

## LOUIS WASHKANSKY

*The first person ever to undergo a heart-transplant operation, which was performed by Professor Chris. Barnard and his medical team at Groote Schuur Hospital, Cape Town, in December 1967.*

### FUNERAL ORATION

The heart to the rhythm of whose beat a whole world listened is stilled. In a deeply true sense all mankind stands at this moment in mourning beside the grave of Louis Washkansky. The measure of our grief is a token of the magnitude of our hope. We had fervently prayed, we had earnestly believed, that in this contest life would triumph over death. The pioneer heart-operation had been a brilliant success; it had won world acclaim. But mortality had found another portal. Our expectation was disappointed. Reverently we say today: לקח יהי שם ה' מבורך "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." His wisdom is inscrutable. His will be done . . .

I have cited the Scriptural words: וה' לקח "and the Lord hath taken away." But has everything been taken from us? Was the epic operation a momentary meteoric flash, an ephemeral flame of glory leaving behind cold grey ashes of despondency? Without hesitation I answer: "Assuredly, this was not so! Those unforgettable eighteen days of post-operative life have enriched the world immeasurably in a variety of ways.

Washkansky was an example of courage. All his life he was a fighter. During the Second World War he served in the army for six years. He was known as a brave man. But there is a vast, if subtle, difference between the heroism of the soldier, who, in the fiery moment of battle is prepared to conquer or die, and the long-suffering fortitude evinced by a sick man who, in bodily and mental agony, sees the relentless approach of the shadow of death. Washkansky's heroic cheerfulness inspired his doctors. His unflinching faith made the historic operation possible. It was a faith shared by his wife and family; it engendered hope throughout the world. That example will never die.

The operation left still another heritage: the unsurpassed dedication, devotion and self-sacrifice of Professor Chris. Barnard and his noble medical team. They also showed inimitable courage. It required not

only skill but the irresistible daring characteristic of a young and forward-looking nation to make the unprecedented leap into the Unknown, to perform what has been termed the ultimate surgical operation. Scientifically and morally South Africa was almost uniquely equipped for the task. The world stood amazed, realizing that a new era had opened in the art of healing. Overnight our image throughout the world was changed.

There is also a symbolic aspect to the great saga, which is of the utmost spiritual significance. The fight for *a* life became the fight for *all* human life. One man's hope and will to live assumed global proportions, and shamed the world's armaments race and thermo-nuclear weapons. We saw, with new and awe-inspiring clarity, that the road before mankind forks: one path emphasizes differences and friction, creates an interminable *casus lulli*; the other unites humanity and transcends race and creed and culture. Our hospital epic belongs to the second alternative. It is the way of life, of world survival, of the future civilization.

Through all our hopes and fears and tensions of the past weeks yet another realization asserted itself with increasing impact. Corporeal man is mutable and expendable; only spiritual man is immutable — and immortal. Organs can be transplanted but not the human soul. The spirit enshrined the unique image of God; that cannot be transferred. It is our one sacred possession that we take with us into the Hereafter.

And now the moment of final parting is at hand.

To Louis Washkansky's life-partner and the other members of his family I would tenderly and feelingly say: Continue to be brave. Even as your love and courage sustained your loved one in his great dramatic struggle, so may your memories of his fortitude, his goodness of heart, his quiet generosity and his unquenchable faith give you strength and solace in the future. Let also the knowledge that you have done all that is possible for your dear one be a source of unflinching comfort to you. His heavenly blessing shall surely be with you.

To Professor Chris. Barnard and his colleagues I would pay the tribute that we all feel so deeply and proudly. You have earned the esteem and the gratitude of the world. There has been no real failure, only success. The road of Progress is inevitably strewn with regressions. "We fall to rise, are baffled to fight better." You have laid the foundation of a hitherto unimaginable form of healing; the coping-stone is not far away.

At this solemn juncture I appeal to all who have come to pay their last respects to Louis Washkansky, and through them to South Africa as a whole, for the utmost support of the "Chris Barnard Fund". The

promise it holds for the saving of human life is measureless. I express the conviction that the response throughout our country will be worthy of the matchless cause.

My concluding words, as my opening thoughts, shall be of the deceased. "And when the storm of life is over comes the crowning and the rest." Your battles, Louis, are over. Your body, being mortal, did not win the last contest. But your noble spirit has triumphed beyond all anticipation. You lived and died a soldier. You will continue to live in history as a hero who helped to blaze a new path for mankind. Your name will be honoured not only in the history of medicine, but in the record of the upward thrust of civilization. For around your sick bed you united the world in love, in salvation — for life.

"The righteous", declares the Psalmist, "shall be had in everlasting remembrance." Of their company you, too, will be remembered.

AMEN