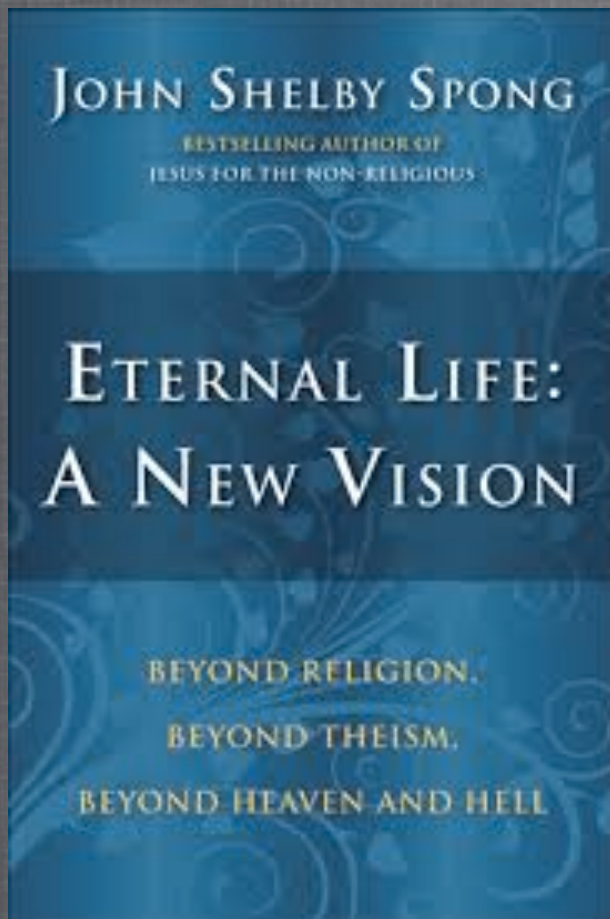
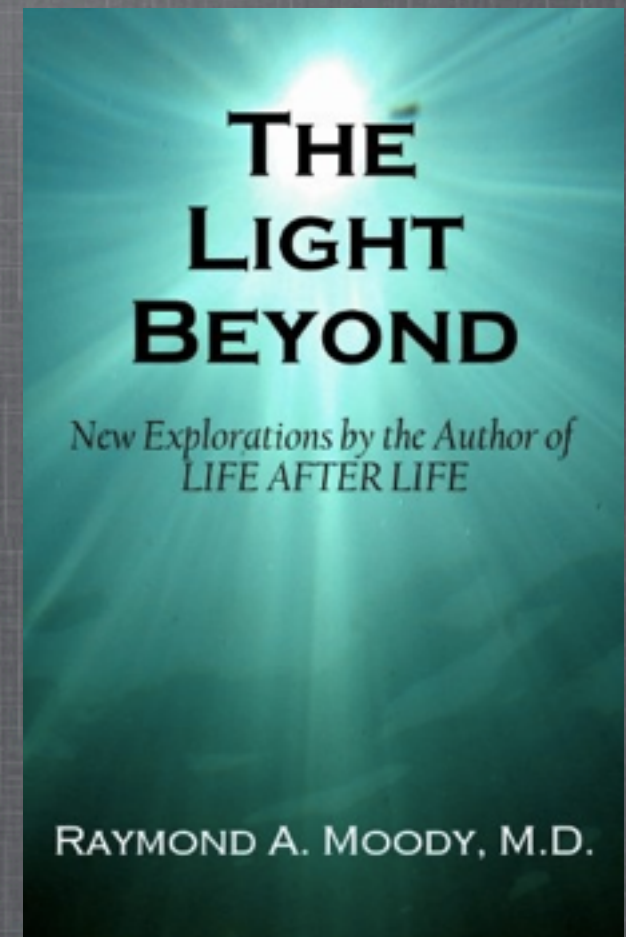


MEETING DEATH WITH HOPE AND UNDERSTANDING



A bookstudy
ACTS
St David's
United
Church
Calgary

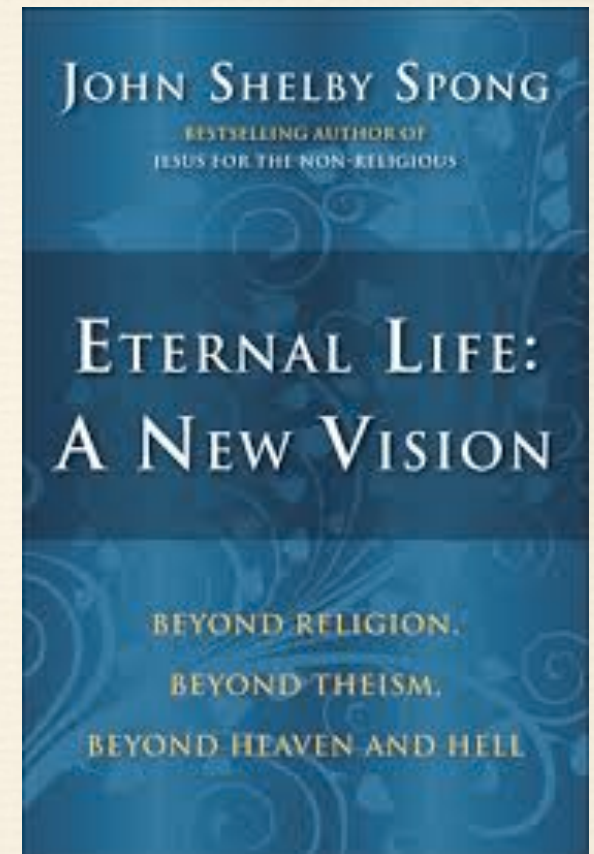


Internet Page: death.stdavidscalgary.net

Meeting Death with Hope and Understanding

Session 8

- ❖ Opening
- ❖ Presentation - A New Perspective on Death
Chapters 10 - 12
- ❖ Video - John Spong - Q&A @ Chautauqua
- ❖ Break
- ❖ Discussion
- ❖ Closing



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Spong - Eternal Life

2 quotations on immortality from
The Wilderness Companion
by David Backes

ebook available at 1candle.net/ftp

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The blazing evidence of immortality is our dissatisfaction with any other solution.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson --

There is comfort in the thought that if there is no immortality, we shall not know it.

-- John Burroughs --

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A New Perspective on Death

Ch 10 - Ridding Religion of Both Heaven and Hell

Ch 11 - Putting Away Childish Things: The Death of Religion

Ch 12 - The Shift of the Religious Paradigm

In the three chapters under consideration tonight, Spong attempts to prepare himself and his readers for the “death of God” and the “death of eternal life” – at least as these two pivotal faith elements have been traditionally understood.

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Since much of what is written in these chapters is a rehearsal of what he has written in previous books, the ‘gradual unfolding’ of his thesis in this book – i.e. the abandonment of “religion” as previously practiced and the need to reconstruct what we mean by “faith” – is taking some time to develop.

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Nevertheless, Spong must be respected for the carefulness with which he addresses the issues – and recognized for the fact that he is describing a personal pilgrimage. This is something he is inviting us to do with him

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Chapter Ten “Ridding Religion of Both Heaven and Hell”

Is there a new point of entry into this project? “I think so,” says Spong. “This is the question we will now explore.”

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Christian hope for life beyond the life this world has heretofore always been dependent on the idea that there is an eternal deity who watches over us, and at our deaths “calls us home.”

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We have come to discover that this hope runs counter to everything we see and understand in the observable world. The universe itself is finite. Nothing is eternal.

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As the church had to deal with those who died outside the faith but who were good people, or with babies who had died without baptism, concepts like limbo and purgatory were developed. These concepts have indeed been discredited in modern times.

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Hell, a place of eternal punishment has more recently been discredited.

Heaven also, as traditionally understood as an exclusive reward for the “spiritual elite” has also been seriously challenged – by growing numbers of mainstream theologians and ordinary Christians alike.

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The decline of these images was a step in the emancipation of the human spirit, and I believe most people rejoice in that.

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Resorting to causing fear or to control people into their destiny is simply not worthy of human beings, religious or otherwise.

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Heaven has more recently been described as a place where unfulfilled human needs will ultimately be resolved and satisfied.

Abundance

Reunification

Rest

We yearn for wholeness. For the completion - of what seems impossible in this life.

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Heaven has more recently been described as a place where unfulfilled human needs will ultimately be resolved and satisfied.

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Spong discounts these images as too much associated with a worldview that has passed.

Do you agree?

Does this mean that the concept of an “afterlife” has also died? Not completely, but its content must be cleared out. What can replace it? We must continue our quest.

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Heaven has more recently been described as a place where unfulfilled human needs will ultimately be resolved and satisfied.

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Chapter Eleven “Putting Away Childish Things:
The Death of Religion”

This is the critical turning point of our journey.

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Spong says “the heart cannot finally worship what the mind rejects. In the struggle between faith and knowledge, knowledge always wins.”

Is this true?

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This moves us into the realm of spiritual experience.

Spong: “I cannot and will not deny the reality of my God-experience. The fact that the way we thought of God in our past has died does not mean that God has died or that there is no God.”

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Spong continues to describe how a number of scientific thinkers in the past have suffered for their views – like Galileo, Newton, Darwin and Scopes.

He outlines how the defenders of old worldviews and religious institutions have continued to defend their positions,

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He suggests that those who seek to put a new face on old ideas ultimately fail. For example, the use of theories like “creation science” and “intelligent design.”

Modernity has discredited the structures upon which these theories were built.

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People can “vote with their feet” and simply abandon religion (or)

They can adapt a form of political and religious liberalism that “seeks to make fair an unfair world.”

The resolution of inequities in a future life is replaced by the goal of ultimate fairness in this life.

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The poor, the racially, religiously and sexually oppressed have become the concerns of many today. Their goal? “to make things right this side of eternity since eternity itself may never come.

How well does this describe our own contemporary church experience?

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Spong explains how our Christian funerals today have refocused from a God who overcomes the power of death to the extolling of the virtues and example of the deceased.

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He repeats - We need to move beyond religion to discover life's meaning. We need a new starting point. We need to find a new approach to meaning, purpose, God and life after death.

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We need to move beyond spiritual biography to the biography of humanity itself. Or, to say it better – perhaps personal and human biography need to come together.

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Chapter Eight “The Shift of the Religious Paradigm”

Early signals of a paradigm change in popular religion – The “Death of God Theologians” of the 1960’s: Thomas J.J. Altizer, William Hamilton, and Paul Van Buren.

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More voices -

John Arthur Thomas Robinson – “Honest to God”

Rudolph Bultmann – “Demythologized religion”

Paul Tillich – “God as Ground of All Being”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer – “Religionless Christianity”

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All of these voices signal a “change of paradigm” or the way by which we understand God and eternal life. They begin to help us locate new spiritual building blocks in our search amid the human, the known, the mundane.

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My search for “heaven” - Spong says “will cause me to turn to this life, to its very depths, to hear the echoes of eternity.

“Heaven” points not to something external to us, but to something that is part of us.

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The turn from the deity above to the deity within is an enormous shift. It is, however, the only pathway open to us.

Really?

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Video. Follows the 3d excerpt from Spong's talk at Chautauqua on Eternal Life.



BREAK



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Discussion Questions

1. Spong says that much of this book so far describes his personal faith journey. Do you think that he accurately describes the faith journey of many others?
2. Do you agree that modern funerals have changed focus? If so, how do you feel about that?

