

ON THE SOUL AND THE RESURRECTION



GREGORY OF NYSSA

ON THE SOUL AND THE RESURRECTION

Translated from the Greek by William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson
From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 5, edited by Philip Schaff, D.D., LL.D.

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duction. The footnote apparatus is retained where it serves the text; we have set aside those notes that pertain only to the nineteenth-century volume context, and any commentary at variance with the Orthodox confession of the Fathers themselves. We add a scripture index for the text in hand.

The texts are typeset in IM Fell English, a face cut by John Fell in seventeenth-century Oxford and freely available again through the work of Igino Marini. The Greek, where there is any, is set in Philokalia, designed for the Athonite tradition.

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ON THE SOUL
AND THE RESURRECTION

ARGUMENT

The mind, in times of bereavement, craves a certainty gained by reasoning as to the existence of the soul after death.

First, then: Virtue will be impossible, if deprived of the life of eternity, her only advantage.

But this is a moral argument. The case calls for speculative and scientific treatment.

How is the objection that the nature of the soul, as of real things, is material, to be met?

Thus; the truth of this doctrine would involve the truth of Atheism; whereas Atheism is refuted by the fact of the wise order that reigns in the world. In other words, the spirituality of God cannot be denied: and this proves the possibility of spiritual or immaterial existence: and therefore, that of the soul.

But is God, then, the same thing as the soul?

No: but man is "a little world in himself;" and we may with the same right conclude from this Microcosm to the actual existence of an immaterial soul, as from the phenomena of the world to the reality of God's existence.

A Definition of the soul is then given, for the sake of clearness in the succeeding discussion. It is *a created, living, intellectual being*, with the power, as long as it is provided with organs, of sensuous perception. For "the mind sees," not the eye; take, for instance, the meaning of the phases of the moon. The objection that the "organic machine" of the body produces all thought is met by the instance of the water-organ. Such machines, if thought were really an attribute of matter, ought to build themselves spontaneously: whereas they are a direct proof of an *invisible* thinking power in man. A work of Art means mind: there is a thing perceived, and a thing not perceived.

But still, what *is* this thing not perceived?

If it has no sensible quality whatever—Where is it?

The answer is, that the same question might be asked about the Deity (Whose existence is not denied).

Then the Mind and the Deity are identical?

Not so: in its substantial existence, as separable from matter, the soul is *like* God; but this likeness does not extend to sameness; it resembles God as a copy the original.

As being "simple and uncompounded" the soul survives the dissolution of the composite body, whose scattered elements it will continue to accompany, as if watching over its property till the Resurrection, when it will clothe itself in them anew.

The soul was defined "an *intellectual* being." But anger and desire are not of the body either. Are there, then, two or three souls?—Answer. Anger and desire do *not* belong to the essence of the soul, but are only among its varying states; they are not originally part of ourselves, and we can and must rid ourselves of them, and bring them, as long as they continue to mark our community with the brute creation, into the service of the good. They are the

"tares" of the heart, while they serve any other purpose.

But where will the soul "accompany its elements"?—Hades is not a particular spot; it means the Invisible; those passages in the Bible in which the regions under the earth are alluded to are explained as allegorical, although the partizans of the opposite interpretation need not be combated.

But how will the soul know the scattered elements of the once familiar form? This is answered by two illustrations (not analogies). The skill of the painter, the force that has united numerous colours to form a single tint, will, if (by some miracle) that actual tint was to fall back into those various colours, be cognizant of each one of these last, *e.g.* the tone and size of the drop of gold, of red, &c.; and could at will recombine them. The owner of a cup of clay would know its fragments (by their shape) amidst a mass of fragments of clay vessels of other shapes, or even if they were plunged again into their native clay. So the soul knows its elements amidst their "kindred dust"; or when each one has flitted back to its own primeval source on the confines of the Universe.

But how does this harmonize with the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus?

The bodies of both were in the grave: and so all that is said of them is in a *spiritual* sense. But the *soul* can suffer still, being cognizant, not only of the elements of the whole body, but of those that formed each member, *e.g.* the tongue. By the relations of the Rich Man are meant the impressions made on his soul by the things of flesh and blood.

But if we must have no emotions in the next world, how shall there be virtue, and how shall there be love of God? For anger, we saw, contributed to the one, desire to the other.

We shall be like God so far that we shall always contemplate the Beautiful in Him. Now, God, in contemplating Himself, has no desire and hope, no regret and memory. The moment of fruition is always present, and so His Love is perfect, without the need of any emotion. So will it be with us. God draws "that which belongs to Him" to this blessed passionlessness; and in this very drawing consists the torment of a passion-laden soul. Severe and long-continued pains in eternity are thus decreed to sinners, not because God hates them, nor for the sake

alone of punishing them; but "because what belongs to God must *at any cost* be preserved for Him." The degree of pain which must be endured by each one is necessarily proportioned to the measure of the wickedness.

God will thus be "all in all"; yet the loved one's form will then be woven, though into a more ethereal texture, of the same elements as before. (This is not Nirvana.)

Here the doctrine of the Resurrection is touched. The Christian Resurrection and that of the heathen philosophies coincide in that the soul is reclothed from *some* elements of the Universe. But there are fatal objections to the latter under its two forms:

Transmigration pure and simple;
The Platonic Soul-rotation.

The first—1. Obliterates the distinction between the mineral or vegetable, and the spiritual, world.
2. Makes it a sin to eat and drink.