

1 Over There

There is no pain in the world like the pain of a new idea.

WILLIAM JAMES

Is there life after death? Can the dead come back and tell us? Dr Elizabeth Kubler-Ross tells of a personal encounter with a former patient whom she had helped to die, after she had died.

Dr Kubler-Ross was just completing an exhausting speaking-trip, and all she could think of was, 'I've done enough of this now. I've got to phase out of this work.' After the speech, she stopped momentarily at the lift, only to be startled by the sudden appearance of a former patient who had died about two years before. Kubler-Ross was shocked but remembered the woman's words:

'You can't give up your work for the dying! It's much too important.'

The woman accompanied her down in the lift and along the corridor.

'This can't be happening? Kubler-Ross told herself.

When they reached her room, the former patient exclaimed, 'Promise me you won't give up your work!'

Dr Kubler-Ross grabbed a piece of paper and said, 'Give me your autograph.' The woman did, and then turned and ran out the door. Dr Kubler-Ross ran after her, looking down the long hall in both directions. The figure had vanished. Dr Kubler-Ross stood there, her former patient's signature in her hand.

Many people who will read this book are, at this very moment, having to face the fact that they are soon going to die. Last year alone, over 150,000 people died of AIDS. Cancer and other terminal diseases claimed another 100,000. For a person who knows that he has only six months at best to live, Sunday school theology about the afterlife offers

little comfort.

At a time when some certainty about our future state of existence is sorely needed, most people are facing death knowing little or nothing about what lies on the other side of the door. Or, worse, they have become so programmed by beliefs thrust on them by others, namely religious bodies, that they face death with a sad combination of guilt and terror.

We owe most of what we have come to believe about life after death to what religion has taught us. Most of us know little more. Nevertheless, mankind has made progress in recent years, and we are making the search for evidence of a life beyond. The time is here when people will open their minds to this subject without prejudice and will even welcome it. Because men and women have long lived in spiritual bondage, because many generations have been taught that the Church was infallible and have been denied the right of private interpretation, many have been reluctant seriously to consider the findings of psychical researchers on this subject.

One would think that the Church would welcome evidence that life, continuity of consciousness, and individuality continue after death, and it would do so if the facts agreed with its teachings. It is only because the findings of psychical research do not harmonize with its theories that investigation into this subject has for centuries been clouded by doubts, fears, dogmas and superstitions. Until now the Churches have not wanted psychic investigation, and even today some of the more fundamentalist Protestant bodies condemn all effort to understand metaphysical laws, seemingly because they fear that an understanding of natural laws will bring an explosion of many of their theories and will undermine the cornerstone of their structure.

Science has been equally guilty and until recently has even refused to look at the evidence for life after death, having relegated psychical researchers to the realm of 'cranks' and 'crackpots.'

As parapsychologist Laurence LeShan has said, 'Science had fre-

quently fallen into the trap of deciding in advance that certain things are impossible. The great chemist Lavoisier knew that meteorites were an impossible fable because it was obvious that there were no stones in the sky. This kind of thing has happened so often in science that knowledge of the danger of assuming that our present beliefs and frame of reference are absolutely and eternally true is a very real part of the scientific attitude today.

Although the recent breakthroughs in particle physics point to the strong possibility of the existence of an invisible universe, a world where we may very well 'go' when we die, the implications of such a discovery are so staggering that no scientist has yet come forward to consider it seriously.

As the philosopher William James once said, 'With the conviction that I saw all there was to see, I have to confess that I am surprised that the phenomena affected me emotionally so little. Now, after four days interval, my mind seems strongly inclined not to "count" the observation, as if it were too exceptional to be probable. I find that I look on nature with unaltered eyes today and that my orthodox habits tend to extrude this would-be levee-breaker [shocking experience]. It forms too much of an exception.'

The psychic sphere is still unknown, unmarked. Only the borderlands have been explored. The field is a goldmine of wealth, rich in material that can be put to good use. All that has been accomplished in almost a hundred years of psychical research simply demonstrates the possibilities within the grasp of everyone. We are coming more and more to forming our own conclusions.

But, in order to draw any conclusions at all with regard to what may be true about survival, we must first examine the teaching of religion. What does the Church have to say about life after death?

Christianity is sharply divided on the issue of immortality. It is the teaching of one Protestant faction that the dead are asleep until the moment of an actual resurrection of the body at some unknown date in

the future. In a booklet published by the Worldwide Church of God, entitled *Is There Life After Death?*, we read: 'You will know absolutely nothing from the second you die, till the second you awake in the resurrection.' Likewise Ralph Wilkeerson writes in his book *Beyond and Back* an account of his personal out-of-body experience: 'God awaits the arrival of the Christian in Heaven. The non-Christian has an abstract and unreal image of the beyond.'

Whether these views are shared by other Protestant Christians or not I do not know, but it would seem evident that there are thousands of people alive today who believe that deceased persons are asleep and are not conscious of events taking place either in this world or in any other.

Roman Catholic teaching differs greatly. According to *What The Church Teaches*, a book approved for publication by Roman Catholic authorities, the 'last things,' the ultimate end and destiny of each of us, forms an entire area of theology called eschatology. This contains the Church's teaching about death and judgment, heaven, hell and purgatory.

Catholic teaching declares that every person who dies, even non-Catholics, will undergo a 'particular judgment.' This judgment will be 'final and irreformable.' The 'General Judgment' will not alter it, 'only proclaim and portray its justice.' We read further that,

Heaven will be available to each of us immediately after death, if we love God and are filled with His grace. For those who do not love God — or who love evil things more — the coming of Jesus in the particular judgment may be catastrophic. We choose it when we reject God's goodness; and the judge will not deprive us of the full consequences of our choice.

Because nothing defiled can enter heaven [the Church says], many must spend time in Purgatory. Purgatory prepares us for Heaven

when we are almost (but not quite) ready.

The judgment of the individual comes at his death; the judgment of the world comes at its end. This is the General Judgment. The physical world will be destroyed by fire and a new world will emerge from the embers. With the emergence of a new world will come a glorious restoration, the resurrection of the body. From the time of our death until the resurrection only our souls will be alive, and our souls are not the whole of us. We will not be living human beings, but only living souls. And then at the resurrection we will be our total selves once more.

This is the official teaching, some of it anyway, of the Roman Catholic Church on life after death.

But this does NOT fall in line with what countless persons have reported to psychological researchers for almost one hundred years. The Church tells us that we are either asleep after death and not aware of what is going on in this world (the Protestant version) or incomplete living souls awaiting resurrection (Catholic version). If this is true, how can we account for the literally thousands of cases on record of apparitions of deceased loved ones who appeared to their families after they died, many of them as speaking apparitions?

Celia Greene was the Director of the Institute for Psychophysical Research in Oxford. She has spent twenty years studying reported cases of apparitions. In her book *Apparitions*, she relates the following stories:

One November afternoon I had arrived home from school, and passing through the dining room I noticed my grandfather in his sitting room talking to my grandmother who had been ill. She was in her nightgown and robe. I entered the room and said hello to them, and told my grandmother it was nice to see her feeling up to being out of bed. After a minute or two of polite conversation, I said I had better go do my homework. My grandmother then said, 'Barbara, it would be

best if you don't tell anyone I was up and that you spoke with me.' I went on upstairs and as I entered my own room it suddenly came over me that my grandmother was dead. She had died a month earlier.

[And another case:]

My husband died in August 1970. The following Christmas I spent with my married daughter. On December 27th we were all playing Monopoly and at that time I was not even thinking of my husband. I looked up from my game and my husband was sitting on the settee opposite. This I could not believe. I covered my eyes with my hands and looked again; he was still there. I must have looked very distressed, as everyone looked up from the game and enquired what was wrong. I was a little incoherent and wept, and my husband got up from the settee, crossed the room and went out, turning at the last moment, putting his head back inside the door and smiling at me. He appeared as in life, wearing his charcoal colored trousers and an open necked white shirt. I was overcome with grief and went to bed at once.

These two accounts represent a small sample of thousands of similar incidents reported to both the American and British Societies for Psychical Research over an eighty-year period. There are countless others.

Researchers are just now beginning to crack open the door to truth, to break down the barriers that have been in place for centuries through the preaching of dogmas that were held as infallible. For untold centuries people went on believing that the Sun moved round the Earth, because the Church said it was so, and the Church could not be wrong.

The mass of humanity is as ignorant in the matter of life after death today as mankind was in the fifteenth century on the subject of astronomy. When Copernicus demonstrated the movement of the Earth and the stars according to fixed laws which were in violation of biblical teaching, he was forced to live in practical isolation and exile, and Christians were forbidden to read his writings. Bruno, one of the great

thinkers of his time, laid aside the habit of a Dominican monk, hoping to obtain freedom of thought and of speech. He wanted to know whether the Sun revolved about the Earth, as the priests taught, or the Earth about the Sun, as Copernicus claimed. For this research and for the expression of his opinion, he was branded a heretic and burned alive in Rome.

Cardinal Bellarmino said: 'If the Copernican theory is true, it would be the absolute undoing of the Bible and the destruction of the Church. If the Earth is only one of many planets and not the centre of the Universe, the whole plan of salvation fails, since the inhabitants of the other worlds are without the Bible, and Christ did not die for them.'

Galileo discovered the isochronisms of the pendulum and invented the thermometer. With a telescope he saw Jupiter's satellites and the Moon's libation. Galileo's critics flatly refused to even look through his telescope, just as many so-called scientists today refuse to take the findings of psychical research seriously. Galileo was charged with witchcraft and was condemned not only for daring to deny the accepted shape of the Earth but also for suggesting that the Bible did not contain the final facts of science.

Life after death is the great frontier. If we are to obtain even a glimmer of truth about what the world beyond death is really like, we must approach the whole subject in a sane, scientific manner. The Church is free to accept or reject the evidence. I feel sure that the vast majority of thinking Christians are open-minded enough to look at the findings of psychical research over the past eighty years and draw some intelligent conclusions. Such organizations as the Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship and the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies exist to further the cause of finding the truth.

The Most Reverend Cosmo Lang, who was Archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of Edward VIII, established a committee to determine whether there was any truth to Spiritualism. After Lang learned of the

findings of the committee, he suppressed the report, and it was not published until 1969.

The committee concluded: 'The miracles of healing are acclaimed as closely parallel to the healings performed through mediums. It is strongly urged that, if we do not accept the evidence for modern psychical happenings, we should not, apart from long tradition, accept the Gospel records either.'

The story with which we began this chapter - about the former patient of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross appearing to her and giving her an autograph - is by no means an isolated case. Even if we dismiss this case as no more than the imagination of an overworked lecturer, we are left with literally thousands of similar incidents, in which people known to have died have appeared to relatives and spoken to them. Indeed, the journals of the Society for Psychical Research are filled with such cases.

What constitutes proof? Science says that proof is derived from scientific experiments that can be repeated over and over again. Michael Roll argues that experiments with materialization mediums have already provide the necessary evidence that we live after we die. I am impressed by the sheer volume of accounts which point to the validity of apparitions of deceased loved ones. These are particularly impressive because in many cases the messages they imparted contained predictions for the future or information unknown to the percipient at the time (such as where to look for a hidden will or hidden money).

Leslie Flint, perhaps the most tested British medium, considered that he was the most willing to be tested whenever he felt truth would be served by his submitting to conditions imposed on him by genuine researchers. Flint possessed a rare gift known as 'direct voice mediumship,' in which the voice of a discarnate person is transmitted through the air, independent of the medium's vocal organs. In perhaps his most famous series of tests, the Reverend Charles Drayton Thomas, a Methodist minister turned psychic investigator, examined Flint in the most rigorous scientific fashion. He and his fellow researchers used an infra-

red telescope which allowed them to see him in the darkness. They also sealed his mouth and affixed a throat microphone to detect if his vocal organs were used.

In his autobiography, *Voices in the Dark*, Flint comments, 'I have been boxed up, tied up, sealed up, gagged, bound and held and still the voices have come to speak their message of life eternal.' (A fuller examination of Flint's mediumship appears in Chapter 5.)

There have been exhaustive studies done on mediumistic communication. Robert Crookall spent years collecting every communication he could lay his hands on alleged to have come from people who claim to be dead, describing what they experienced at and soon after the moment of death. He analyzed the results in a book, *The Supreme Adventure*.

Crookall reasoned that it was impossible that all the people who claimed to have received the messages could be in collusion. Even if all the mediums were fraudulent, it was impossible that all their statements could be part of a coordinated global deception. If all the statements were received by telepathy from the minds of the sitters, as some researchers suggest, could they all have had similar imaginary ideas?

Assuming that the volume of evidence collected via deathbed visions, apparitions of loved ones, experiences of some kind or another out of the body, and experiences of the living with messages through mediums points to the conscious survival of the personality after death, can we then suppose that both science and religion must begin to examine in a new light some of the old ideas about how the universe works? Sooner or later science is going to be forced to come face to face with the fact that many of the data simply do not fit in. Because these data cannot be reconciled with the concepts we ordinarily use to explain how the universe works, we must examine them and see if they are in error.

Science is reluctant to do this for many reasons, but the best one is fear - fear that we may have to look at the world through a lens differ-

ent from the one we are using now. But by and large this is, and always has been, the process by which we have come to make discovery. One discovery overturns another, and only in the spirit of discovery do we really learn anything.

As Methodist educator Phillip Slater has pointed out, ‘The motive beneath the scientific method is fear - the fear of making a mistake. But mistakes produce feedback, the most priceless kind of information. To protect ourselves from this information is to make a suicide pact with the future.’

One early psychical researcher, G. N. M. Tyrell, has suggested that science is incapable of coping with the changes which psychical research would bring about simply because it would disrupt the world with which we are familiar. He continues: ‘The reason why thinking and scientific people reject psychic phenomena is not because they lack the power of discrimination, but because, as has been repeatedly said, of the innate pull of nature back towards the sensible world. They intuitively feel that the facts of psychical research will no more mix with the beliefs of common sense than will oil with water ... the fear that the dissonant facts, if admitted, will disrupt the scheme of the known and the familiar.’

The discovery of an ‘invisible world’ where millions of people may be living after their death would cause concern to science and turn religious teachings topsy-turvy. There is ample evidence provided in this book that such a world does indeed exist. I have never been there, and yet I have never been to Australia either and I know it exists.

After-death research will cast light in many new directions. The theological conceptions of heaven, hell, sin, judgment and other basically man—made ideas may be discarded if conclusive proof can be furnished that they are but the products of an Old Testament theology that stressed fear and terror instead of love.

A study of people who have been pronounced clinically dead but who have been revived appears in Raymond Moody’s best-seller *Life*

After Life. Again and again the theme is repeated through the hundreds of people he interviewed, who report that in the 'judgment experience' you judge yourself; others do not do it for you. Others report the experience of seeing their lives run before them like movies, after which they must decide for themselves where they went wrong - whether their lives up to that point had been a success or failure and what, if given the choice to return, they would do to change their life.

Not a single account taken from a person who had such a near-death experience points to a judgment seat or to eternal damnation.

What does all this add up to? Where do we go, if anywhere at all, when we die? What happens immediately after death? The rest of this book focuses on these and other questions relevant to survival. A vast amount of evidence for life after death has been accumulated from a wide variety of sources. None of the evidence points to the reality of any sort of religious afterlife nor the existence of a religious heaven or hell.

There are many facts that have come to light in the last eighty or so years that cannot be swept under the carpet. As Gustave Geley has said, 'The facts revealed necessitate the complete overthrow of the materialistic physiology and conception of the universe.'

The problem is that the real facts about life after death HAVE been swept under the carpet by organized religion. Why, you may ask? All down through the centuries there have been men who desired power and position. They learned early on that people could be controlled by fear. Fear of hell. So over time the truths of the Bible became obscured. All sorts of things were tacked on over the centuries. The Virgin birth for example. And the idea that Jesus was God. And, the commonly accepted idea by many Christians in a Judgment Day, when people's bodies would rise out of the grave. What, I wonder, is supposed to happen for those who have been cremated?

The conspiracy must be kept going at any cost! But as I said at the beginning of this book the time has come to tell the truth. And I intend to tell it!