving ourselves to the Christ who died and rose again for us, this mortal personality of each of us must at the last, through death put on immortality!

Quick concludes that to be 'made a partaker of Christ's life, here and hereafter, as in heaven so on earth, is what the Christian means by life eternal.' We dare not say how far on the other side of physical death we will become fully at one with God, the Beatific Vision, but he reminds us that we can not either say 'how far Christ's greatest saints have been received into the life of heaven' 'even before' he says 'in the body they crossed the narrow stream.' Lovely words and all I know is that when the time comes I do not want to cross the stream alone, the angels will guide me on the way, I believe I shall be with those I have loved in this life as well as having to face up to the actions I have taken in this life, good and bad. I believe love is not destroyed by and indeed is stronger than death. I take heart from the Saints and above all from Mary who we believe was assumed body and soul in heaven and sits close by her son, and with St Joseph of course. This thought gives me continued hope for myself and all whom I love.

Can you imagine eternal life without those we have loved in this life? I certainly can't, I assure people over and over again that we will meet again. I know that was my hope as I lay there waiting for my heart operation – a dark night of the soul. I believe in God's love for each of us and I believe in our love for each other too! Quick triumphantly concludes 'surely this much we know, that whenever and not until, a man's surrender of himself to the God of love has been altogether accomplished, will he attain the end of his being. and that end is not death but life.' To which I add a life I hope and I want to believe we share not just with God in the Beatific vision but with all those others whom we have loved and yet lost awhile