

## Lecture Two: images of resurrection: time, space and bodies in eternity?<sup>1</sup>

Signs of transcendence, intimations of immortality, are written into our ordinary life: in our sense of order and play, in our sense of humour and hope, in our sense of incompleteness and longing, and in the mysterious nature of death as sacrifice. All these point to something beyond this life. These signs are ambivalent. They do not have to be seen theologically, that is, as signs of a God who gives us life beyond death. But they can point to it.

That is what I sketched out in the first lecture. In this lecture I now want to move on. I want to show first how signs of eternity in general experience have been given much firmer basis in the specific experiences of christian revelation; and second, to show what *sort* of eternity this revelation describes.

But first – let me just stress again the ambivalence of the more general hints of eternity. Their ambivalence is important because it highlights just how persuasive and powerful the more specific experiences of revelation must have been to provide full-blooded belief that there *is* in Christian faith. That is why I want to re-emphasize that these signs I outlined last week, for all their suggestiveness, if we are honest, are only sporadic and muted. I think of them rather like birdsong. As with signs of transcendence birdsong is there to be heard, haunting and suggestive: and at times, at liminal moments like dawn, it is a glorious full chorus and it can feel compelling, lifting even a sceptic to a state at least of wistfulness if not full belief - like Thomas Hardy, hearing the song of the darkling thrush, became briefly persuaded of '*some hope whereof he knew, though I was unaware*'. But it is not always there. Sometimes the world is just dark and silent. Or the song is only just there - barely indistinguishable from other sounds. So we can easily become sceptical, tough-minded, and reinterpret what we thought we heard. Was it really song at all? We remember that in biological terms the birds were not singing because they had eternity set in the hearts at all - they were just shouting to defend their territory. Just so with these general signs of transcendence. They are intermittent, their meaning easily deconstructed: they may help set a context for faith, but we also know they *may* just be the projection of our own needs, rather than a reflection of something really beyond us.

I should also re-emphasize that this ambivalence about signs of afterlife can occur too right within religious belief. Even when the transcendence of God is believed, not everyone reads the signs to mean transcendence for ourselves. Right within the Hebrew origins of our own Judaeo-Christian faith there is this sort of reticence. Jewish scholar Alan Segal summarizes:<sup>2</sup> 'the earliest parts of the [Hebrew] Bible simply are not concerned with any life after death worth having'. Instead, we are simply to ponder our days now: 'the days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty if we are strong; even then their span is

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> Includes material abridged and revised from Vernon White, *Life Beyond Death. Threads of Hope in Faith, Life and Theology* (DLT 2006)

<sup>2</sup> Alan Segal, 'Life After Death: The Social Sources' in ST Davies et al (eds) *The Resurrection* (Oxford, 1997)

only toil and trouble; they are soon gone and we fly away...so - *teach us to count our days*' [Ps 90]. Yes, there was some belief in a shadowy, temporary afterlife - Sheol, place of the spirits - but this was little more than nothingness, not a reality to be desired. And this view has remained as a strand even in later Judaism, right into Jesus' time. Even within Christian faith, as I showed last week, there has been and is similar doubt, disbelief, ambivalence.

So – it is out of this background of ambivalence that I now want to tell the story of the rise and persistence of specific belief in personal afterlife. I want to show how it is the power of a wider theological logic (which has come from visions of the character of God) that has brought belief in afterlife so firmly into focus *in spite of* such mixed signals in general experience and even in its own religious background. And that story will be the first main part of this lecture. The second part will then be to examine the images that faith has used to describe this eternity, this afterlife. [I will, incidentally, limit myself in this lecture to discussing the afterlife of heaven, not of judgement and hell]

First, then: how and why did this hope take such root in faith? Although Hebrew religion was ambivalent, it was also a cradle of this more positive story. Although some psalmists taught us only to think of our days here on earth, others did begin to offer visions beyond. Ps.78, for example: perplexed by the injustices of life, the psalmist enters the Temple and receives *this* vision - 'My flesh and my heart may fail. But God is the strength of my heart and my portion *for ever...*'; 'you guide me with your counsel, *and afterward you will receive me in glory*'. The prophets then gave more shape to the vision: 'Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead' [Is. 26]. This may be a vision just about Israel's collective restoration at some future time in earthly history, not a specific belief in personal afterlife, but by the time Daniel quotes it later it is certainly extended to personal bodily resurrection. [12:1]

But what was driving this? Possibly some influences from Zoroastrian beliefs in life after death, encountered in the exile period. Perhaps too some imagery was borrowed from Greek philosophy, from Plato or Cicero (Daniel, for example, later uses the Greek image of shining stars to picture immortality). But it is unlikely that Israel's belief would have been decisively shaped solely by alien culture. The more obvious impetus to the belief was their own more immediate context: the ferocious persecution of the period - the Maccabean martyrdoms, when the pious were being slaughtered and justice was simply not prevailing in this life alone. In other words, once they believed in anything like a just God at all, then it was that sense of divine *justice* which began to require some life beyond death – for justice to be fulfilled.

A strong sense of divine *creativity* also played a part. That image of re-creating people after death 'out of the dust of the ground' is an echo of the first creation story. It was sense of the sheer vitality of divine creation which led people to believe God would not let his creative work simply be extinguished. Most of all, the belief was driven by their conviction of divine *faithfulness*. As each period of exile, persecution, setback, ensued, the

pressure grew to show how God's promises to Israel could be vindicated, how God's faithfulness could still be credible. How this was conceived - whether it meant the restoration of Israel in this world or another, and whether it included restoration of life for individuals who have died, varied. But the main point is that it was always this theological motor driving the beliefs: namely, the conviction of God's character as just, creative, faithful. How *that* conviction (about the nature of God) came to be so strongly grasped is of course the wider story of the Old Testament as a whole: a story told through events of the Patriarchs, of Moses in the desert, in the political liberation that the people experienced from Egypt, and in the visionary experiences of later prophets. But, the key thing is, once grasped by this sort of God, the issue of afterlife was forced: when disaster struck, mortality knocked at the door, the hammer of suffering and death fell on the anvil of God's justice, creativity, and faithfulness, and so new hopes had to be forged in the furnace, hopes which inexorably led to personal afterlife. In this way we see a form of argument going on<sup>3</sup>. An argument from the nature of God to the hope of a world beyond. This is not an argument in purely rational form: 'if God is just then He must 'logically' recreate us in some new way'. The belief is arising more as a visionary perception in the heat of dire events, and only later elaborated as argument. Nonetheless, it is argument - both with God, and about God, as authentic theology often is!

As we move into the New Testament era, the pivotal event of Jesus Christ then effectively 'clinches' this argument. What was new there was not the idea of resurrection itself - as we've seen, some sort of resurrection was already part of popular belief. What was new, as my predecessor Tom Wright amongst others has stressed, is that the Christ event came to be seen (uniquely) as a resurrection that had in some sense already happened. Rather than waiting like the rest of us, Christ was believed to have been raised already. This gave new grounds for their hope. Since it had already happened for Him they could be more sure it would happen for them! This is not, incidentally, a point made explicitly by the resurrection stories of the synoptic Gospels: they are not told with the main purpose of giving confidence about the afterlife, but rather to establish Jesus's identity, vindicate his mission, and inspire discipleship for *this* life. But it certainly is a point Paul makes. He *does* see Christ's resurrection not just his vindication but for us all: 'the first fruits of [all] who die' [ICor 15]. Regardless of the exact nature of what happened in Christ's resurrection, what is incontrovertible is that something happened which convinced Paul and other followers that they too would share it...

What also seems clear, bearing in mind this was a time of gathering persecution for his early followers, is that once again this belief gained impetus from the imperative for justice: when an outrageous death hammers on divine justice and faithfulness, belief in resurrection takes wing - both for Christ himself, and then through him for his faithful followers. Another imperative at work here, I suggest, in the Christ event, was a new sense of the demands of divine *love*. Christ's living, teaching, and passion, had

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<sup>3</sup> Cf Alan Segal, *op. cit.*

conveyed a perception of divine love of such depth it became inconceivable that such love could ever let him go – or let us go. So it didn't - it raised Him, and will raise us. Paul again is the most explicit about this: there is such 'length and depth and breadth and height of the love of God... that neither death nor life... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Ro 8). This is again a form of argument: something born of vision and experience, then developed in the rhetoric of theological argument.

So- with this huge impetus of the Christ event, the belief took root - and has persisted through further new contexts. It persisted through the changing expectations in the early Church about the imminence of Christ's return. It flourished in the era of Medieval Christendom, where war, famine, and plague, created a constant threat of death, feeding huge speculation about life beyond death, and elaborate not to say fanciful theological reflection about it. It persisted through the Reformation which rejected much of the speculation but still kept fully alive a longing for a radically new world beyond this life. In more recent theological history it has also largely persisted, even through scientific rationalism, and a world of industrial and technological and medical progress. This world of modernity has certainly challenged the belief - in intellectual ways, of which more later - but also in social ways. When it has appeared to make this world better heaven has been made to look redundant. When, as it did in the industrialized slaughter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century wars, modernity has seemed to make this world worse, God has been made to look impotent. So through all this the belief has certainly been shaken, and often re-shaped - but on the whole it has still persisted. In the moral mess of the 1WW battlefields, for example, as the chaplains discovered, hope of life beyond death in heaven could no longer be ring-fenced by theological niceties such as the protestant dogma about justification by faith alone, or catholic dogma about salvation only in the church: if life after death was on offer at all it would have to be for *all*. But it persisted. Even, later, when the searing experiences of Auschwitz challenged to its core all belief in a loving and just God, and some theology reduced its concept of God only to the status of a fellow sufferer with us in this world, rather than one powerful enough to take us beyond it - even then, belief in afterlife and a more robust God has also persisted, precisely as the only belief which could make sense of a good and just God, in the face of such horrors in the world.

For in the end, this is the crucial motor of this belief, as I have been trying to show: namely, that it helps secure the credibility of divine love and justice. Understanding how God can be good and just in the face of the evils of this world may be an immense, insoluble task; and it's true that an appeal to the afterlife can prove more dangerous than helpful in this task - if it reduces our motivation to fight evil and suffering now by suggesting eternity can compensate and thereby somehow justify evil now (a view Dostoyevsky rightly nails as utterly immoral in his celebrated novel *The Brothers Karamazov*). *But*, properly understood, it is a belief can also uniquely secure the credibility of divine love and justice, and can prove morally invigorating, not enfeebling. More of this next week. Let me simply say now that it can do this when it is hope for a heaven where evil will be, not justified or

compensated, but redeemed; where those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and do not find it in this life, shall be fully and truly satisfied; where those who mourn shall be fully and truly comforted; and when it is a belief which means, as one writer who lost his son has said, that those who mourn may still ache now but as 'aching *visionaries*' - people who can look forward in their loss, not just backwards. ..

So much for how and why this belief has arisen and persisted to the extent it has, within the life and thought of Judaeo-Christian faith. It is like Blake's golden thread, woven through it all. It is a direct consequence of the events Israel's history and Christ's resurrection, *and* of this inexorable theological logic in those events.

But now to venture to the second part of this lecture. Does Christian faith also give us tools to imagine, in any credible way, what it might be *like*? I hesitate to go here. As I said last week, speaking of the beyond is perilous. With TS Eliot, it's tempting to just say we must 'wait without hope' because hope is almost bound to be 'hope of the wrong thing'. But I still think we must try. It is necessary to give *some* substance to hope. It is also important to ensure the field is not left open, by our silence, just to easily discredited images - to images of a heaven of harps and thrones, or a returning Christ taking people up in a cloud into the sky. If this is all that is offered, and if taken literally, the whole belief is likely to be discredited. In other words, it is to prevent the baby of heaven being thrown out with imaginative bathwater, that I think we have to give the baby some other shapes with which to hold onto it...

But - how? Some have just translated traditional images into their contemporary counterparts. In other words, if a heaven of harps and thrones doesn't sound plausible, substitute them with Mozart and shopping malls<sup>4</sup>. The trouble is, this hardly comes out any more convincingly than the traditional images. The images for heaven would be so materially real, so like our current embodied lives on earth, that heaven turns out to be little more than a celestial five star resort, the Presidential Suite in a Beverley Hills Hotel, good claret, and angels ministering to us like perfect tour guides. In short, life beyond death would be conceived just as a state of enhanced earthly pleasures expressed in the terms of 21<sup>st</sup> century materialism.

But we cannot do without some images. And we do need images with *some* continuity to present life. Not least because the general notion of heaven as a life with some recognizable continuity with earthly experience is based in a tradition of serious christian exegesis. Tom Wright, for example, is convinced that faithful exegesis of scripture commits us to using images of recognizable continuity with this life - and so we must talk of 'bodies' as well as souls, 'time' as well as eternity, individuals as well as cosmic wholes.<sup>5</sup> So that is the picture he unfolds from scripture, particularly from Daniel, Corinthians, Thessalonians. Very briefly summarized it goes like this. First, what happens beyond death is not instant but involves a further narrative, a further story to

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<sup>4</sup> A popular example is Anthony de Stefano's *A Travel Guide to Heaven* (Doubleday, 2003)

<sup>5</sup> See his major work NT Wright *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (SPCK, 2004)

our lives, involving time and change. Immediately after death there is a temporary disembodied state as we wait for the end of all things. But then there is resurrection proper when we are all re-embodied in a new way and can expect a further story to unfold. This further story will be in some sort of new environment which is a recognizable place: we shall inhabit a new earth for our new life, not just some placeless spiritual dimension entirely beyond space and time. Heaven (God's dwelling) might be a purely spiritual reality, but we do not hope to go to 'heaven'. Our destiny is new earth, which God comes from heaven to remake for us and inhabit with us. If we stay very close to the Hebrew and early Christian scriptural images this is indeed the sort of picture we are given. And, as such, it should set at least a basic framework and trajectory for our imagining.

However - what I do not believe is that it is sufficient simply to repeat this and reflect no further. For what do we really *mean* by such words and pictures? What do we mean by 'some kind of re-embodiment', and 'waiting' for a 'new earth' with continuing 'time' and history? How do they relate to other kinds of thought, how can these basic images be made plausible in our own world view? It is only as we consider how have these core images have developed in christian thinking, it seems to me, that we will get any answers to this.

And here it is well worth considering the contribution of Greek thought. This is not an appeal to something completely outside scripture: Hebrew thought in biblical literature was already a complex recipient of other influences, including Greek ones. However, within that, Greek thought did offer distinctive and illuminating emphases. For example, Greek anthropology generally conceived the soul to be separable from the body, an immortal spark which could be freed at death to live on in eternity - which meant, incidentally, that death seemed less of a complete barrier, more just a mechanism of release for that essential part of us which will live on. By contrast Hebrew anthropology generally saw body and soul as inextricably linked, more like the way mind and body is seen to be inseparable in most contemporary western scientific thought. It was this Hebrew emphasis which led to ideas of resurrection which included first a total end at bodily death, then requiring a radical recreation with a new body later at the general resurrection - as distinct from a seamless persistence through death of the soul, which Greek thought allowed for. [One reason, perhaps, why Socrates could apparently face his death with equanimity, in contrast to Jesus who trembled in distress, sensing a real end]. Nonetheless, the Greek influence did also then make its presence felt. In early christian understanding, ideas of an immortal soul quickly combined with the more Hebraic ideas.

It is easy to see why. Conceptually it was useful to have some notion of a soul which could at least temporarily exist on its own, because it helped explicate that time of disembodied waiting before the general bodily resurrection. It was also existentially attractive to think that a vital part of our being continues at death, rather than facing the prospect of complete annihilation at death before resurrection: it is reassuring to think death is, if not 'nothing at all', not a complete end either. Perhaps that's why, in the survey I quoted last week, so few believed in bodily resurrection, and so many

believed in survival of the soul. The attraction of a separable soul (in some sense) also has some intellectual basis. Although recent scientific materialism teaches there is a necessary physical basis of all our mental and spiritual experiences - so that when the body dies everything else does too - that only shows what is necessary in the present order of space and time. It does not show what may be conceivable beyond such an order. Moreover, even within the present order, signs of some kind of 'dualism' can still be discerned - as I shall say more about later. 'Soul' language, therefore, has been and can remain highly suggestive...

A similar story can be told of Greek views of time and eternity. These too attached themselves quickly to early christian belief, in spite of some contrast with Hebrew cosmology. Greek cosmology (especially Plato's) saw linear, forward moving, time as largely unreal - just a broken shadow of an ultimate reality which is time/less eternity. In Hebrew thought, by contrast, linear time was more real and ultimate. Key events like the Passover had a sort of transcendence of time but overall time was still expected to move us forward to new things, and this was expected to continue in the new heaven and earth. Yet in spite of this difference christian theology again readily assimilated aspects of this Greek view into its view of afterlife. From Augustine to Boethius in the platonic tradition of the early western church, and in the English imagination of the metaphysical poets like Henry Vaughan and John Donne, we have a dominant strand of images of heaven which are much more like a Greek eternity: 'no ends nor beginnings but one equal eternity'. [It is there, too, in C19<sup>th</sup> hymnody: e.g. *Abide with me* - when 'Heaven's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee' it is the shadows of time and change which flee, and the eternal God who 'changes *not*' who abides with me]

So - this Greek influence has contributed some persuasive images. The question is, do they still help and what do we make of them now? In fact they have been widely rejected in recent western theology. Their contrast with some Hebrew thought has made biblical theologians wary of them. The fact that they seem at odds with scientific materialism, the risk that they might seem to downgrade the significance of incarnation and material reality, the conceptual difficulty in having to imagine persons in any thing like a timeless state, have all made them unpopular. There has therefore been a major theological consensus to *eject* what it sees as the Greek cuckoo from the Judaeo-Christian nest, especially when imaging afterlife. Here, however, I simply need to say I disagree. First, I do not actually think that Greek line of thought was such a complete blind alley. Second, even if it was, I still do not think it is enough just to restate Hebrew imagery instead, as if its own underlying anthropology and cosmology have no problems either. So let me say more about this.

Take the second point first. Can Hebrew images of bodies and time, just in their own terms, satisfy? As we've seen, what they offer is hope of transformed bodies continuing in some sort of time on a renewed earth. But this, it seems to me, ties us too much to our current experience of time, space, and matter. The words 'body' and 'earth' are strong, gritty, images which rub us in the present reality of what *is*. Yet we know that what *is* - this

bio-chemical reality which we currently are and inhabit - is going to end in those terms: our bodies are going to decay, just as this planet earth will end. So just stating that we shall have a new body on a new earth is weak: it is too tied to this stuff we know is going to end. It offers no imaginative force to the radical difference about a further reality that will have to be to make it credible. It's not that I want to dispense with all language of body, earth, time: the new must have some continuity with what we know for it to have any point or meaning. But to express eternity only in the recognizable terms of this world, without using new categories, fails to be plausible, or even desirable: what we know now is all too evidently transient, decaying, and therefore *unimaginable* as eternity.

In fact the biblical tradition itself makes this point: it requires us to develop these earthy resurrection images in a more imaginative way. In the apocalyptic tradition for example, and especially in the prophecies of Isaiah and Revelation, we find a hope for God to do a more radically new thing. Here we see divine re-creation including real difference as well as some continuity; otherness as well as connection. The language of new creation enforces this by being deliberately extravagant, vivid, throwing up those wonderful juxtapositions, oxymorons, impossible contradictions: 'a *lion* lying down with a *lamb*, a *life* where there is no more *death*, a *love* where there is no more *mourning*, a *body* which is *incorruptible*. In our current experience these can only be dreams and imaginative fantasies - but that is precisely why they are used: i.e. to deliberately drive us to conceive of something truly new, truly transcendent, something 'not constrained by our [direct] experience of this world.'<sup>6</sup> And so in the light of this biblical licence - and imperative - to conceive the truly transcendent, why not return to that apparently discredited Greek tradition, and mine it further? - not to rehabilitate it uncritically, but to let it stretch our imagination in other ways. *And* then let us also see what help may be given by other contemporary philosophical and scientific resources.

For example, if we consider again Greek anthropology more closely, we see it's not just a conception of the self as a wholly separate soul which throws off the body as worthless at death. For Plato, 'soul' was more nuanced: it was the essence of all we are - including what the body has provided for the mind and soul. So although the material nature of our bodies does not survive, what we experience through our material bodies may well be taken by the soul into eternity. Our relationships to people and the world, everything experienced *through* the body's sensual nature, our experience of touch and laughter, the scents of an English spring, the sights of an African sunset - all that is good from material creation can be conceived as being taken into eternity as part of the soul's experience: 'kept as an inheritance for us in heaven' - to co-opt a biblical phrase. I'm going beyond Plato himself here - but it is his language of soul which helps take us in that direction. In short, look past the caricature of Greek thought, and its language of soul can actually help interpret the biblical vision, not contaminate it.

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<sup>6</sup> A phrase from Bauckham and Hart *Hope Against Hope* (DLT, 1999)

If we now ally this to contemporary philosophical and even scientific thought about the self, it can become all the more, not less, conceivable. This certainly shows that the contents of our (bodily) experiences of mind and spirit are generated through the body and require it for now. But it also shows hints about their potential independence under different circumstances. The firing neurons which seem to generate mental experience do not fully account for the persistence, complexity, and modes of being which characterize this mental experience. I do not mean the persistence claimed by the few who have some out-of-the-body experience on an operating table (though I will say more about this in the next lecture): I mean the sense of 'transcendence' which is implicit in our quite ordinary instincts and language. For example, as philosophers are quick to point out, we all readily and instinctively talk of 'having' a body rather than just 'being' a body. In that intuition the mental experience of the person, though formed through the body, seems separable.

In talking like this perhaps I should stress again that I am not wanting to abandon all body language even for eternity. Some sort of new embodiment is vital to express the sense that we will remain distinguishable, people, rather than just part of some cosmic whole. In that sense I do believe in the resurrection of 'the body'. But that does not require a body with anything like the material nature of our present bodies. That has no more claim on eternity than matter in general - which, as modern physics tells us, is anyway ultimately destined either for extinction or dissolution back into the energy of which it is actually composed. It requires a body much more like the mystery of the body of the risen and ascended Christ who can exist not just here but also in a realm quite different from our spatio-temporal universe.

Similarly, if we look again at Greek cosmology, at the instincts behind Greek views of time and eternity, these too can be helpful: they can offer more fertile forms for our imagination than strictly linear time alone. Hebraic views, as we've seen, required biblical expositors to imagine we have uncertain periods of 'waiting' after our death, and even after resurrection they imply an apparently infinite unfolding of more time and change. At the very least it induces a certain weariness! But it also carries its own theological implausibility. It conveys a sense of incompleteness, dissatisfaction, always travelling, never arriving, making it hard to meet those theological demands for a *fulfilled* love, a *fulfilled* justice, the *perfection* of God's creation, the imperatives for an *end* to a groaning creation. What those theological imperatives for fulfilled love actually demand, is precisely an end to the very structures of space and time which give rise to pain and incompleteness. They demand something much more like 'a house of God where there shall be no noise or silence, but one equal music, no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession, no foes nor friends, but one equal communion and identity, no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity' (John Donne). And what else is this but something very like the images generated by just that Greek influenced tradition? Furthermore, and, crucially, if we look more closely at the Greek traditions, they do not have to mean complete timelessness, something static, lifeless. Plato's eternity in the *Timaeus* may include that but Plato's heaven *in toto* is not what I'm arguing for. I'm taking his instinct for perfection and completeness, without excluding creativity and dynamism.

But is that possible to imagine? Again, yes - if we ally it to more recent thinking. It may then actually become more conceivable. Think first for a moment about our present experience of time. Is *this* really so real that we cannot imagine anything else? In fact, as recent philosophy of time has suggested, our present experience of time is actually very fragile. Because it moves us from past through present to future in one direction, we never really inhabit it: we lose the past, however vividly remembered, we are never actually *in* the future, however keenly we anticipate it, and all we actually inhabit is the present - which itself slips away into the past the moment we grasp it - so even the present isn't quite real (which is why philosophers call it a 'specious' present). You know what I mean by this: time always seems to slip away from our grasp! So our present experience of linear time is actually an image of loss and unreality. A *more* real image of time, eternal time, is precisely to imagine it as a movement within a perfected whole, so that it doesn't slip away. To imagine this, think of what we call past, present and future visually, spatially - as if laid out on a map two-dimensionally, as a pattern of marks running across a piece of paper. Each apparently follows the other - but only on paper, for we as the observers or makers of those marks do not have to follow the lines just in one direction. Our eyes can move in different directions - backwards and forwards, even up and down - so that we can inhabit it all at once. We can see it as a whole, and move around within the whole, in an almost infinite number of ways. This relationship we have to that pattern on the paper is at least a faint analogy of the relationship of heaven's eternity to earth's time - an eternity which can incorporate creative movement within a whole. And if all that proves too abstract, think simply of music: the experience of great music already known as a whole, but which can still be performed and heard in new ways. It is, again, an experience which retains infinite depth and movement, yet within a perfected *whole*, not an endless narrative. Recent scientific cosmology, as well as philosophy, can also imagine time as something like this - though more of that next week.

So - all these images are just some possible ways of giving some shape to what we hope for. And I hope they might also be something to hold onto when trying to respond to those most frequent specific, simple, questions asked when people die: *where* is he? Will we see each other again? Will we have to *wait*? I do not mean for one moment our response should be a lecture in theology or Greek philosophy. No-one in the raw state of bereavement wants that! But in some way, at the right time, I hope all this may give us some background resources, some background confidence, to say *something* rather than nothing. It has offered a hope of an eternal life which is not simply an improbable extension of our present earthly life, just a bit better, but of a radically new kind of being where personal life and love and worship is enjoyed perfectly and whole. It offers a hope of a reality which we and others enter instantly, without having to 'wait', because we enter a different kind of time with no waiting. It offers a hope of a different kind of 'place', which is not in any particular place like this earth for it is a different kind of space and matter. Yet is it still a 'place' where we will be recognizably ourselves; and where we will still be able to re-live the best of sensual experiences generated from this earthly life which the soul has stored for us in

eternity: those footfalls of our memory, the rose garden, children's laughter, fresh again, not fading. That is the sort of hope I believe that can be maintained truthfully, in the light of our theological tradition. That is what this lecture has sought to show.

Next week I will say more about how it can be maintained truthfully in the light of science and psychology, and how it can be maintained morally so that we still live our lives now to the full. For now, that is enough - and I probably have already said too much about what is, after all, beyond our knowing. But even though I may have been tempted to say too much and 'hope for the wrong thing', I do not believe we need to remain completely silent, and wait without any hope...

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