

Excerpts

Excerpt from "The Dimensions of a Complete Life"

Many, many centuries ago, out on a lonely, obscure island called Patmos, a man by the name of John caught a vision of the new Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God. One of the greatest glories of this new city of God that John saw was its completeness. It was not partial and one-sided, but it was complete in all three of its dimensions. And so, in describing the city in the twenty-first chapter of the book of Revelation, John says this: "The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal." In other words, this new city of God, this city of ideal humanity, is not an unbalanced entity but it is complete on all sides.

Now John is saying something quite significant here. For so many of us the book of Revelation is a very difficult book, puzzling to decode. We look upon it as something of a great enigma wrapped in mystery. And certainly if we accept the book of Revelation as a record of actual historical occurrences it is a difficult book, shrouded with impenetrable mysteries. But if we will look beneath the peculiar jargon of its author and the prevailing apocalyptic symbolism, we will find in this book many eternal truths which continue to challenge us. One such truth is that of this text. What John is really saying is this: that life as it should be and life at its best is the life that is complete on all sides.

There are three dimensions of any complete life to which we can fitly give the words of this text: length, breadth, and height. The length of life as we shall think of it here is not its duration or its longevity, but it is the push of a life forward to achieve its personal ends and ambitions. It is the inward concern for one's own welfare. The breadth of life is the outward concern for the welfare of others. The height of life is the upward reach for God.

These are the three dimensions of life, and without the three being correlated, working harmoniously together, life is incomplete. Life is something of a great triangle. At one angle stands the individual person, at the other angle stand other persons, and at the top stands the Supreme, Infinite Person, God. These three must meet in every individual life if that life is to be complete. ...

Excerpt from "What Is Man?"

The question "What is man?" is one of the most important questions confronting any generation. The whole political, social, and economic structure of a society is largely determined by its answer to this pressing question. Indeed, the conflict which we witness in the world today between totalitarianism and democracy is at bottom a conflict over the question "What is man?" The question "What is man?" is one of the most important questions confronting any generation. The whole political, social, and economic structure of a society is largely determined by its answer to this pressing question. Indeed, the conflict which we witness in the world today between totalitarianism and democracy is at bottom a conflict over the question "What is man?"

In our generation the asking of this question has risen to extensive proportions. But although there is widespread agreement in asking the question, there is fantastic disagreement in answering it. For instance, there are those who look upon man as little more than an animal. They would say that man is a cosmic accident, that his whole life can be explained by matter in motion. Then there are those who would lift man almost to the position of a god. ...

There are still others who would seek to be a little more realistic about man. They would avoid the extremes of a pessimistic naturalism and an optimistic humanism and seek to combine the truths of both. They see within man a strange dualism, something of a dichotomy. So they would cry out with Carlyle, "There are depths in man that go down to the lowest hell, and heights that reach the highest heaven, for are not both heaven and hell made out of him—everlasting miracle and mystery that he is?"

One day the psalmist looked up and noticed the vastness of the cosmic order. He noticed the infinite expanse of the solar system; he noticed the beautiful stars; he gazed at the moon with all its scintillating beauty, and he said in the midst of all of this, "What is man?" He comes forth with an answer: "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor." Goodspeed, Moffatt, and the Revised Standard would say, "Thou hast made him a little less than divine, a little less than God, and crowned him with glory and honor." It is this realistic position that I would like to use as a basis of our thinking together and our meditation on the question "What is man?" ...