

Back in the early 90's I got a book by the Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Kung, entitled "Life after Death?" In it he wrote about the modern western world view which affirms the biological basis of all consciousness. It assumes that we are conscious because of the grey matter between our ears. If your brain is alive and functioning properly, you have consciousness. If it is dead or diseased and not functioning properly, you cannot think. Kung played out the end of biological life as the end of all possible consciousness based on the biological and medical models.

It was a jarring read at the time. But it can drive us to examine some assumptions that modern Christians might have. There is no basis in the modern world view for assuming that we continue to think without our brains in a place called "heaven" after we die. There is no basis in the modern world view for assuming we continue in any capacity after death makes brain function impossible. As the book of Ecclesiastes puts it, "We die like all the animals." It would require a miracle. Now miracles happen, but they ought not to be taken for granted. Nor should we assume that miracles happen for everyone after death.

At the end of March we will commemorate the real death of the real man named Jesus of Nazareth. When he dies on Good Friday, his brain stops working. He has only a past. His future is cut off unless some sort of miracle happens. He shares in the fate of all people according to the modern world view.

The Jews of Jesus' day did not believe in some non-bodily continuation of Jesus' thinking being in a place called heaven. They believed in a future in which God raises the righteous—especially those who had been martyred by the Pagan overlords. God raises the righteous with new bodies and new brains in an event called the resurrection of the dead in the age to come. That was the future they hoped for. What surprised everyone was that the resurrection would happen to one man in the middle of the present age.

Any life after death is not the default for all people. It is not a right which we have by being swell folks. It is a privilege extended to those who are in Christ by the only person ever to have experienced the Resurrection—Jesus of Nazareth. We have earned death, hell, and damnation. Any future other than that is a future won by the holy and precious blood and innocent suffering and death of our Lord, Jesus Christ (Martin Luther). Beginning Ash Wednesday and continuing for the 40 days, we reflect on what it is in us that makes it necessary for Christ to go to the cross. And we repent. His death happens and is real and is final unless the Father says otherwise. Our deaths will happen and will be real and final unless the Father says otherwise. Can God get us past the non-being of death? We ought not to assume that the answer is "Yes, because everyone ends up in heaven thinking without brains when we die." We ought to assume the answer is "Yes" because Jesus has promised to share his resurrection life with us in the age to come (Jn 11 & Jn 14). Paul speaks of the glorified bodies (and brains) we will receive in the Resurrection of the Dead in the age to come. My knees and back and brain need major glorification. I certainly look forward to Christ's keeping his promise. I hope and pray that you do too. Have a blessed and meaningful Lent.

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