

# MOMENTI MORI

## I Corinthians 15

### I. INESCAPABLE—"it is appointed to man once to die" (Heb 9:27);

- A. Persuasive evidence! (Universal Affirmative Syllogism); Sin's penalty (Ro 6:23 cf. Gn 3:3)
- B. Predictable stages: Elizabeth Kubler-Ross: 1) denial; 2) anger; 3) bargaining; 4) depression; 5) acceptance

### II. UNIQUELY HUMAN CONCERN

- A. Self-consciousness entails death-awareness—Pascal: "man is only a reed ... frailest thing ... thinking reed"
  - 1. Fears widespread—e.g. Hamlet's soliloquy: "to be, or not to be"
    - a. Soldiers as likely to retreat as to charge! Need officers, discipline, courage
    - b. 2020 pandemic hysteria (unlike response to Hong Kong Flu 50 years ago) reveals novel hysteria
      - 1. Frank Ferudi: *Culture of Fear & How Fear Works*
        - a. Lars Svendsen & Solzhenitsyn quotes
        - b. "Worst-case" thinking; "Precautionary Principle;" "Teleology of Doom"
        - c. Children insulated from falls, failures—cf. *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas are Setting up a Generation for Failure*
        - d. Underlying explanation: declining religious faith
      - 2. Christopher Booker & Richard North: *Scared to Death*
        - a. Food Scares: Mad Cow Disease in '80s
        - b. General Scares: DDT; lead; "passive smoking"; asbestos;
        - c. Global Warming
        - d. Underlying explanation: flawed science, trusting "experts," jumping to erroneous conclusions
      - 3. Phobias endless! all illustrating human nature, weaknesses
    - 2. Hopes irrepressible—"intimations" re Happy Hunting Grounds etc.; cf Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*; Scott Hahn's *Hope to Die: The Christian Meaning of Death and the Resurrection of the Body*
    - 3. Biblical message: "FEAR NOT!" "Be not afraid" (365 times!)
  - B. Burial sites indicative (N.B. Biblical Patriarchs' concern for burial plot, Gn 24:10 re Abraham & Sarah)
    - 1. Evident reasons:
      - a. Hallow remains of departed—"these hallowed grounds" (Lincoln re Gettysburg); military shrines; enduring message of *Tobit* and Sophocles' *Antigone*
      - b. Symbolize hopes for hereafter—tools for journey & future life; headstones testify—even Boot Hill humor revealing
      - c. N.B.: relatives of persons killed usually desperate to retrieve body of beloved & rightly revere it
    - 2. Evidence available:
      - a. Ancient: Egyptian pyramids; American Indian mounds widespread
      - b. Jewish: Jerusalem graveyards (e.g. Jesus' tomb) & concern for proper burial; NB *Tobit*
      - c. Christian: graves hallowed from earliest days—thus churchyard (holy ground) graves; suitable reminder that while alive a "Temple of the Holy Spirit"
      - d. Modern: growing secularization evident in cemeteries (Forest Lawn & Evelyn Waugh critique); Nazi crematoria; cremations & environmentalists champion "recomposition"
  - C. Funerals revealing
    - 1. Ubiquitous mourning ceremonies throughout history
    - 2. Pagan rituals—sometimes accompanied by cutting; Hindu custom of burying wife
    - 3. Jewish & Moslem rites—grieving & graves important
    - 4. Christian tradition (one of 7 "corporal works of mercy") solemn, grief-acknowledging; Christ-centered; Cappadocian Fathers (Basil; Gregory Nyssa; Gregory Nazianzan) re mother, sister
    - 5. Current trends
      - a. Many secularists eliminate ceremonies
      - b. Many churches minimize Christ-focus so as to celebrate life & virtues of departed

- D. Aesthetic responses
  - 1. Graphic arts—scenes in cathedrals & museums
  - 2. Literature
    - a. Poems—Dante’s *Divine Comedy* & Dylan Thomas’s—“do not go gentle into this good night”
    - b. Stories—Tolstoy’s “Death of Ivan Illich” & Hemingway’s “Short Happy Life of Francis McCumber”
  - 3. Music—classics (Bach’s *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*, BWV 106) & popular songs (Bob Dylan’s “death is not the end”)
- E. Philosophical reflections
  - 1. Plato’s *Apology* & final dialogues
  - 2. Stoic’s record—Seneca; Aurelius
  - 3. John Donne’s musings—*Devotions Upon Occasions & Death’s Duel* (provoked by serious sickness)
  - 4. Existentialists—Albert Camus (*The Plague*) & Unamuno (*Tragic Sense of Life*) often discuss
- F. Life-After-Life data fascinating if not compelling

### III. DIVERGENT ATTITUDES:

- A. Rejecting reality, significance of death—rooted in denial of essential human nature, *imago dei*
  - 1. Euphemisms (several hundred) revealing
  - 2. Christian Scientists deny reality of material world & thus death
  - 3. Social structures designed (institutions or buildings, often named for politicians) to evade—cf Ernst Becker’s *Denial of Death*
  - 4. Communist/socialist dismissal of significance (individual unimportant)—Solzhenitsyn (*Book of Death*, p. 103-104)
  - 5. Fantasy funerals—levity rather than sobriety
- B. Resigning to inevitable—*que sera*
  - 1. Stoic tradition (*Book of Death*, p. 8)
  - 2. Darwinian determinism—casualty in natural selection
- C. Relief
  - 1. Suffering’s cessation: physician-assisted suicide
  - 2. Buddhist Nirvana—extinction the ultimate goal
- D. Reincarnation
  - 1. Hindu position—yet, as V.S. Naipaul discovered, no consolation
  - 2. New Age mantras’ superficiality
- E. Resurrection Hope—I Corinthians 15 (Isaac Watts’ hymn, *Book of Death*, pp. 33-34)
  - 1. Monotheistic religions, positing Creator, generally hope He will reestablish things
  - 2. Christianity, especially, declares Risen Savior Who paved way