

# *Qua Vadis?*

**EVANGELISASIEBLAD VAN DIE GEREFORMEERDE KERKE IN SUID-AFRIKA**

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## **The Death of Death**

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## **FUTILE WORLD**

**"The world is unhappy. It is unhappy because it doesn't know where it is going and because it senses that if it knew, it would discover that it is heading for a disaster."**

Whether these words of Giscard d'Estaing were meant to extend to the ultimate destiny of mankind and of his world, or were limited to a mere temporal and short-term diagnosis of man's ills, one cannot say. Nevertheless, they sum up, most aptly, the hopes and fears that constitute man's great dilemma, which is simply this: an indestructible hope in his own immortality — in life after life, as it were — and, yet, no real knowledge, no indisputable proof of what awaits him beyond death. No traveler, as the poet rightly said, has come back from that bourn from which there is no return.

Though, recent studies of the post-death experiences of a number of men and women by psychiatrists Moody and Kubler-Ross, have caused a flutter of excitement, this has provided no lasting respite from the gnawing of doubt and conscience. For a while it has gone down on record that "most of those interviewed say that the death-experience was beautiful and peaceful, that they were completely happy and unafraid, and that they were reluctant to return," other scientists have questioned the validity of the results as conclusive proof of an "afterlife", believing the whole thing to be another fad.

Man is left no further along the road of knowledge concerning life after death than which he ever was, and his dilemma remains. Something of the loneliness and the forlornness, which haunts mankind, pushes its way to the surface (for man will not have it known that anything is wrong) according to the words of Fellini, the film producer or Epicurus, the philosopher or even W B Yeats, the poet. Epicurus said, "What men fear is not that death is annihilation, *but that it is not!*" Yeats wrote,

"Nor dread nor hope attend  
A dying animal;  
A man awaits his end  
dreading and hoping all"

Fellini saw himself as being in a tiny boat adrift upon the great ocean ... waiting for something; perhaps a Martian!

## **DELIVERER?**

Is it some deliverer, in the form of a Martian or whatever, mankind awaits? Is it a visitor, from outer space, who will draw near and confirm our hope, that "nameless longing" peculiar to mankind, that we have a destiny, which lies beyond this life and beyond the stars, in an existence surpassing in glory all that this world could ever offer?

Well, the most wonderful news is that He has come! Not in a spaceship to be sure — but indeed He has come, He certainly has! You've not read anything of this in the papers, nor seen anything about it on television, you say?

No, well, you see, it happened a long time ago that the Deliverer or Redeemer of mankind was born in a stable in Bethlehem. Yes, it was in a stable and His mother was a humble woman, who was far from rich though she came from good Jewish stock.

You feel they could have done a better promotion job? You think you know now why the world didn't sit up and take notice of the coming of God's own Son?

Well, in a way, you're perfectly right! In fact, Jesus had little success in convincing His own people, the Jews, that He was the Savior of the world, and then, let us remember, their whole history and tradition, their religion — their very life as a nation, as God's people — had woven into it's very fabric, the bright and glorious hope that the great deliverer of mankind, the Messiah, would be born, would come from the ranks of Judaism.

And, of course, never was the Redeemer more longingly awaited, more desperately needed than in that period, when the wise men, the magi from the east, saw His star in the night skies and sought Him out to worship Him in that Bethlehem stable. Palestine and the Jewish nation were oppressed by the yoke of Rome! Leaders and people alike were hoping and praying for a liberator, the Liberator, to come and, with a flourish of great power and glory, crush their oppressors and inaugurate a golden age of peace, joy and prosperity.

What did they, in fact discover? John the Baptist, who had broken the 400 years of prophetic silence, proclaimed, "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie." And again, "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." It was of Jesus Christ he spoke, and all Palestine was trembling with excitement and expectancy. Before long, from village to village, the word was hurriedly taken of miracles that were being performed by Jesus, the carpenter's son. The blind could see, the deaf hear and the lame leap! Even the dead were being raised!

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But no deliverance from the Roman oppressors! No triumphant victory for Israel! The hated legions of Caesar still marched the streets. It is not surprisingly that John the Baptist enquired, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

That, in essence, was the problem, they should have been expecting someone else than the one they, mistakenly, had been led to expect. It is still mankind's problem!

## ***Deliverer***

### **FROM DEATH AND DESOLATION !!**

Instant relief from pain and suffering, without much concern, and who really wants to know the truth of the matter, for the causes, has led to the mere treatment of symptoms and hence our tranquilizer and sleeping tablet generation.

Alcohol, drugs and ostrich politics (whether local or international) are a few of the means we use in other areas than the purely physical, to find release from pain and discomfort, from embarrassment and sheer disaster. We forget that it is treatment of the root cause of the problem, not merely the symptoms of the problem that brings about the cure, whether of our physical condition, our marriages, our societal chaos or our international fiasco's. Here, too, lies the solution to our great dilemma, our hopes and fears as human beings.

Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world did not come to treat the symptoms, but to strike a blow at the root cause of all our misery and suffering. He came into this world, the Bible tells us, to save sinners, to call sinners to repentance. Sin, you see, is at the root of our troubles, and it must be destroyed, or it will destroy us forever. The wages, sin pays, are disastrous. Death is what the sinner takes home in his pay-envelope! No, my friend, not annihilation but eternal misery and suffering, against which, all earthly forms, mild and extreme, had sought to warn you.

What has Christ, the Redeemer and Savior done? He has brought about the death of death! No Roman legions for Him, no mere human oppressors to tackle! For Christ seeks the cause of God's displeasure and the resultant consequences of pain, suffering, death and damnation for mankind. To sin, death and Satan He throws down the gauntlet and triumphs for God and man!

**Death is what the sinner takes  
home in his pay-envelope**

How has the Son of God accomplished this? He suffered death and the very agonies of hell in the place of sinners. On a Roman cross, outside the walls of Jerusalem, the final phase of Christ's suffering as the Substitute for sinner's, was enacted. There He paid the penalty, the price of mankind's rebellion against God, of humanity's sin against its Creator — namely, death and damnation! He became a curse for us in order to redeem us from the curse of God's law, which it lays upon everyone who does not continue to carry it out in every detail. And as the Bible so clearly puts it,

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God."

**We're O.K! We're the  
beautiful damsel in  
distress and our Prince  
Charming must rescue us  
and love us forever!**

Why in this particular way, do we ask? Why did He have to suffer and die? Could man not have been delivered in some other way?

You are touching on an important point here. Here lies the reason behind the Jew's rejection of Christ, but also the reason for the world's rejection of Him. Our pride, our self-assurance and total acceptance of ourselves as we are, rules out this liberation or salvation, which God provides through Christ, the

Son. We're O.K! We're the beautiful damsel in distress and our Prince Charming must rescue us and love us forever — just as we are!

To this God says that there is need of drastic change, major surgery and total renewal! But even before this radical transformation takes place, you must be cleaned up! I can't bear to look at you, the muck and mire of your sins makes you an offense to my nostrils.

There it is, you see. Christ had to die just as He had to be born out of a woman. As the Substitute of sinners, He had to take on human nature, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. As a very man, He Who was very God, pacified the anger of the just and holy Creator of all mankind, and turned the face of God, averted in loathing and disgust, upon us again in love and mercy. Every phase of our human existence, from cradle to grave, is covered by the willing obedience and sacrificial suffering of the Son of God, who came so that we might have life.

Life, He offers to us sinners, in the place of our just deserts. His death for sinners has robbed death and the grave of the victory they had over us; and set before us is that destiny for which we were originally created — eternal, abundant life in the presence of our Maker.

The life which Christ's suffering and death have secured for sinners begins, here, in this life, and death becomes no more than the entrance into the perfection and full enjoyment of all the facets of this gem, God's gift of real, true life.

What is your choice? Will you wait for the Martians? Are you content to wait for the unknown with all its uncertainty and agony for a conscience-burdened heart and soul? Or, will you take as your Redeemer, God's Christ? Here, you are not dealing with the unknown, but with the One whose heart and intentions have been revealed to us not merely in words, but in deeds. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."