
LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations

Spring 1986

Review: Death and the Afterlife

Gary R. Habermas

Liberty University, ghabermas@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [History of Religions of Eastern Origins Commons](#), [History of Religions of Western Origin Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Habermas, Gary R., "Review: Death and the Afterlife" (1986). *LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 338.

https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs/338

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu.

hermeneutical and metaphysical analysis of love (via markedly Hegelian patterns), Jüngel expresses his thesis point. Not from any vague trinitarian NT statements but only from the reality of God who is love can one establish the fact and necessity of the tri-unity of the God who has come near in Jesus.

In analysis, one must first emphasize the positive elements of Jüngel's colossal work. His discussion on the background of modern theological doubt is very helpful and ought to be heeded. In desiring to magnify God's absolute glory it is possible to emphasize him as so vastly beyond and essentially unthinkable that the revelation of God and the incarnation of the Son of God are made theologically impossible! Further, I appreciated Jüngel's desire to overcome modern doubt by a reaffirmation of the biblical perspective of God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. In this the "whereness" of God is clearly important in the modern God-talk debate. Finally, Jüngel's discussion of hermeneutical issues (as related also to God-talk) is very helpful and informative. Jüngel's historical, philosophical, and theological expertise is vast and with these tools he clearly desires to strengthen the foundations of the church on the one hand, and to make clear the final inappropriateness of modern theological and philosophical skepticism.

However, Jüngel's profound thesis is not an orthodox expression of the Christian faith. While his discussions are often helpful and always provocative, the influence of his mentor, Karl Barth (see Jüngel's *God's Being is in Becoming*), is clear. Jüngel does not merely mimic Barth, but many of the criticisms leveled at Barth in the past are at least partially applicable to Jüngel. Though he desires to be scriptural, Jüngel clearly picks and chooses only the scriptures which supposedly support his views. His Christology, while at times hinting at the Chalcedonian conclusion, is semi-adoptionist and at times reflects the process theology view of Christ as the man most fully apprehending God's nearness and creative love. Jüngel's trinity, as was Barth's, is quite Hegelian and often modalistic. Furthermore, this translation is often hard to read (this is not Guder's fault, for Jüngel's German is notoriously difficult).

Despite these major problems, this text is recommended for the professional theologian and advanced student in theology. It is an excellent treatment of the present situation. Jüngel's formulations should provoke interaction and refinement of the orthodox expression of the living God who has revealed himself by his incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

JOHN D. MORRISON
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Death and the Afterlife, by Robert A. Morey. Minneapolis: Bethany, 1984. Pp. 315. \$11.95. Paper.

In his Foreword, Walter Martin remarks that this book by Robert Morey will become "a standard reference work" on the subject of death and the afterlife. In the Preface, Roger Nicole notes the technical precision in Morey's research. The book consists of two major parts ("Exposition" and "Defense")

and two appendices. The five chapters in Part I chiefly pursue the hermeneutical, lexicographical, extra-biblical, and theological background and meanings of a variety of topics. Included are treatments of body, soul and spirit, Sheol, Hades and Gehenna, as well as everlasting life and eternal punishment. There are also five chapters in Part II, devoted chiefly to polemics against materialism, annihilationalism, universalism and occultism. The two appendices deal respectively with Alfred Edersheim's position on eternal punishment and quotations from "church fathers," although the material is taken from only two, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. The book then closes with a Selected Bibliography and three indices.

This volume generally exhibits a high degree of scholarship. One is repeatedly impressed by the amount of background material and research which had to be done in order to interact properly with the individual topics in Part I. Chap. 1, as an example, sets forth hermeneutical guidelines for the scriptural study of death and the afterlife. Many unbiblical aberrations are the result of improper interpretation. By performing such a foundational task, Morey lays the groundwork for his later conclusions. Other instances of proper research procedures include Morey's careful attention to the meanings of words, the exegetical contexts, and extra-biblical meanings supplied by intertestamental and rabbinic sources.

Part II is concerned with somewhat different material, chiefly defending the biblical options set forth in the first part against non-biblical views. Chap. 7 is a pointed and insightful critique of philosophical materialism. Chap. 10 contains good warnings against any involvement in the occult, especially by the Christian. This is timely in light of the tendency, even among Christians, to tamper with this area out of curiosity. Few sins are condemned so strongly in Scripture (cf. Deut 18:9-12, 14; Lev 20:27; and Rev 21:8).

Lastly, the Bibliography is generally excellent, including some relatively obscure works. Yet, there are some problems in this section, a few of which will be noted momentarily.

Generally speaking, this volume by Morey is a well-researched treatise on the biblical data concerning death and eternal life. However, there are areas in this work which are problematical and need strengthening.

One such area concerns the Bibliography, just mentioned for its general strengths. While a few small problems might simply be overlooked, several reoccur. For instance, it was frustrating to be referred to the Bibliography for several books by certain authors, only to find that those books were not included there (pp. 99, 284, 286). More serious, however, is that in Morey's major critique of Karl Barth (pp. 227-31, 236-38), including direct references to his writings, primary sources are absent from both the footnotes and the Bibliography. The reader should be directed to the original sources against which Morey's criticisms can be checked.

Second, in the "Life After Life" section of chap. 10 (pp. 262-64), researchers are blamed for some things of which they are not generally guilty, such as whether "life after life" experiences are termed near-death or post-death. For instance, Raymond Moody does not generally (if ever) call them "after death experiences," as Morey asserts on p. 263. A more critical issue is

that Morey dismisses these experiences much too easily, citing several natural hypotheses (pp. 263–64). Yet, each of these has been thoroughly refuted in relevant publications which Morey does not cite at all. For instance, pharmaceutical, neurological, physiological, or psychological causes are unable to explain the many corroborative experiences which have been recorded. Veridical experiences have not been explained by such subjective theories. But here is the crucial point. Morey also approvingly cites Maurice Rawlings's research. Therefore, he apparently speaks positively of (or at least allows for) Christian near-death experiences and experiences of a hell which are consistent with the biblical description (i.e., the "hell experiences" which Rawlings widely popularized). If this is the case, he should more clearly inform his readers that not all such experiences are nonbiblical. He need not make Christians who have had near-death experiences (and there are many) feel that these are necessarily due to occultic reasons. I believe that there must be a critical reevaluation of near-death experiences consistent with biblical norms. This brief section in Morey's book is important, given the contemporary scene. But its quick dismissals without distinctions tend to be both incorrect and misleading, necessitating a more careful response.

Third and most important, Morey's volume is limited by the exclusion of some crucial areas on the subject of death and the afterlife which have largely been ignored. Immortality of the soul (of several varieties) has, throughout history, been the chief competition for the Christian view of resurrection of the body. More discussion of this contrast in Part I would have been very helpful. I was also very surprised to find virtually no treatment of the *nature* of the resurrection body, including the implications of Jesus' resurrection. Further, if Morey's intention in chap. 7 is to critique the general naturalistic position that denies life after death, additional positions besides materialism need to be included. And with the current popularity of the Eastern religions, treatment of their views (beyond reincarnation, pp. 264–65) could easily have taken an additional chapter in Part II. These extra issues would have made this book even more relevant to current trends. As it is, the volume appears to be more oriented towards cultic claims than philosophical ones. Of course, any book could be strengthened by the inclusion of additional material, so these are only suggestions of some crucial areas.

The overall evaluation of this book, however, is surely positive. Perhaps its greatest virtue is the level and amount of research, as indicated above. But additionally, its "1, 2, 3 approach" keeps it interesting and very readable. The weaknesses critiqued here could easily be remedied.

The topic of death and the afterlife is always a popular one. For the Christian, Scripture presents infallible guidelines. Though many are looking to the occult, Scripture seriously warns against such an approach. Accordingly, I recommend this book as a textbook for courses on cults or eschatology, whether for group studies or for personal reading. Much noteworthy data is supplied which needs to be studied and digested.

GARY R. HABERMAS
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY