

The Global Culture of Death

When the history of our era is told, we'll read of the tumbling of its taboos. There is nothing we cannot now discuss in polite society, at least here in the West. Sex used to be forbidden talk (sometimes unhealthily so), but then came the 1960s sexual revolution. Now, regardless of the audience, we chat freely of affairs, random sexual encounters, same-sex relationships, and the politics of gender identity. Lobbying for the right to bestiality should kick off at anytime.

Once sex became a free-for-all, death became the taboo. Inevitably so. We didn't want to hear that unrestricted sex, as British celebrity Russell Brand recently admitted, kills the life of the soul. It can also kill the body, although this danger is now largely offset by today's drugs. We choose rather to marginalize those pesky Christians who remind us that after death God calls us to account for our actions (Hebrews 9:27). It is easier to rage at Christ followers than to return to the wisdom of one man and one woman for life, which God has revealed for our good.

Yet, going silent about death has spectacularly failed. How so?

Death Is Inevitable

Everyone dies. To quote British historian Simon Schama, "The scythe of humanity [is] always busy, never fussy." Death results from sin and reminds us of our inability to repair our relationship to God, the fountain of eternal life (Romans 6:23). Yet, there are the likes of (the



late!) Robert Ettinger (1918–2011), the father of cryogenics (left), who believe death can be beaten. Currently, for \$28,000, you can have your body frozen in liquid nitrogen until a cure is found for (Photo: <https://persona.rin.ru/eng/gallery/25241.jpg>)

the condition from which you died. Yet, there is a problem: The 200 or so bodies stored in Michigan

are already dead! Supposing they could be brought back to physical life, what of their souls which are long gone from their bodies? Cryogenics, if successful, could enable us to breathe again but not to live. The thought is commendable—life *is* priceless (www.cryonics.org/)—but the cryogenic pursuit of eternal life is flawed.

Death Is in Demand

More common is the choosing of death over life. The "lucky ones" making it out of the womb have no right to murder, unless, bizarrely, they are aborting their own—over 1.5 billion worldwide since 1980 (www.numberofabortions.com/). We rightly memorialize the dead of Auschwitz, yet brazenly justify this staggering atrocity. Contrast recent Irish celebrations of abortion with ultrasound scans and online images of the aborted to see how complicit we are in today's holocaust. Then there's the unending succession of massacres here in America. Young children, barely weaned, are learning that peers die in shocking and unnecessary ways. Get to your teens, and you've arrived at the first of the life stages marked by suicide (up 30 percent overall in the U.S. in the last 10 years). The clamor is on in the West for the right to aid others in ending their lives, and if they won't, the medical profession may gain the right to. This is the fruit of humanism: Man is no different than an ape. Dispose of him or her at will, forbidding anyone to trouble your conscience.



In the Middle East and Africa there's the suicide bomber, and ungodly parents offering up their children to get shot by soldiers in the hope of swaying opinion. East or west, there is a global revolt against God, the Lord of life. We know that choosing death is sinful—God has etched this conviction on our hearts (Romans 2:14-16)—yet we make the choice when it suits us, rejecting in addition the eternal life God offers us. Thought to be rational, this decision is highly irrational and self-defeating.

Come to the Light of Life!

If you are thinking by now that this issue of *The Way* is dark, you are partially right. It depicts reality, yet our purpose is not to dwell on the morbid but to point you to the hope that billions over the centuries have found in Jesus Christ. The very word *gospel* means *good news*. In fact, when the Bible translator William Tyndale (1494–1536) came to translate the Greek of the New Testament, he described the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) as “that which makes a man’s heart leap or dance for joy.” Our prayer for you is that you would also discover this joy in Christ.

As you contemplate Christ’s call to leave your darkness for his light, consider three things.

Where You Are

In a fallen world, everyone sins. There are, of course, the irreligious who could not care less about God or his will for their lives (lives he has created). Such is their blindness that they call good evil and evil good. They are so bent on sinning that God eventually gives them over to their sins and its consequences. They begin, in effect, to feel the initial waves of his righteous anger against sin even in this life (Romans 1:18-32).



Take a look at these protestors and you get the point. You’ll find online that even atheists disapprove of them, for they give the game away. Namely, that at the heart of the protest for abortion are not the rights of women, but the desire to be entirely free

of Jesus’ claims over their lives. (Photo: <https://churchpop.com/2017/01/23/this-vile-anti-christian-sign-was-not-at-the-womens-march-on-washington/>).

Yet, the religious must come to Christ, too. They are those, regardless of their affiliation, who believe they can get to God in their own strength. Typically, they rest their case, partially or fully, on their belief in their personal merit or good works. But this appeal is evidence of their darkness. They fail to understand that we cannot approach a perfect God unless we, too, are perfect, without sinful thought, word, or deed. Not one, and never! To try, then, to reach God through good works is to commit to keep God’s law in its entirety and all of the time. Our failure is guaranteed.

Just to read this is tiring. Trying to save ourselves by law-keeping is an impossible burden. That’s why Jesus said to those reared in religion, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”** (Matthew 11:28). Saul of Tarsus was one who did so. He recalls in Romans 7 his road to Christ. Delighting as a Jew in the law of God, he found that when God began to apply the law to him his heart was exposed. The evil that he didn’t want to do, he did, and the good that he would do, he didn’t do. He thus exclaimed: **“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”** Only having expe-

rienced God’s grace in Christ could he reply, **“Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!”** (vv. 24-25). He found, and we pray you will find, too, that only into the confession of our darkness and hopelessness does the light of Christ shine.

Who You Need

Both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible attest the darkness of life when the Lord Jesus was born. Prophesying the coming of the Messiah 800 years before the event, Isaiah wrote: **“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness have seen a great light, on them has light shined”** (Isaiah 9:2). Reflecting on Jesus’ life, Matthew saw his coming as a clear fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Matthew 4:16).

It is worth our while standing back from the hubris of our own age to listen to those who experienced Jesus. Wrote John the Evangelist, **“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it”** (John 1:4-5). Although Jesus was giving light to everyone (v. 9), left to ourselves we prefer to remain in the darkness of sin, for we do not want the light of Christ to help us see our sin (John 3:20). When, however, we tire of the darkness, we humbly come into the light of Christ, seeking the new life he offers. None who do so, regret it.

We discover to our delight and eternal gratitude that Christ bore the guilt of our sin at the cross, and suffered our death penalty. On this basis alone can we know pardon and true life. Which is to say amid today’s culture of death, that Christ’s cross stands out as the only hope for man. This is why it has been called “the death of deaths.” (Photo: <https://yalebooksblog.co.uk/2014/04/08/culture-and-the-death-of-god-terry-eagleton/>).

What You Could Have

Jesus gave his view of the culture of death. Speaking of Satan, he noted: **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”** Yet, he added, **“I**



came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). This abundant life is not only eternal but qualitative. It bespeaks a relationship to the God of the universe, outside of which there is mere existence. Read on to learn of one who could have had all this world has to offer but found that there is nothing to compare to true life in Christ.

My Times Are in His Hand!

Naturally you ask, if God grants eternal life to those seeking one through his Son why is death as much a certainty for a Christian as for a non-Christian? Briefly stated, although Christians are forgiven they continue to live in a world that has yet to be delivered from the effects of the Fall. We experience afflictions and death like everyone else, yet we face them in hope of a bright future with God. Said the eighteenth-century Methodist preacher John Wesley (1703–1791), “Our people die well.” God’s people still do. Consider the life and death of Dr. Peter Trumper (1934–2015).

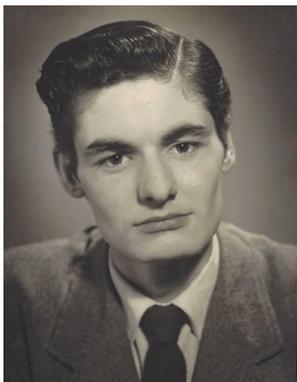
A Colorful Life

Born in Chatham, England, Peter moved to Cardiff, Wales, the year World War II began. There he became conscious of death, recalling how his local barber was killed in a German air raid, and the views he saw *en route* to school of beds hanging out of upstairs bedrooms after the bombing of the night before.

By 1943, Peter began singing, gaining a scholarship to the choir of Llandaff Cathedral (1945–48). As Dean Scholar (head boy and soloist of the choir), he was invited to make recordings at HMV Studios in London. At the Cathedral, though, he also learned the emptiness of religion, observing, to quote Isaiah the prophet, that we can draw near to God with our lips, and yet have hearts far from him (Isaiah 29:13; cf., Matthew 15:8-9). Thus, by his late teens he jettisoned his façade of Christianity, opting for atheism and a godless lifestyle.

In this frame of mind he began actor training at Cardiff Castle College of Drama. According to his tutor, Dr. Raymond Edwards (whom he shared with a certain Anthony Hopkins), Peter would “reach the top of his profession.” He was “Brilliant. Thorough. Hard working.”

It wasn’t to be. Slated to play the part of Jesus in a college play, a vivacious student named Maureen Jenkins, troubled by the thought that someone who blasphemed would play the part of Christ, staged a strike. It gathered support and the play was canceled. This rocked Peter’s world. He stormed out of the college, fuming, “Who is this Jesus?” Within weeks, Maureen shared with him what the Lord Jesus meant to her. Realizing his need of Christ, Peter began calling upon God: “I don’t even know if you are there, but if you are, please help me!” Peter’s entrance into a relationship with God was dramatic. He used to say, “One day I was mocking Christians, the next day I was defending them, and never looked back.”



He discovered in Christ not only forgiveness but purpose in life. So when, during his appearances in theaters around the U.K., a man tried to persuade him to take his life, arguing that if he was going to heaven he could go right away, he refused. Rightly so, for suicide is not God’s will. God had another purpose for Peter. With a couple of

films under his belt and numerous stage performances, he was called of God to leave acting in order to preach the good news of Jesus Christ which had become such a blessing to him. Returning his equity (actors’ union) card, he set off to train as a minister, and then to pastor churches in Wales.

A Christian Death

Peter preached powerfully and sought to model the apostle Paul’s teaching of the religious and irreligious, both publicly and from house to house. He, too, called people to repentance toward God and to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:20-21). Indeed, so important was this call to Peter, that he chose this text for his gravestone.

Meanwhile, in his late 40s, he was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and retired from pastoral ministry a few years later. Gradually, he became homebound, and remained so for twenty-five years. “If I was still an actor,” he mused, “I would have been cast aside. But in the Lord’s service, there is no retirement.” He took up writing, issuing a regular international publication and publishing 17 books about the Christian faith. He never lost his love of the acting profession,—he was an authority on its history—but his Lord always came first, then “Maggie” his wife and best carer (m. 1961).



As active as Peter remained, his life became increasingly about conforming to Christ. Paul’s words he found especially meaningful: “*That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead*” (Philippians 3:10-11). The “any means” included for Peter, beside a wheelchair, bladder cancer, pneumonia, and the multiple myeloma which took his life. After many years of disease, he was surprised but unshaken to learn that his death was imminent. When asked whether he was afraid to die, he responded, “No! No! My times are in his hand.” Peter was quoting Psalm 31:15, the text he had preached in 1986 on his last Sunday as a pastor. He knew his soul would soon be in heaven with his Lord, but also that at the end of the age his emaciated body would, delivered from death, be reunited with his soul, ready for life in the new world Christ has promised (Matthew 19:28).



Oppressed by the Culture of Death?

[uploads/2013/03/praying-hands.jpg](#)).

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Dear God,

We come to you the fountain of life and the one in whom we live, and move, and have our being. How long-suffering you are with our love of sin and culture of death. We have rejected both your love and your law which you gave us for our good. We destroy what is yours and choose rather to remain in our darkness than to come to Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Take away the death in our own souls, which persists through unconfessed sin in our thoughts, words, and actions. We have radically distorted your will for our lives, both by our sins of commission (what we do) and of omission (what we don't do), and have sorely grieved your Spirit. We have been blind to the seriousness of our sins and even now are, left to ourselves, too proud to leave the darkness behind and to confess our need of Jesus Christ.

We praise you for ever sending Christ to us and for telling us that he appeared to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). How wonderful it is that his death on the cross pays the penalty of any and every sinner who turns to you to receive forgiveness and new life in him! May each of us go away from these pages able to say, like the Christians of the first century, that they have been "*called . . . out of darkness into [your] marvelous light*" (1 Peter 2:9), and may we go on to live in the light as Christ is in the light (1 John 1:7).

All these things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen (Hebrew for "Let it be").

(Photo above: Courtesy of [fggam.org](#). Go to [www.fggam.org/wp-content/](#)

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