

DEATH: A Juxtaposition of Discourses

Melanio L. Leal, M.A.
San Beda College

For the past couple of decades, there has been an increase in the amount of attention and interest concerning with the beliefs pertaining to the end times, the end of the ages, or the end of the world.¹

Such renewed interest in the “end times” is further reinforced by the occurrence of natural calamities and disasters which are deemed in the Scriptures “as signs of the end.” This can be gleaned from national and international news, both print and media, which narrate horrifying stories of wars especially in the Middle East. These armed hostilities appear to be incessant that after the resolution of one conflict, another tension will rise. Earthquakes have likewise taken away thousands of lives all over the world. Haiti, Japan, Turkey, China, and more recently the Philippines are only some of the countries which have been devastated by severe earthquakes with unparalleled intensities and destructions.

The Philippines was not spared either by natural disasters. The vivid memory of the destructions brought about by typhoon Yolanda and Ondoy are still etched in the minds of many Filipinos. Moreover, the tropical storm Sendong devastated Cagayan de Oro in Mindanao. This typhoon brought massive flashfloods and mudslides and killed more than 1,200 people.²

All these calamities have remarkably and consistently been on the top of the lists in news items,³ that have made few to wonder about end times. Because of the fears and anxieties spawned by the natural catastrophes and prophecies of doom, the urgency of

¹Frank Lake wrote, “Technically, May 21st is Judgment Day, or The Rapture, so the world won’t end that day, it’s just the beginning of the end... But, don’t worry, it will end VERY soon after. Probably by October 21st of this year – at the latest.” Harold Camping has made his calculations based on his reading of the Bible. See “End of the World: October 21, 2011” available online: <http://weeklyworldnews.com/headlines/26946/end-of-world-may-21-2011> (accessed 7/7/2011). The web carries a lot of news about this, some headings include: “How to Sell your Soul to the Devil”; “End of World: October 21, 2011”; “Alien Spaceships to Attack Earth on 2011.” A single click in Google about this topic shows 355,000,000 results in just 0.21 seconds!

²The Philippine Star, (vol. XXVI no. 154, Wednesday, December 28, 2011), 1, 10.

³<http://www.december2012endofworld.com/recent-and-new-signs-of-the-end-of-the-world>

eschatological doctrine which is at the core of the Christian faith becomes a necessity. Because Eschatology instills joy, not fear; hope, not despair; consequently, humans may be able to appreciate the wonders of creation in the innate goodness of humanity, and in the unfailing love and providence of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

All preceding discourses on the phenomenal presence of natural disasters that yield fears and anxieties, and losses to humanity have given this researcher very strong impetus to embark on the study, *DEATH: A Juxtaposition of Discourses*.

In the Philippines, discourses about death have not been deliberately and systematically delved into by scholars and teachers in the academe. Thus, the absence of death discourses among and from the young has definitely made the current one very significant for future theological reflections on the world-view of human existence and death.

Therefore, the message about death in the Scriptures developed by traditions (Past) would have greater clarity for the college students of San Beda College, who are exposed to a different culture shaped by global events (Present) can reveal understanding either different from or similar with the eschatological traditions of the past. If found to be viewed differently by the college students; then, it is still expected that students' perceptions and understanding can still be directed by the teacher through the use of some instructional reinforcement and advancement activities to the light of contemporary interpretation of the Last Things--the common future promised by God.

Moreover, his deepening understanding of students' perceptions of death operating in the educational setting was fortified by his utilization of the integrated approach of the National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines (NCDP).⁴ In his attempt to present the doctrinal understanding of Death, the researcher has decided to organize the study in five parts:

Part one: *DEATH—An Introduction* consists of a citation from the Scriptures or Church's Teachings. This citation serves as an introduction to the topic that was quantitatively and qualitatively explored in subsequent sections of the study.

⁴Episcopal Commission on Education and Religious Instruction Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, *Maturing in Christian Faith: National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* (Manila: Saint Paul Publications, 1983).

Part two: DEATH--Juxtaposition between Contexts and Contextualization provides the researcher's qualitative findings derived from the quantitative data with situational discussions contextualized with the students' academic problems, attitudes, values, strengths and weaknesses. The findings derived from the students provided death discourses which served as Contexts for the Contextualization and juxtaposition by the scholars--who have the expertise on death. Such contextualization by experts provided deeper discourses about death.

Part three: DEATH--Juxtaposition by Experts' Exposition presents an extended qualitative exposition to showcase the researcher's deep understanding of eschatology operating in the educational setting, which was galvanized by his utilization of the integrated approach of the National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines (NCDP).

Part four: DEATH—Integration after Juxtaposition showcases the researcher's integrative ability from the students' death discourse vis-à-vis their concrete experiences to the bigger death themes, and then finally to the tripartite dimensions of the Faith--doctrine, moral, and worship.

Part five: DEATH: More Juxtaposing Questions presents a culmination of students' discourse of death from its doctrines to their practical applications in life. This culmination came into More Juxtaposing Questions about Death.

The achievement of the researcher's intention and objective was obtained through his coherent presentation and analysis of his quantitative data into qualitative findings, exposition and integration in five parts.

From the theological perspective, Zachary Hayes defines "death as the final point of the human person's individual history". As the final moment of a free, personal history, death is seen as the decisive act of human freedom in which the person can either accept or reject the mystery of God and thereby put the final seal on his or her personal history and destiny. Each human being's life on this earth has a beginning and an end. Death is certain. However, its time is unpredictable. The fact of death and its unpredictability require everyone to acknowledge his/her dependence and contingency at all times.⁵

⁵Zachary Hayes, OFM, "Death" in Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Pasay City: Daughters of St. Paul Publications, 1991), 272-273.

Hayes' definitions of death became the researcher's guiding star in dealing with the students' discourses of death. Will the data gathered from the students of San Beda College likewise reveal conformity to or juxtaposition with Hayes' definition that death is the final point of the human person's individual history that all men must accept or reject? The answer to this query is expressed in the ensuing paragraphs.

DEATH: An Introduction

From the Biblical perspective, death is seen as a normal event to be expected after a long and full life. However, the Bible has no univocal teaching on death.⁶

The Bible offers no univocal teaching on death. In the genealogical material of Genesis 5 and other early levels of the tradition (Gen 25: 7-11; 2 Sam 14:14) death seems to be a normal event to be expected after a long and full life. The fate of the deceased was expressed in the concept of sheol. The idea that death is related to sin occurs in Gen. 2:17 and Wis. 1:12ff. Significant reflection on death is found in Wisdom literature.⁷

As regard to the teaching of the Magisterium, there are a few statements concerning the topic about death. One of these is that death is a consequence of sin (D.S. 222, 372, 1511,1521). The Second Vatican Council has reaffirmed this ancient teaching and further discussed this phenomenological truth about death (G.S. 18). The most recent pronouncement on death is the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its "Letter on Certain Questions concerning Eschatology" (May, 1979). It affirmed that a spiritual element endowed with consciousness and will also known as the "soul", remains even after death of a person. This was made in response to the contemporary questions and problem about what happens when a Christian dies and what will happen in the general resurrection.⁸

The New Testament quite often uses the peaceful metaphor of falling asleep to represent death of believers (Acts 7:60; 1

⁶Zachary Hayes, OFM, "Death" in Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Pasay City: Daughters of St. Paul Publications, 1991), 272-273.

⁷*Ibid.*, 272.

⁸*Ibid.*

Corinthians 15:6 and 18; 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and 15; 2 Peter 3:4). Christians thinking has always faced difficulty the reality of death. ⁹For Christians, the darkness of death is accepted in the light of the hope of resurrection thereafter.¹⁰

For the better part of the Hebrew Bible, “death is simply the end, for great and small, righteous and wicked alike; all that awaits any of us beyond this world is Sheol, a sort of abyss in which impalpable shadows of ourselves linger on amid the dust and darkness. To die is to be cut off from the land of the living-and so to be cut off from God-permanently...”¹¹

Today there is renewed interest about death with dignity, preparation for dying, treatment for the terminally ill, and many more. This research should help Christians to face death not with fear or negativity but with courageous hope.

Jurgen Moltmann posits that the experience of death is always secondary since what we experience primarily is life and the love for life. Only after life shall we experience the loss of it and the loss of people we love.¹²

In reflecting on death, and specifically in expounding a Christian meaning of death to today’s youth, it will be important to directly link the experience of death and dying to the eschatological promise of God’s offer of life with Him as the final destiny of man. This is so because the materialistic culture of the times has made death very commonplace through news and television where the use of death is a means of domination in a greedy world. Where death and death dealing powers are popularized and life thus cheapened, death could just be met with a shrug of the shoulder. Inured to the idea of death because of the continuous display of hostilities worldwide and the deluge of local reports on killings and massacres, an indifference to death may already be part of the psyche and attitudes of the youth.¹³

There is a need to find appropriate occasions such as death in

⁹See John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and The End of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 125.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹See David Bentley Hart, “Death, Final Judgment, and The Meaning of Life”, *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 479.

¹²See Jurgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 77.

¹³See related report in Peter C. Phan, *Responses to 101 Questions on Death and Eternal Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 15-16.

the family or community to get the youth to reflect on death on the more personal level from a Christian perspective of the Last Things.

DEATH: Juxtaposition between Context and Contextualization

Emphatically, the general findings derived from the students provided death discourses which served as Contexts for the Contextualization by mature individuals—the scholars—who have the expertise on death. Such contextualization by experts provided deeper discourses about death. The researcher’s discussion exchange between the students’ and experts’ discourses on death is subsequently presented.

For achieving clarity, it must be emphasized that the questionnaire administered to the 844 students contained 20 statements on death. Students were asked to either agree or disagree on all the statements. For clear framework for the analysis of the data, discussion focus are given to those statements that obtain the highest and lowest ranks which usually are the rank 1 and the last rank. The ranks of the statements may likewise have given some patterns that can result in a series of findings. These patterns created by statement ranking are also given analytical focus.

Table 1: Propositions regarding Death (Sample Questionnaire)

A.	Propositions regarding Death			
1	Death puts to finality man’s personal history and destiny.			
2	One’s death can never be explained.			
3	Death is the separation of the soul from the body.			
4	Death definitely ends all that a person has accomplished throughout his life.			
5	Ironically, death is the saddest part about life.			
6	The death of Jesus is the model and norm of every human death.			
7	Death helps me realize that I do not have unlimited time at my disposal.			
8	I must be prepared at all times because death is certain and predictable.			

9	Death can be the end of faith, hope, and love.			
10	There is still love after death.			
11	Death negates human freedom either to accept or reject the mystery of God.			
12	I will meet my Creator in death.			
13	I shape and direct my life because I cannot escape death.			
14	Death is an unexpected moment.			
15	Death is the consequence and punishment for my sins.			
16	Death does not choose age.			
17	There is no way to return back to life because death is final.			
18	I have hope that there is life beyond this earthly life.			
19	Death is unavoidable. None of us can do anything to stop it.			
20	I do not know what will happen afterwards because death is a mystery.			

Table 2: Respondents' over all perception on Death Legend:

Item No.	Propositions Regarding Death	Average		Rank
16	Death does not choose age.	3.74	agree	1
19	Death is unavoidable. None of us can do anything to stop it.	3.61	agree	2
18	I have hope that there is life beyond this earthly life.	3.52	agree	3
9	Death can be the end of faith, hope, and love.	3.49	uncertain	4
14	Death is an unexpected moment.	3.49	uncertain	4
10	There is still love after death.	3.44	uncertain	5
12	I will meet my Creator in death.	3.39	uncertain	6
7	Death helps me realize that I do not have unlimited time at my disposal.	3.34	uncertain	7
20	I do not know what will happen afterwards because death is a mystery.	3.34	uncertain	8
3	Death is the separation of the soul from the body.	3.31	uncertain	9

13	I shape and direct my life because I cannot escape death.	3.30	uncertain	10
11	Death negates human freedom either to accept or reject the mystery of God.	2.96	uncertain	11
8	I must be prepared at all times because death is certain and predictable.	2.89	uncertain	12
6	The death of Jesus is the model and norm of every human death.	2.88	uncertain	13
2	One's death can never be explained.	2.80	uncertain	14
17	There is no way to return back to life because death is final.	2.69	uncertain	15
5	Ironically, death is the saddest part about life.	2.59	uncertain	16
4	Death definitely ends all that a person has accomplished throughout his life.	2.37	disagree	17
1	Death puts to finality man's personal history and destiny.	2.32	disagree	18
15	Death is the consequence and punishment for my sins.	1.81	disagree	19
Overall Mean		3.06 = Uncertain		

Legend:

- 4.5 - 5.0 = 5 (Strongly Agree) 3.5 - 4.4 = 4 (Agree)
 2.5 - 3.4 = 3 (Uncertain) 1.5 - 2.4 = 2 (Disagree)
 1.0 - 1.4 = 1 (Strongly Disagree)

The overall mean of 3.06 confirms the students' uncertainty about the reality of death as can be strengthened by their agreements that death does not choose age (16), it is unavoidable (19), and there is life beyond this earthly life (18) (3.74, 3.61 and 3.52, respectively). This uncertainty is likewise seen in 14 propositions, and their disagreements in 3 propositions. Such uncertainty is highly supported by the disbelief that death is the consequence and punishment for one's sins (15); it puts finality to man's personal history and destiny (1), and it definitely ends all that a person has accomplished throughout his life (4) (1.81, 2.32 and 2.37 respectively), which are lowest mean computations.

However, they positively endorse the idea that death does not choose age (16); it is unavoidable (19), and there is life beyond this earthly life (18). Students' agreement that Death does not choose age (16) is everybody's ordinary observation. Students

see people of all ages die and from infants, or even the unborn, to children and youth, to adults and the elderly. Thus, they have come to realize that death can come to someone at any age, time and place.

Secondly, inevitability of death is another idea that students have generally understood and accepted to be real and true among all. Accordingly and truly, death cannot be avoided (19). No one can escape from, or are exempted, from it. They have fully recognized that no one can do anything to stop it. Along this acceptance is their expression of resignation to the inevitability of death. However, they have a way of consoling this expression of death inevitability: their hope that there is life beyond this earthly life (19).

Indeed, students' affirmation of this HOPE for life after death despite the presence of uncertainties and disagreements can be still be a source of joy especially for this researcher who barely believed before the conduct of this research that young people like the students of San Beda College have already that strong and darting belief of the inevitability of death that all must face and accept.

However, this hope has disagreements which can be an antithesis. As if students have said: Inasmuch as they believe that there is life after this earthly life (18); therefore, death cannot definitely end all what a person has accomplished in his lifetime (4). Likewise, in his personal view, this researcher has countered that death can really put to finality man's personal history and destiny (1) because I too have the hope that life continues even after death (18). I too hope that death is the beginning of the greater life.

Profoundly derived from the findings, the students' agreement on death which chooses no one anytime anywhere clearly underscores the realization on the phenomenon of death that death is ever occurring in this humanity, and that must be shared by all humans with other living creatures. This profundity of understanding and realization by the students is somewhat leading to the naturalness of death; thus, students can truly say: "Because death is natural and happens to all; then, I—with or without sins--will eventually die, too. Then, why would other say that death is a consequence and punishment of my sins? Based on

the logic of the preceding findings and statements, I, too, reject and disagree with the idea.

Clear disagreement by the students to the statement that links death by sin can come to terms with Saint Paul's line: "the wages of sin is death" (cf. Rom. 6:23). The broader context of Paul's statement that brings metaphors becomes the line of argument necessitating explanation and clarification in relation to the students' uncertainties about the 14 prepositions on death. These uncertainties can raise and yield multiple questions for everybody's attention especially for this researcher who is finding for ample explanations and justifications for the major query raised in this study.

When deeply pursued, the students' agreement to the statement, "Death does not choose age" (16) emerged as an ordinary phenomenal observation. They have seen people of all ages die--from infants or even the unborn to children, to youth, to adults and the elderly. They have seen or known about the death of so many people in all the different stages of life as to lead to the conclusion that at any time of life, death can come to someone. At any age a person can die. Our culture tells us that we should fight hard against age, illness and death: However, as the end of life approaches, it often begins to lose importance, and "letting go" may instead feel like the right thing to do.

The second idea to which the respondents agree is on the inevitability of death. It may not be passed up. "Death cannot be avoided" (19). No one escapes it or is exempt from it. It may come at the end of a very, very long life, but finally one's end will come. One must accept this fact and concede that "none of us can do anything to stop it". Thus, a feeling of resignation is common to both statements. In contrast, an upbeat feeling is true about the third statement: that they have hope that there is life beyond this earthly life (18).

In agreeing to the statement "I have hope that there is life after death"(18), the students affirm and make a counter claim. Having agreed none of us can stop death's coming, they are resigned to the eventuality that somehow, someday my sojourn on earth will come to an end, I immediately step into the light. That the youth agree on this hope, rather than be ambivalent or uncertain, is something to be happy about.

This is all the more significant as the items to which they disagree are the antithesis of this hope. It is as if they were saying: I have hope that there is life beyond this earthly life (18), so I cannot agree that death definitely ends all that a person has accomplished throughout his life (4). And I also cannot agree that death puts to finality man's personal history and destiny (1), because I have hope that life continues after death; I have hope that the end of this life is the beginning of a greater life after 'life-after-death'.

Generally, the students' agreement to the two statements: death does not choose age (16) and death is unavoidable (19), and thus, none of us can do anything to stop it (19) underscores the perception and realization that death is something that is part of being human, and which humans share with all other living creatures. However, the strongest disagreement that can be seen is on the link made between sin and death that exactly affirms St. Paul's claim that, "the wages of sin is death!" (cf. Rom. 6:23). The connection is difficult to imagine. Again, it is as if the students are saying "I accept the fact that death is natural because whether I sin or not, I must die. How then can one say that death is a consequence and punishment of my sins? Therefore I reject and disagree with the idea."

Because of the clear disagreement by the respondents to the statement that links death to sin, they must be helped to deal and come to terms with that well known line from Saint Paul where he says "the wages of sin is death" (cf. Rom. 6:23). The broader context in which Paul's statement was made, the line of argument, and the metaphors invoked, will need to be explained and clarified. This task is important in the light of it getting the highest disagreement expressed by the respondents.

The students' clear disagreement on statements on "Death definitely ends all that a person has accomplished throughout his life" and "Death puts to finality man's personal history and destiny" indicates a refusal to accept the finality of human death. This position is consistent and strongly corroborative of the strong "I have hope that there is life beyond this earthly life statement". From this perspective then, we proceed to reflect on the statements about which respondents were "uncertain". Our purpose will be to lift the veil that shrouds the uncertainties and to align the reflection along the "I reject death's finality" toward

the positive stand of “I have hope!”

The 14 items about which the students are uncertain call attention to the fact that there is a vast need to provide clarification on these statements on death and the many questions that may be raised. These uncertainties have provided ample justification for this study.

We now come to consider the 14 statements of uncertainty. These may be viewed in pairs or clusters that are similar or contradictory, which can partly account for the ambivalence and uncertainty. Like there is still love after death contrasting with death can be the end of faith, hope and love. Then there is the inevitability and the unavoidable of death and with the loss of freedom in Death negates human freedom either to accept or reject the mystery of God. There are sets that are consequential like “ I do not know... therefore I must”. But the seeming resignation is violently contradicted by the despairing tone of “what’s the use? Anyway death cannot be explained”.

The reflections that follow expand on the individual statements and incorporate thoughts from theologians to throw in light in order to disperse the uncertainty, confront the rejection and reinforce the positive (agreement) already expressed by the respondents. Theological reflections are presented in clusters:

The first cluster is the Finality of death. There is no way to return back to life because death is final (17); Death negates human freedom either to accept or reject the mystery of God (11); Death can be the end of faith, hope, and love (9).

Would coming back from death be good? Would it be useful? Admitting one has not lived life well, some who die would ask for a second chance, promising to do better. But this implies that one values this life more than the life on the other side of death. Therefore, what is needed is to come to a full understanding and appreciation of what comes after death and how the way we live in this life determines what that other life will be for each of us. Will it be entirely new and unrelated to the present life? Or will there be continuity? If we have lived by this truth, we shall have prepared well for death. Anthony Kelly offers us an inspired insight:

God is intent from the beginning on drawing each human being into the divine life. When John declares that “God is love”

(1Jn 4:8, 16), he goes on to remind us that it is not as though we first loved God, but that God has first loved us (1 Jn 4:10). The divine initiative is always the determining factor in bringing the human person to the fullness of life. The creature's coming to be in God is the outcome of the divine self-giving through the course of a lifetime.

In contrast, those who have been open to the divine gift can take a different view of death. Kelly assures us of this when he observes:

In this context of communion with God, the source of all life, death remains as the limit to this form of earthly life, but is transformed. It is an act of ultimate surrender to the Father in union with Christ. It is yielding to the ultimate creativity of the Spirit who makes all things new. Though death is experienced as a limit, it imposes no limit on the life-giving mercy of God.

When we surmise that our link with God can end with death; when we concede this we are, in effect, conceding that death has such great power. We ought, instead, to turn our will toward these i.e. faith, hope and love, as the means by which we enter into life with God. And through these acts experience transformation into conformity with Christ and our assimilation into God.

The second cluster is What death demands from me. I shape and direct my life because I cannot escape death (13); I must be prepared at all times because death is certain and predictable (8); Death is an unexpected moment (14); Death helps me realize that I do not have unlimited time at my disposal (7).

There is no escaping death. This realization hopefully compels me to seek or give direction to my life. I cannot just fritter my life away. Knowing that I must return to dust someday must motivate me to give meaning to my life.

Death is for certain, but not when it will come. It often comes in the most unexpected moment. Therefore, I must be prepared for it at all times. But that's assuming I have accepted death. Believers have been admonished to prepare for death. It is an event we are expected to welcome. While it comes at an unexpected moment, it is something we should expect as part of God's original plan. Colm McKeating has this to say:

"God's original plan included the termination of this present life as the transition to an eternal destiny".

It is a matter of consequence; therefore, I make the best use of time. Make the best of life soonest. I must be prepared at all times because death is sure to come. What should I prepare for? Since I know that in death I step into the the mysery of God I must strive to be worthy of Him. But my effort will surely fall short of the immense demand. Thus, must I hope that God who gave me the life will give me the courage to face death and the capacity to take what greater gift he has in store for me. A. Kelly has this valuable insight:

If our God-given destiny is to share in the divine life, then the human person must have the spiritual capacity to receive this final gift.

The third cluster is Uncertainty and sadness.“I do not know what will happen afterwards because death is a mystery (20);“One’s death can never be explained (2); “Ironically, death is the saddest part about life (5)”.

In death, I am plunged into darkness, into dark mystery that I cannot know about, or what happens afterwards. This stance should be replaced with the conviction that our real home is elsewhere. We feel like we are strangers in this world; merely on pilgrimage and passing by. We are homeward bound. We are called to share in Christ’s passage through death into his resurrection; into the eternity of God. Benedict the XVI has this admonition:

...that only those who can recognize a great hope in death, can live a life based on hope. If we reduce man exclusively to his horizontal dimension, to that which can be perceived empirically, life itself loses its profound meaning. Man needs eternity for every other hope is too brief, too limited for him. Man can be explained only if there is a Love which overcomes every isolation, even that of death, in a totality which also transcends time and space. Man can be explained, he finds his deepest meaning, only if there is God. And we know that God left his distance for us and made himself close. He entered into our life and tells us: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (Jn. 11:25-26).

I have to be resigned to the fact that death cannot be explained. Yet it all seems unjust; unfair. It makes death a part of life to bring it down to sadness and total loss. Part of the difficulty in explaining

death is that it contains a contradiction. On the one hand we speak of it as natural, something we share with all living creatures. At the same time we experience it as unnatural. Death runs contrary to the whole orientation of human consciousness.

The horizon of human awareness is one of indeterminate futurity, an openness that aims naturally beyond nature; we have projects, plans, expectations...designs that can be only incrementally embodied, desires that can be only progressively pursued... To be human is to possess—consciously, that is—a future and to be able to turn one's will toward it. Death, therefore, must always come as an interruption for us...a kind of negation of human nature---a kind of ultimate meaninglessness.

In death whatever one has achieved will, it seems, be reduced to nothing. There is regret. As if nothing of life counts. What then is life for? Why did I have to be born? I was happy living, and now all these have to be taken away. Everything I worked for will be for nothing, everything I hoped for will be unfulfilled. There will no longer be a chance to claim some relief from my sufferings and failures. I look into the future and I ultimately see my life and myself swallowed into nothingness. Can anything be sadder? David Bentley Hart, in an article "Death, Final Judgment and the Meaning of Life" says:

Death provokes, torments, and threatens us with the possibility of nothingness, the futility of all enterprises, the overthrow of all hopes, the impossibility of indemnification for our miseries or recompense for our disappointments; it awaits us as a final crisis that make all life questionable.

The fourth cluster is What death is about. Death is the separation of the soul from the body (3);The death of Jesus is the model and norm of every human death (6).

This is but an idea for explaining the end of a person. But must the person end? As hinted elsewhere death is not a separation from God; it is sin that is alienation from God. It is not an annihilation of the person nor the human spirit. Instead of the describing death in dualism's image of separation of body and soul, we should speak of dying as a human act experienced by the whole person. McKeating posits "...at death we gather up and take with us our life as a whole into eternity".

Understanding the death of Jesus is the only way I can

understand, accept and appreciate and prepare for my own death. J. Moltmann has this valuable insight:

What happened to, and with, the dead Christ is a transformation and a transfiguration through and beyond dying and death, a transfiguration of his bodily form (Phil.3.21), a metamorphosis from our low estate into the form of glory (Phil. 2.6-11). In analogy to this, believers will see their deaths too as part of the process in which this whole mortal creation will be transfigured and be born again to become the kingdom of glory. The resurrection of the body means the metamorphosis of this transient creation into the eternal kingdom of God, and of this mortal life into eternal life. *Vita mutator non tollitur* - life changes but it is not taken away.

the fifth cluster . Hope despite death. There is still love after death (10); I will meet my Creator in death.(12)

“There is still love after death” is a hopeful statement; almost a wish. But since it is uttered in uncertainty, from the standpoint of human longing, then it is just the customary promise of eternal love among lovers. The pledging of deathless love is put into question by Death. But if we go beyond our individual longings into our relationship with the vast wholeness of humanity and the cosmos as drawn into communion with God, then, and only then, do we escape the uncertainty and the questioning by, and about, Death.

Let us say it once more before we end: the individual’s salvation is whole and entire only when the salvation of the cosmos and all the elect has come to full fruition. For the redeemed are not simply adjacent to each other in heaven. Rather, in their being together as the one Christ, they are heaven. In that moment, the whole creation will become song. It will be a single act in which, forgetful of self, the individual will break through the limits of being into the whole, and the whole take up its dwelling in the individual. It will be joy in which all questioning is resolved and satisfied.

Faith and love must be grounded on HOPE: my hope that there is life after death. What is certain is that relationship with, and life in God, continues beyond death. This is the ground on which hope must stand-that I will meet my Creator in death.

The youth finds no difficulty in accepting death as a fact of earthly life. The inevitability of death is obvious to them. Death will come to everyone; everyone will have to face death. Everyone

will die. It's just a matter of who will die first. They expect it to eventually happen to each one of them. As end of personal history, of dreams and life, death is to them the saddest truth about life. In addition to sadness there is also a feeling of anxiety that consumes them whenever they think of death. It is also a feeling of fear and of being scared about what is going to happen. They are not sure whether or not there is life after death. They hope there is but cannot say for sure. To their young minds death is a mystery that can never be fully explained. There is thus the resigned acceptance that death is part of being human, However, since there is much uncertainty about what happens at death and what one steps into upon death, they desire some clarification about the nature or reality of the life that (hopefully) continues upon one's dying.

This limited understanding of uncertainties about one's death by the youth is influenced by the traditional teaching in school and parish as well as from folk narratives they have imbibed since childhood. Part of this is the idea and belief that there might be life after death.

What the youth are asking for, and deserve, is nothing short of "proof of life- after-death". Possibly one experience which they can already have a foretaste of while they are alive. Yet, more than information or assurance that there is life after death, the youth must come to understand from Christian faith the implications of such life-after-death to their present life and to the future that awaits the human community which they, the youth today, would be part of. For that life after death has been propounded as life for eternity. So, therefore, they ought to be able to pinpoint the basis for that belief and articulate a confession of that hope in eternal life.

Even before discussing "hope for life-after-death" and the perception that death is the "final end" of human existence, it will be useful to first address the assertion that death "can never be fully explained". This notion has to be dispelled along with the feeling that "death is the saddest truth about life". Not to do so would be a disservice to the youth.

DEATH: Juxtaposition by Experts' Exposition

In his article Eschatology and Resurrection, Stephen Davis,

claims that “death is the complete and final end of our existence as human beings”. For him there is no more life after death in the sense of continuing, conscious existence as individuals. Moreover, Karl Rahner, widely recognized as the outstanding Catholic theologian of the twentieth century insists in his book *On the Theology of Death* that “death marks the absolute end of our state of pilgrimage”. Each individual’s free self-affirmation is achieved once and for all in death. Rahner further asserts that our lives are permeated by the prospect of death.

The Australian theologian Tony Kelly has movingly catalogued the pain and negativity of death. Firstly, he rightly points out, death is final. There is no return. You do not come back. You go through it once and that is it. No one comes back to tell you what it was like. Secondly, death is dark. You do not know what happens afterwards. From the purely human level, the person who dies is simply gone from us. Thirdly, death is silent. A person who was once so communicative can now say nothing. And that silence also spells the end of relationship. Since you can no longer talk to each other, death means cessation of relationship. Fourthly, death is ugly. The most beautiful face, the most graceful body, the most intelligent mind, all, without exception, decay, become food for worms, despite pathetic human attempts to delay the inevitable with embalming and cosmetics. Finally, death is unavoidable. None of us can do anything to stop it: all our learning and all our accomplishments are impotent, powerless, poor, in the face of death. As David Bentley Hart puts it, “As organisms, we are subject-like all animals-to the inescapable circularity of natural existence: birth and copulation and death”.

In trying to explain the phenomenon of death to the youth, it shall be our aim to displace the horrifying perception and depiction of death with one that leads to calm acceptance based on a deep understanding of its significance to human beings. We shall do this by first raising awareness and affirmation that at the heart of all creation there is this natural rhythm and cycle of death and life. But of the two, life is of greater significance; death in fact being a pre-condition for new life.

From this backdrop, we shall then proceed to clarify death (and life) under three sub-topics: a) death and dying as a personal, human act; b) the state of existence immediately upon death, and

c) death as transformation of the person's spirit oriented towards resurrection. In each sub-topic our relationship with Earth and the cosmos (natural); our relationship with one another, the human community and the world throughout history (social), are touched upon in light of the destiny that God has offered humanity within the cosmos. With this Exposition we shall have satisfied the youth's quest for "proof of life-after-death", and help them to understand why Christians dare to hope beyond the grave.

The Natural Rhythm of Life and Death

The death of a human being is above all a natural event. We die because we are finite. We share this fate with all other living creatures.

Colm McKeating says, "the awareness of being destined to die gives clarity and definition to life". Death enables us to gain perspective on life. And what we learn is that life and death are thoroughly intertwined and penetrate each other. Living and dying go on together simultaneously. And this natural rhythm of death and new life is at the heart of creation.

Dying as a Deeply Human Act

Although man shares death with all living beings, human death is distinct. For human beings, death is not merely an act of nature. Death is a human event precisely because it is the death of a human person. Unlike the plants and animals death understood as a human event means that it is the whole person who dies, not just the body, but the person, body and soul. We die with the full awareness that it is the end of our personal history and with the eternal freedom of giving consent to it. Furthermore, McKeating posits "...at death we gather up and take with us our life as a whole into eternity". Jurgen Moltmann explains that "the human being lives wholly, the whole human being dies. God will wholly raise the human being." .

One's state of existence beyond death

The human soul continues to be related to the world even after

death. The person: (soul/spirit) is not completely cut off from the world after death. Karl Rahner has proposed this theory:

“Death does not simply withdraw a person from the world and make him a-cosmic; rather it transposes him to a new and more comprehensive relationship to the world, freed from the limitations of a single point in space and time characteristic of his earthly existence”.

Death has to be seen as a transformation of the person’s spirit, that is to say, his or her wholeness and life history; and this means the whole person. Through death the human person is transformed from restricted life to unrestricted existence. Death de-restricts the human being’s spirit in both time and space. The dead are living “before God”.

The human person’s spirit survives death.

We cannot, therefore, say: “in death the whole human being is annihilated” or “In death human identity comes to an end”. Neither can we say that death is the separation of the soul from the body, or that death is the separation of the human being from God. Death is not the end of the whole person. It is not an “annihilation”. Rather, we should say: “God’s original plan included the termination of this present life as the transition to an eternal destiny.

Jurgen Moltmann gives a very clear account of the foundation of Christian hope in the afterlife in the relationship of God with human beings and thus, with the persons of the dead.

The Spirit brings God into relationship to the whole person, body and soul, past and future, and at the meeting point of each person’s social and natural relationships. The Spirit brings the whole person into relationship with God, in the entire fabric of that person’s life. In the Spirit we live “before God’, just as the ‘light of God’s countenance’ is turned toward us in the presence of his Spirit. In us, the Spirit of life shapes the mutual interdependence of body and soul, past and future, and the social relationships in the history of our lives”.

Moltmann further points out that the relationship of God with man and man with God is in the Spirit. This relationship is immortal and is not terminated or extinguished in death. For the Spirit as the divine power of resurrection cannot be destroyed by death.

It is for this reason that we are able say that the person who has died to this earthly life, lives on as seed of a resurrected life, in the Spirit, though not yet risen, because awaiting transfiguration into glorified existence. In every death “the relationship in which God has put himself to the human being remains just as indissoluble as the relationship that the human being has been put to God”.

From all of the above, we come to this realization: God’s relationship with us is a dimension of our existence which we do not lose even in death.

Christians dare to Hope beyond the grave

Anthony Kelly presents an interesting view on a contrasting attitude toward death: death as threat to the self-enclosed self-centered human; versus death as gift by the believer after the pattern of Christ’s death. He takes off from Ernest Becker’s study, which uncovers a primitive terror in the face of death, which then leads to a culture of denial of death. He then moves on to Ladislaus Boros work which presents the thrust of life as somehow positing death as a door to the final self-realization in the light of the infinite. Then he brings up the sin-death relationship and proceeds to the death of Christ as gift.

Christian death must be tied in to the death of Christ. The Christian understanding of death should be in terms of Christ’s self-giving into death for the sake of the world’s salvation. Kelly expounds:

This gift occurs so that “by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone” (Heb 2:9) Even more specifically, Christ is sent “so that he might ...free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Heb 2:14-15). In the gift of Christ a multidimensional giving is at work. Christ gives himself in death for the salvation of the world. This looks back to the Father giving the Son into such a death. In the power of the Spirit, this death becomes a gift given in the dark abyss of the death of each Christian: “Those who believe in me, even though they die, they will live” (Jn 11:25).

Jesus’ self-offering in death is given as the form and energy of true life: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us--- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.” (Jn 3:16)

The death and resurrection of Christ becomes the paradigm that throws new light on the meaning of death and transforms it. Union with the risen Christ, already started here on earth, is the basis for Christian hope in life-after-death. But the resurrection of the body, individually, does not take place immediately upon death. There is a phase after death in which union with God is attained. This union however has still to be brought to perfection.

DEATH: Integration after Juxtaposition

The catalogue of pain and negativity listed by Tony Kelly which was cited in the Introduction may be taken as a secular and pagan observation. This morbid view is overturned by the opposite vision presented in the reflections presented above. With apologies to Tony Kelly we may now confidently proclaim the joy and positivity of death --- the inverse of his catalogue of pain and negativity of death. Let us proceed in the reverse order:

Item 5: death is unavoidable. None of us can do anything to stop it: all our learning and all our accomplishments are impotent, powerless, poor, in the face of death.

Who would want to live for a thousand years in a spent and weakened body? Or why would anyone want to live forever in this kind of ruined world? Above all why would anyone want to avoid death or stop it when it is the necessary step to new life?

Jesus did not avoid but embraced human death. Doing so, he conquered and transformed death. For the Christian the fact that death and dying is inevitable and unavoidable has turned into an essential element of one's final acceptance of God's offer of a new mode and level of living in his Kingdom, sharing in his life and being. Christ shows us how. He takes us with him to the Father passing through a new way of dying by turning death into a gift. Why then think at all of avoiding death?

Item 4: death is ugly. The most beautiful face, the most graceful body, the most intelligent mind, all, without exception, decay, become food for worms, despite pathetic human attempts to delay the inevitable with embalming and cosmetics.

When we die our body decays, turns to dust, goes back to the natural elements it is made of, and return to the earth. All animal carcass decay, leaves and flowers dry up and crumble to

dust. Beauty, gracefulness and intelligence are a gift of life. Their natural passing may evoke regret, but above all they ought to invite gratitude and relive joy and appreciation in remembrance. Respect and honor for self-giving is what decay and returning to dust deserve and call for. Even in death the lingering affirmation on a wholly and fully lived life, and joyful self-giving in death cannot be anything but “beautiful!”

Item 3: death is silent. A person who was once so communicative can now say nothing. And that silence also spells the end of relationship. Since you can no longer talk to each other, death means cessation of relationship.

Speech is not the only, nor the highest form of communication. Therefore silence does not necessarily end communication and relationship. We all know that. And we also know the limits of human speech and communication. From this we intuit that the limitations of earthly communication will be superseded by a higher level and form of communication after death, along with the highest form and level of prayer and worship.

Item 4: is death is dark. You do not know what happens afterwards. From the purely human level, the person who dies is simply gone from us.

Yes, gone from us. From being physically present with us. But born to another level of existence. Gone into the presence of God more clearly than is possible among the living. And into the blinding “light” of the risen Christ in his glorified humanity. Though not as yet sharing in the glorified state, there are the heaven-bound and ready. Then there are those undergoing purification but likewise assured of glory. And even those rejecting heaven may turn away from the light, but must still experience indirect light, knowing God is not giving up on anyone of them.

Item 1: death is final. There is no return. You do not come back. You go through it once and that is it. No one comes back to tell you what it was like.

Not so. Someone has gone through death and back, and has told us what it is like. Death may mark the end of earthly life, but it is not a termination of existence, not the final end for man. New life in Christ, in a new community, in a “new heaven” and “new earth” awaits all who pass through death. For life is not ended by death; only transformed after the paradigm of the risen humanity

of Christ, the final fulfillment and completion of the eternal bond uniting God and man. For man, death is not final. What is final is eternal life offered by God, shared with all, in the glorified humanity of Christ. For humanity, the world and the cosmos, what is final is incorporation into the community of the resurrection, into the “Body of Christ”.

In conclusion, the 844 students of San Beda College are put together into synthesis have generally advanced death discourses teeming with positive and optimistic tone and perception (conformity) amid their assertions on anxiety, worry, sadness and fear of DEATH (juxtaposition). Such juvenile positive assertions on the reality of death have found convergence with experts’ beliefs that all humans—child or adult, man or woman from any race—will die. This is a phenomenon that happens to all. Thus, students’ full resignation to death, trust in and obedience to God provide an overall balance between man’s acceptance of life that culminates into death. Indeed, Hayes’ definition that death is the final point of the human person’s individual history has initially met juxtaposition but finally found conformation by the students of San Beda College.

DEATH: More Juxtaposing Questions!

However, more profound cognitive juxtaposition can yield other more juxtaposing thoughts that can strike again that overall balance into more juxtaposing questions for future discourses; such as:

1. What is death for all earthly creatures? Earthly creatures sharing in nature have a specific lifespan. They are born, mature then die, returning to the earth. Humans are part of nature and thus also undergo this natural cycle of birth and death.
2. What difference is there in the death of a human being? The human being has conscious existence that is constituted in the wholeness of the person, body, mind and spirit. In addition God has established a relationship with this human spirit and wholeness; and the person, in some way, responds and enters into the relationship with God by the

way one lives and constitutes his/her wholeness. By virtue of this wholeness being in a relationship with God, the whole person dies but is taken up in the relationship which survives death. The dead live "before God".

3. Why do we say, and what do we mean, when we say that death is a human act? Death is a human act because it is the whole person, body mind and spirit who dies. In dying the person's life and history comes to an end and is gathered up before the presence of God. For the human being, dying is a conscious act, our final act of freedom, as we take up our life as a whole into eternity.
4. What state of existence do the dead have? Where are the dead? What is life after death? The dead are in some intermediate state between death and the awaited resurrection of the body. The intermediate state may be one of three situations depending on the life a person has lived. We differentiate these states as heaven (life of grace); purgatory, (serving time for purification to become worthy of heaven; and hell (human rejection of heaven/state of isolation).
5. Is there a link between the dead and the living? How? Why? Yes. The living can pray for the dead, who need to undergo a process of purification, or conversion from their decision to reject heaven. The dead, in turn can pray for the living who are striving to lead a life in Christ. This exchange is a revered practice of the communion of saints, or the community of the resurrection.
6. How might we truly come to fully understand human death? Human death is linked to the hope of resurrection. We can come to fully understand this orientation of death to resurrection when we look into Christ's death and rising. Human death is transformed by his death for the sins of the world, and is thus caught up in his rising. To share in the glorified humanity of Christ is what is promised to man as God's gift.
7. Why did Christ have to undergo the kind of death he suffered? To serve as ransom and appeasement to the Father on behalf of sinful humanity. By his death he brought mankind back to the favor of the Father, reconciled and

- saved.
8. What did Christ's death accomplish? For himself? For humanity? For all creation? Christ receives his glorification as his reward for obedience unto death to the Father's desire to give him up to death for the world, and Christ dies in self-surrender to the Father for the world. For humanity and for all creation, his rising becomes the seed and first fruit in fulfillment of God's intended destiny for mankind, the world and the cosmos.
 9. Why is death called the final enemy? Death interrupts our natural orientation to God's eternity, which orientation has been made part of our essence. Death goes against this orientation and is thus considered an enemy of God. Vanquished by the death and resurrection of Christ, death will be ultimately defeated as the 'last enemy' at the general resurrection during Christ's second coming.
 10. How might one make of death a gift? Following the example of Jesus, who obediently offered his death to the Father, for the redemption of the world, the Christian may approach death from a similar spirit of gift-giving.

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