

CONCERNING THOSE WHO HAVE DIED

INTRODUCTION

The title of this essay, **Concerning Those Who H Died** (*Logos Eis Tous Koimethentas*)¹, is based upon a quotation from Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians (4.13): "But I would not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep" (*peri ton kekoimemenon*). From verse thirteen of chapter four to verse eleven of chapter five St. Paul describes in some detail the relationship which exists between Jesus Christ and those persons who have died believing in him. He concludes on a reassuring note in verse eleven, "Comfort yourselves and edify one another, even as you do." Gregory of Nyssa sets out to make this objective the central theme of his treatise concerning death. Monique Alexandre has observed ² that the philosophical nature of the work and the lack of precise references to a certain audience reveals that it cannot be easily categorized as either a treatise or a sermon. She comes to the conclusion that the final doxology points in the direction of a treatise, "Our God and Lord Jesus Christ who comforts the humble will comfort your hearts and make his love firm through his mercy (1Pt 5.10). To him be glory forever and ever. Amen." Alexandre points out that the general literary tone of **Concerning Those Who Have Died** situates it about the same time as Gregory's Easter sermon which was delivered in the year 379. It bears an affinity with his **On the Creation of Man** and **Catachetical Discourse**, both works concerned with anthropological and escatalogical issues. The relative brevity of the treatise offers a good presentation of these two important concerns. Furthermore, its more philosophical and speculative tone has the advantage of introducing major Christian themes such as the resurrection and life after death in a relatively straight-forward manner, thereby appealing to modern readers who have been raised in a secular environment. It is precisely this intellectual orientation that lends a contemporary air to Gregory's essay on death, for the allegorical flights of fancy contained in some of Gregory's other works, notably scriptural commentaries, are lacking.

The fundamental theme underlying **Concerning Those Who Have Died** is that the carnal life into which we were born with all its joys and pains pales in comparison with the true life and good for which we as baptized Christians are destined after death. Refer to Gregory's own words:

¹Jean Danielou situates this treatise as having been written about the years 379-380 shortly before Gregory's **On the Creation of Man** and **Catachetical Discourse**. *Chronologie des Sermons de Gregoire de Nysse*, **Revue des Sciences Religieuses**, (Paris, 1955), pp. 350-51.

²"Le **De Mortuis** de Gregoire de Nysse," **Studia Patristica** vol. x (Berlin, 1970), p.35. This article offers a fairly detailed outline of the text with plentiful references to other works by Gregory of Nyssa as well as ancient authors.

Because true goodness is clearly opposed to that which is not good [*me alethos ontos kalou*], we are faced with a contradiction. It follows that persons who separate themselves from that which is not beautiful become attached to true beauty which constantly and at all times remains good. Such a gesture is not temporal nor anything of this sort; rather, the good always preserves its own integrity. The human soul migrates towards this good from corporeal existence after it has exchanged the present good for another one which is impossible to see clearly because we are burdened by this fleshly existence. However, we can have a notion of this change] and draw a certain parallel [*di' analogias*] between it and a possible withdrawal from that knowledge which pertains to this present life. [J.34]

Observe here three characteristics so typical of Gregory's Platonic background: 1) "true goodness" which remains constant amidst the instability of this human existence, 2) the necessity of separating ourselves (perceived in terms of migration, *pros touto toinun meteisin apo tes sarkodous zoes* ³) from "that which is not beautiful," and finally, 3) the similarity between these two realities despite their radical differences. This resemblance allows us to draw a correspondence between the corporeal and incorporeal realms, for if they were completely alien to each other, we would despair of migrating from one to another. One of the most significant points of Gregory's treatise is the ability for us to draw a parallel or analogy (*di' analogias*) between two such distinct spheres of existence. T.J. Dennis has turned attention to this problem which also confronts modern day Christians and sees a clearly defined separation between Biblical and Platonic concepts with which Gregory was so familiar ⁴.

Concerning Those Who Have Died is rhetorical in structure and presents human grief as affliction caused by *sunetheia*, human habit or custom:

Furthermore, persons who by reason and intent base their opinions upon an

³³ The dynamic nature of this migration is revealed though the preposition *pros*, "towards," "in the direction of." We have here a energetic picture both of the soul's departure from material existence and its perpetual journey towards God.

⁴⁴ "Why is it that such a tension [body vs. soul] exists in these two works [**De Anima** and **De Mortuis**]? Partly, I think, because Gregory was not sufficiently aware of the anthropological implications of the doctrine of the resurrection...Partly because he is not sufficiently systematic in his thinking, and allows his argument to be influenced by the demands of the immediate context. More fundamentally because of the essential conflict between the Semitic and Biblical view of man, to which the doctrine of the resurrection belongs, and the Platonic or neo-Platonic scheme of things which had such a profound impact on Gregory's mind." From an article entitled "Gregory on the Resurrection of the Body" in **The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa** (Cambridge, MA, 1981), p.72-73.

irrational [*aloyos*] attitude do not properly evaluate that which is beautiful and meaningful; they do not choose it because their passionate attachment to human custom [*sunetheia*] and poor judgment appears pleasing and agreeable. [J.28]

We may draw a parallel between this passage and one taken from Gregory's **Commentary on the Song of Songs**⁵:

Many people do not judge themselves from the nature of reality; rather, they consider the way men lived who preceded them and lack sound judgment about reality. They do not have prudent reason but irrational [*alogos*] habits while they like to pass judgment on the good...They make a lot about material self-pretensions while it is unclear where these things will get them after this life. Human custom [*sunetheia*] is not safe assurance for the future, for its end often leads us to the goats, not to the flocks of sheep. [J.65-66]

As Gregory clearly demonstrates in both passages (**Concerning Those Who Have Died** was written earlier in his life whereas the **Song Commentary** was composed much later), we are obliged to shake off our habitual reliance upon *sunetheia* which is equivalent to saying that we must renounce all those things which we have employed to construct our perceptions of (created) reality. Fidelity to this task leads, of course, to what we cannot help but perceive as a physical, psychological and spiritual death. However, the *skopos*⁶ or goal of Gregory's treatise is to transform this life's afflictions in order that we may participate in the Good (God), a task set forth right at the beginning:

Thus our consideration [*theoria*] of the task set before us has the goal [*skopos*] of enabling us to persuade many persons to exchange their habits [*sunethous*] for sound reasoning. [J.29]

Here Gregory presents his *skopos* in practical terms which is simply an appeal for persons to forsake irrational behavior arising from passion and to choose the good. But in order to achieve this end which is ultimately "likeness to God" (J.51), we must progress towards it; we do not achieve it all at once but only through stages. However, Gregory's identity of the human soul with divine goodness can often make us unaware of that temporal-spacial gap existing between us and God. The term he uses to describe this continuum along we must travel is *akolouthia*, "order" or "sequence:"

⁵ **Commentary on the Song of Songs** (Brookline, 1987), p.69.

⁶ An elaboration of the term *skopos* may be found in **Cosmic Man: The Divine Presence** by Paulos Mar Gregorios (New York, 1980), pp.1-23.

Because true goodness is clearly opposed to that which is not good, we are faced with a contradiction. It follows that [*akolouthon*] persons who separate themselves from that which is not beautiful become attached to true beauty which constantly and at all times remains good. [J.34]

Akolouthia is a term difficult to translate and conveys a sense of logical progression whether belonging to the intellectual realm of logic, moral development or natural stages of human growth. Initiation into the sequence or *akolouthia* of events necessary for becoming "attached to true beauty" and therefore tends towards the *skopos* or particular goal as set forth by Gregory of Nyssa. In order to contrast corporeal and spiritual existence, he employs a form of dialectical argumentation with some degree of precision. Such reasoning sets forth his case for spiritual existence when we pay close attention to "the sequence [*akolouthia*] of our words which will reveal that the changes [*metastasis*] of this life hinder us from participating in whatever is not good" (J.34). Observe how he employs these two words: Within Gregory's treatise, *akolouthia* implies an orderly progression towards a goal whereas *metastasis* implies a change or alteration from one state to another. It seems that the notion of change dominates **Concerning Those Who Have Died** as we can see by the following different terms: *allattesthai* (J.62.14), *hupallayenai* (J.65.14), *metapoiesis* (J.62.20), *summetatithesthai* (J.63.1) and *metastoicheiousthai* (J.62.26). All these terms form an *akolouthia* or sequence which refer in one way or another to the unstable condition of our human nature which requires transformation. The prime example for such transformation or growth is portrayed by means of the somewhat lengthy and detailed description growth of an ear of corn. It starts from a seed hidden in the ground and reaches culmination in the ear which we eat, "the final goal" (*teleioseos*, J.49-52). The entire process includes a whole series of deaths as they relate to the previous stages until the farmer reaps his harvest. Gregory applies this example to our true goal in an important passage:

The final goal of our journey is restoration [*apokatastasis*] to our original state or likeness [*homoiosis*] to God. Just as the corn grows and puts forth green shoots which include the husk, grain, stem and the plant's various segments without our assistance, the edible fruit attains maturity through all these stages. In a similar fashion we await the goal of blessedness. [J.51]

Here we have a celebrated though controversial term, *apokatastasis*, the restoration of all things [in Christ], when every type of alteration or mutability belonging to the created realm will achieve its fulfillment. Within the context of Gregory's essay, our earthly form or human bodies must be abandoned which is an argument against Origen's position, whereas Gregory's **De Anima** and **De Hominis** supports its restoration. As T.J. Dennis points out ⁷, the relatively early treatise, **Concerning Those Who Have Died**, is

⁷⁷. *ibid*, pp.67-8.

more radical in its application of *apokatastasis* than these other two related works in that it stresses the disappearance of the earthly body. Furthermore, it seems that Gregory's severe attack on the corporeality of our bodies leaves little or no room for a more balanced Christian picture of the resurrection, that is, of the role of the human body. Despite this generally negative attitude towards the body, the bishop of Nyssa does acknowledge its role in God's plan for our redemption:

The senses perceive beauty in their own way whereas the soul perceives that [divine] beauty transcends understanding; sense can only judge by color, mass and similar qualities. Once the soul is no longer identified with appearances after exiting the body, it is united to that good which is in accord with its nature. No more does the sight of beautiful colors entice the eye, nor do we choose anything else which delights the senses; every bodily perception [*pases somatikes aistheteria*] has now been shaken off. [J.48]

Gregory borrows Plato's famous example of a cave (**Republic**, VII 514a-517a) to describe our present state of life and applies it to persons who have been incarcerated in a prison. They are prevented from seeing such beauty as "the celestial wonders, the sky's beauty, the lofty heaven, rays of heavenly lights", etc. (J.38). Shortly after this example Gregory transfers perception of natural beauty through the bodily senses to perception of "the heavenly, immaterial beauty, the thrones, principalities, powers, governing forces, angelic array, congregation of holy persons, the transcendent city above and the festive assembly described in it." This sentence contains two scriptural references, Col 1.16 and Heb 12.22, which pertain to that (divine) reality existing outside, as it were, the Platonic cave. It is the task of former prisoners to proclaim to persons still incarcerated the beauty of that transcendent reality which exists outside (the body). In fact, Wilhelm Blum calls this borrowed Platonic analogy "dieses Hohlenleichen des Gregor von Nyssa"⁸. Certainly death is both a threshold and separation (*chorismos*) for Plato, and Gregory of Nyssa borrows this notion of a rift: "...[persons outside prison] do not bewail newly released captives who have been cut off [*chorizomenous*] from the good" (J.38). Such a prison (cave) belongs not only to the temporal order as opposed to the "transcendent city" mentioned just above, but it implies a true separation from being and therefore from life or our "native home" (*eis ten oikeian auto*, J.42). The term commonly used for the realm governed by the vicissitudes of space and time is *diastema*. As T. Paul Verghese says, "*Diastema* cannot be understood as a spatial gap between the Creator and the Creation, for that would mean that the *diastema* is the limit of the Creator as well. It is a unilateral gap--from the side of the Creator. It is a 'standing apart,' a diastasis or an *apostatis* from the Creator, but the Creation being fully, i.e. with *arche*, *telos* and all in between,

⁸⁸ *Eine Verbindung der Zwei Hohlenleichen der Heidnischen Antike bei Gregor von Nyssa*, **Vigiliae Christianae** 28 (Amsterdam, 1974), p.45.

immediately present to the Creator" ⁹.

The notion of a cave is seen by both Plato and Gregory of Nyssa as in terms of being and knowledge. To effect our release, Gregory has recourse to the famous dictum, "know yourself" ¹⁰ and bases it upon a related passage from Deuteronomy (15.9):

O man, you who partake of [human] nature, attend to Moses' injunction and know yourself [*ynothi seauton*] by closely examining your true nature. Whenever you pay attention to external affairs, you are not attending to yourself. Learn from the great Paul who considered our [human] nature and said that we are composed of the exterior and interior man; the former is corrupt while the latter is being renewed (2Cor 4.14). Thus whenever you examine your corruptibility, you fail to look at yourself. [J.40]

Most Church Fathers stressed such experiential knowledge ¹¹. It is the criterion by which we discover the true difference between our corporeal and spiritual natures, thereby allowing us to opt for the latter under God's guidance. With this in mind, Gregory later delineates how we obtain this knowledge, contemplation of our own image, "the stamp of the archetype" to which the soul "conforms itself" (J.41). It is precisely this emphasis upon self-knowledge that differentiates Gregory from Plato; the former is more optimistic in that such knowledge is essential for liberation, whereas the latter stresses exit from the cave. Furthermore, Gregory relates the beginning of self-knowledge to the development of an embryo where death acts as a midwife:

To me, a baby resembles persons grieved by life's changes; they suffer like

⁹ *Diastema and Diastasis in Gregory of Nyssa. Introduction to a Concept and the Posing of a Problem*, **Gregor von Nyssa unter Die Philosophie** (Leiden 1976), p.253.

¹⁰ With regards to this self-knowledge Walther Volker says, "Der stoische Unterschied vom Wesen des Menschen und dem, was nur auserlich zu ihm gehört, bildet den Ausgangspunkt, hierauf baut sich die Arbeit des *logismos* auf, die bis zum Kern vordringt und die Hülle als unwesentlich ausscheidet (wie Reichtum, Ehe, Schönheit), und mit dieser popular-stoischen Konzeption verbindet sich die paulinische Lehre vom auseren und inneren Menschen, wobei man an einem lehrreichen Beispiel die Verschlingung verschiedenster Motive studieren kann." **Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker** (Wiesbaden, 1955), p.128.

¹¹ With Volker's passage in the previous footnote in mind, refer to the remarks by Ignacio Escribano-Alberca: "Die gesamten Topi der patristischen Tradition sind an dieser Stelle versammelt...Nicht im letzteren (Selbsterkenntnis um der Sache willen) lagen die Interessen Gregors, sondern in der leidenschaftlichen Überführung zur Gotteserkenntnis mittels der *eikon*-Seele im Menschen." *Die Entdeckung des Innernen Menschen, Gregor von Nyssa und Die Philosophie* (Leiden, 1976), p.54.

them when coming to live in this distasteful material existence. On the other hand, the pain of death acts as a midwife to another life. When men come into that light, they breathe a pure spirit and know by experience how different this life is from the former one. [J.46-7]

This example of a baby's advancement through the various stages of human growth parallels another one developed at length by Gregory, the growth of an ear of corn. He concludes this passage by saying that "Whatever now pertains to body--death, old age, youth, infancy, formation of the fetus--they all resemble green shoots, grain and stems which contribute to the final goal" [*teleiosis*, J.51-2]. The likeness (*homoiosis*¹²) we have of God is precisely this *teleiosis* as it exists in eternity¹³. Another striking example of this progression or *akolouthia* refers to the one-hundred and fifty psalms which obtain their climax in the final psalm, a song of praise to God. Such a progression may be summed up in Gregory's own words, "Everything is directed towards a goal [*skopos*] and is determined by a natural, essential order which is pursued in accord with its proper sequence [*akolouthia*]"¹⁴.

In an article related to the problem of death as found in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa¹⁵, Charles Kannengiesser divides **Concerning Those Who Have Died** into three parts or goals (*skopoi*): 1) to determine "the true good," [*to alethos agathon*], 2) to examine more precisely man's corporeal condition, and 3) "to both contrast and compare our own corporeal existence with the [future] life we are anticipating" (J.29). As Kannengiesser points out, "La Bible est invoquee pour la premiere fois dans cette conclusion [the soul's survival after corporeal death], qui prend d'ailleurs la forme d'une belle prosopopee"¹⁶. The means by which we discern true goodness is related to the passage cited several pages above (J.40) which strings together several scriptural quotations as they pertain to self-knowledge and the soul's immortality: Dt 15.9 ("Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart."), 2Cor 4.16 ("Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day."), 1Cor 15.53 ("For this

¹²12 Cf. J.51 where *homoiosis* is related to *apokatastasis*, the "restoration of all things" (in Christ).

¹³13 "Die Seele kommt nicht sofort zur Ahnlichkeit mit Gott sondern durch eine notwendige Entwicklung kommt man erst wieder in den ursprunglichen *Homoiosis*-Zustand..Diese *homoiosis* ist dann die *teleiosis* in der Ewigkeit." Hubert Merki, **Homoiosis Theou: Von der Platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottahnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa** (Freiburg, 1953), p.112.

¹⁴14 p.115, **In Psalmorum Inscriptiones**, vol. v. Edited by Jacobus McDonough (Leiden, 1962), p.115.

¹⁵15 *Logique et Idees Motrices dans le Recours Biblique selon Gregoire de Nysse*, **Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie** (Leiden, 1976), pp.85-103.

¹⁶16 *ibid*, p.88.

perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality."), and 2Cor 4.18 ("We look not to the things that are seen but to the things which are not seen."). The second *skopos* or goal considers the human *nous* or spirit (J.40-46) and its exit from the body, a section of the treatise in which Gregory makes no recourse to scripture; he prefers instead to engage in metaphysical speculation regarding the composition of both body and soul. Finally, the third and longest part of the treatise which describes the object of our hope is based more upon biblical references. Gregory links this section with the first part of his treatise (which is also based more explicitly upon the Bible), determination of the true good. After delineating all the noteworthy points of the spiritual senses (J.47) as they pertain to life after death, the bishop of Nyssa mentions the figure of Jesus Christ for the very first time as a "good odor" (2Cor 2.14) and the need to taste that "the Lord is good" (Ps 33.9). Next he treats the purpose of corporeal existence as it relates to the soul's survival:

What, then, can a person say in all fairness about the misery of this passing life? Clearly life unencumbered by it is better than the body and anything which pertains to ourselves. Furthermore, we say that persons unable to comprehend the full breadth of [our human] nature's order (*ten oikonomian tes phuseos*) are at a distinct disadvantage. On the other hand, how blessed is that angelic life which is unencumbered by the physical body! Indeed, imperfection has nothing to do with it. [J.48-9]

Within this passage we have several elements which enhance Origen's spiritual doctrine of the soul by purging it of those presuppositions concerning the soul's pre-existence. Instead, a healthy perception of progression and advancement towards perfection is summed up in the image of a grain which finally achieves transformation into a large tree (J.49-52). Generally speaking, Gregory employs scripture heavily with philosophical presuppositions, yet he does not relate to it the human *nous*, mind or spirit. As Kannengiesser concludes in his article, Gregory uses the Bible regarding *nous* in order to communicate its reality than elaborating upon it ¹⁷.

Towards the beginning of **Concerning Those Who Have Died** Gregory brings up the important teaching of stability as it pertains to the eternal good and is opposed to the instability of this uncertain (corporeal) existence:

¹⁷17 "La reference scripturaire ne fonctionne pas uniformement au niveau de ce texte. Elle reste meme absente de la theorie du *nous* humain qui joue pourtant un role essentiel dans la 'consolation' philosophique ici prodigee par Gregoire. Bref, elle ne semble pas encore requise dans le **De Mortuis** par les positions philosophiques elles-memes de son auteur, mais seulement par l'ordonnance de son discours. Le recours a la Bible favorise ici la communication d'un savoir plutot que son elaboration" p.90.

The type of enjoyment which concerns us here is not subject to this life's changes [*ouk kath'homoioteta tou tede biou* such as those things we admit or decline, acknowledge or reject; rather, it always remains full and can never be satiated [*oudepote perigraphouso koro*]. [J.36]

We may compare this passage with one taken from Gregory's **Commentary on the Song of Songs**:

[Moses] sought God as if he had never seen him. So it is with all others in whom the desire for God is deeply embedded: they never cease to desire [him], but every enjoyment of God they turn into the kindling of a still more intense desire. Even now the soul united to God never has its fill of enjoyment. The more it enjoys his beauty, the more its desire for him increases. [J.32]

In other words, this desire (*epithumia*) remains unsatisfied, a teaching contrary to Origen who maintained that the soul became satiated (*koros*) with the knowledge and love of God only to return to material existence where quest for the divine begins once again. Gregory maintains that *epithumia* as related to anything unwholesome is passing: "The desire for anything harmful is transitory and insubstantial. It is alien to man right from the start" (J.57). As Jean Danielou has remarked, sin necessarily results in satiety. This can ultimately be beneficial for the experience can allow man to freely return to God¹⁸. Danielou points out that in **Concerning Those Who Have Died** the bishop of Nyssa is especially preoccupied to prove against Origen the reality of the resurrected body and intends it as a reproach against a too materialistic conception of the resurrection. Despite the negative connotations usually associated with desire and instability, human mutability does have a benefit in that it allows us to set our sights on a more lofty goal¹⁹.

Each person, regardless of his or her state in life, has a natural proclivity towards

¹⁸18 "Le peche aboutit necessairement a la sietete (*koros*). C'est pourquoi Dieu, voyant que l'homme voulait pecher, lui a permis d'en faire l'experience, sachant qu'en ayant eprouve l'amertume il reviendrait librement a lui." **L'Etre et le Temps chez Gregoire de Nysse** (Leiden, 1970), p.196.

¹⁹19 "Gregory sees a virtue in human mutability. Unlike the cyclical change in which there is no progress there is the possibility of change to the better. The very fact that created beings change opens up the possibility of improvement. Creation itself was such a change. The passage from non-being to being means that the first and natural movement of created being is progress. Man's constant mutability gives the possibility of change to the better" *God's Infinity and Man's Mutability: Perpetual Progress according to Gregory of Nyssa* by Everett Ferguson (**Greek Orthodox Theological Review**, vol. 18, 1973), p.69.

beauty ²⁰ and makes decisions which are in accord with this tendency even it happens to be distorted. With reference to this choice, Reinhard Hubner points out that the true likeness to God is situated within this faculty ²¹:

Once the soul is no longer identified with appearances after exiting the body, it is united to that good which is in accord with its nature...every bodily perception has now been shaken off. There only remains immaterial thought [*mones de tes noeras de energeias aulos*] which comprehends its own good because it freely perceives spiritual beauty...while at the same time it transcends anything we may conjecture. [J.48]

Compare this passage with an important one taken from Gregory's **Commentary on Ecclesiastes**:

But the person guided through such temporalities to an understanding of him who exists and comprehends [God's] constant nature through transitory reality and sees with his mind him who is always the same, beholds the true good and possesses what he sees, for knowledge is the possession of this good. [J.285]

Such possession of the good is essential for us to realize the escatological life of Christ. The very notion of possessing any good implies a means of attaining it in terms of desire, *epithumia*. Once this strongest of all human inclinations has been purified, we can then identify it with the good or God:

The desire for anything harmful is transitory and insubstantial. It is alien to man right from the start, whereas that [good] alone with which we are familiar and are on intimate terms is both desirable and agreeable. It abides forever and never changes. [J.57]

As Jean Danielou has observed, the Christian doctrine of *katharsis* or purification has a Plotinian background. Its intended goal is to liberate us from passion through the

²⁰ "Every person is naturally impelled towards the good and chooses according to it, whereas bad judgment of the good produces a multitude of sins" **Concerning Those Who Have Died**, J.29.

²¹ "Dies, das, 'allen Menschen eine natuerliche Verhaftung zum Schonen,' das die Seele ihrer Natur nach dem wahrhaft Guten zugehort, mitdem sie Verwandtschaft und Stammesgleichheit verbindet, und wie die Formeln alle lauten, mitdenen Gregor in Aufnahme einer ganzen philosophischen Tradition das Verhaeltnis von Urbild und Abbild bestimmt" **Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa** (Leiden, 1974), p.215.

practice of ascesis which Gregory uses in a sense different from Plato ²². It is precisely when a person attains his or her original condition of being fashioned in the image of God that true blessedness (*mapariotes*) is attained ²³. The passage quoted in the previous footnote serves to introduce us to the well-know teaching about the "garments of skin" which is based upon Gen 3.21:

This material sweetness serves to gladden the soul and is an example of how God allows attacks upon those garments of skin with which he covered man due to his inclination to evil and by which he partook of an irrational nature: pleasure, anger, gluttony, greed, and similar tendencies which allow man to choose between virtue and evil. [J.55]

Although the "garments of skin" are a consequence of sin and man's deprivation of immortality, they are intended more as a remedy than a punishment. As Danielou has commented, "the garment of skin allows man to turn back again freely to God: since man had despised the life of the spirit for carnal pleasure, God did not wish man to withdraw from sin unwillingly and be forced by necessity towards the good, for this would have destroyed man's freedom and the image of God within him" ²⁴. Thus, the garment of skin is alien to human nature and resembles a cure offered by a solicitous doctor for our benefit. We may compare the passage above from **Concerning Those Who Have Died** with one from the **Commentary on the Song of Songs**:

Rightly the bride heard her spouse summoning her to be a sister, companion, dove, and perfect one, so that through these words truth might dwell in her. She did what she had heard, that is, she removed her garment of skin with which she clothed herself after her sin. The bride also washer from her feet the dust with which she was covered when returning to earth after her time in paradise because he had heard, "You are dust and unto dust you shall return." [J.327]

²²22 "La lutte contre les passions, but de la vie ascetique, est proprement la lutte contre les tendances mauvaises et non contre la vie corporelle comme telle. C'est en ce sens que le point de vue de l'ascese chretienne se differencie du point de vue platonicien dont l'object est plus precisement d'isoler l'esprit de la view animale" **Platonisme et Theologie Mystique** (Paris, 1944), p.51.

²³23 Hubert Merki (**Homoiosis Theo**, p.101) quotes a passage from **Concerning Those Who Have Died**, J.53: "The divine stamp sealed us right from the beginning, not according to any particular form or color; rather, it reflects the divine beauty insofar as man is adorned with freedom from passion (*apatheia*), blessedness and incorruptibility in the image of his archetype (*archetupos*)."

²⁴24 **From Glory to Glory** (New York, 1961), p.12.

Towards the end of his treatise, **Concerning Those Who Have Died**, Gregory of Nyssa speaks eloquently of the unity to be bestowed upon the human race once the Word of God has effected a change:

The sons of day and light do not fail to shine with purity and incorruptibility; neither do they undergo change nor do they fail to resemble each other since all form a single race. One grace illumines all who have become sons of light just like the sun of which the Lord has spoken. All will become perfected into one according to the Word of God in the Gospel; they will have one mind in him because his grace will radiate through them. As a result, each person will show kindness to his neighbor, rejoice to see his neighbor's beauty, and sadness will cease to exist because evil will reveal its own deformed state. [J.66]

Here Gregory has his teaching on Christ's redemption firmly rooted in the Gospel and speaks of the unity which the baptized will one day achieve. This passage finds echo in a short treatise on 1Cor 15.28²⁵ which deals more precisely with the subjection of the Son to the Father together with humankind's subjection to Christ. For example, refer to the following passage:

Subjection [*hupotage*] to God is our chief good when all creation resounds as one voice; when everything in heaven, on earth and under the earth bends the knee to him, and when every tongue has become one body and is joined in Christ through obedience to one another, he will bring into subjection his own body to the Father. [PG 44.1320A].

The subjection of which Gregory speaks is closely related to the notion of *apokatastasis* which we had discussed earlier. As we have observed, humankind's true existence consists in its restoration to God and "perfection into one" as quoted from the passage in **Concerning Those Who Have Died** just above. Reinhard Hubner has pointed out that subjection or *huptage* does imply loss of our identity²⁶; rather, it means that we

²⁵25 The title to the treatise is taken from a quotation from 1Cor 15.28: "When (the Father) will subject all things to (the Son), then (the Son) himself will be subjected to him (the Father) who subjects all things to him (the son)." PG 44.1304-26.

²⁶26 With reference to the passage from **Concerning Those Who Have Died** quoted soon after this footnote Hubner says, "Der Mensch ist zur unsterblichen gottebenbildlichen Existenz zuruckgeht und dies bedeutet die Unterwerfung Christi unter Gott: die Umfassung aller Menschen in ihrer Ebenbildlichkeit in seinem Leibe. Dieser Leib is dann aber nicht mehr das Modell eines organisch aufgebauten Ganzen als vielmehr die festumrissene Summe einer in ihrer geistigen Existenz gleichgearteten Vielheit von Individuen unter ihrem geistigen Prinzip." p.50-1. *Concerning Those Who Have Died*,

have freely come to acknowledge our dependence upon our spiritual principle:

We thus observe that persons who have been changed through the resurrection are not subject to compulsion because this new order has succeeded the earlier one (We cannot clearly explain our future transformation). We all compose one race when we become one body of Christ for we are stamped with one form, and we are certain that the divine image shines everywhere with equal force. [J.63]

As Gregory freely admits above, our future transformation in Christ cannot be clearly explained for it remains a mystery to both love and to contemplate. The only recourse for him is to close his "consolation" treatise with a passage from 1Thes 4.13, the same verse from which he has used as a title: "that you do not be sad like those who have no hope." Despite the absence of biblical references within much of **Concerning Those Who Have Died**, the bishop of Nyssa is clear in his conviction that Jesus Christ alone effects the spiritual unity achieved through his resurrection from the dead.

The translation of this treatise was made from the critical text edited by Gunter Heil under the general direction of Werner Jaeger, **Gregorii Nysseni Opera**, vol. ix (Leiden, 1967), pp.28-68. The edition by J.P. Migne may be found in **Patrologia Graecae**, (Paris, 1858), vol. 46.497-537.

THE TEXT

J.53: "The divine stamp sealed us right from the beginning, not according to any particular form or color; rather, it reflects the divine beauty insofar as man is adorned with freedom from passion (*apatheia*), blessedness and incorruptibility in the image of his archetype (*archetupos*)."

[J.28 & M.497] Anyone who maintains that our [human] nature ends in death and that our passage to the spiritual, incorporeal realm is a tragic calamity, fails, in my opinion, to closely examine [the nature of] this life since our irrational attachment to passing beauty, regardless of what it happens to be, causes intense suffering. Furthermore, persons who by reason and intent base their opinions upon an irrational perspective of life cannot properly evaluate anything beautiful and meaningful; they do not choose it because their passionate attachment to human custom and poor judgement seems pleasing and agreeable. To me, such persons must free themselves from their mistaken outlook in order that we can address them more effectively and with greater understanding. Once this is accomplished they can avoid [J.29] irrational behavior which arises from their passions. Let us now proceed with the task set before us provided that we first truly seek what is good. Only then we will be able to both contrast and compare our own corporeal existence with the [future] life we are anticipating. Thus our consideration [*theoria*] of the task set before us will enable us to persuade many persons to exchange their habits for sound reasoning. If we approach this responsibility in such a spirit, we will be in a better position to persuade many persons to exchange their habits for sound reasoning. Every person is naturally impelled towards the good and chooses according to it, whereas bad judgment of the good produces a multitude of sins. When true goodness becomes manifest, we would never deviate from it because it is good by nature; neither would we freely associate with evil [M.500] if we refrained from performing deeds while having a false image of the good. Let us now set before our minds that which is truly good in order that we may embrace it instead of evil and so avoid deception. Therefore we are compelled to define and describe in advance the object of our investigation and so obtain an accurate understanding of the good.

What characterizes true goodness? Not only does it lack utilitarian value, it cannot be useful at one time and [J.30] ineffective at another, nor can it appear beautiful or unattractive at another time; rather, the good is naturally beautiful in and by itself at all times. To me, this is a genuine sign of its authenticity. On the other hand, anything which cannot be present in every place, nor at all times nor is subject to addition certainly does not participate in [true] goodness. But many persons who fail to carefully investigate the elementary constituents of nature get a false impression of beauty; they cannot find anything beautiful in itself because in their eyes all things have a utilitarian purpose which is clearly inconsistent with beauty's nature. For example, water is salutary for quenching thirst yet at the same time it can cause damage by inundating dry land. Air, too, is beneficial but is harmful for any form of life accustomed to the water as in the case of [a fish] removed from water. Fire serves us but it can also be harmful. The sun is not always beautiful; it causes much damage when it burns and dries our skin, thereby afflicting us with numerous illnesses and sufferings. The sun also causes our eyelids to waste away in fluid and generates innumerable unpleasant infirmities through corruption formed by dampness.

As we have said, it behooves us to choose that good which [J.31] always exhibits the nature of [divine] goodness and which exterior circumstances can never alter. People chose without reason those things which do not participate in the good, that is, whatever concerns the body such as physical strength, charm, splendor as well as power and appearances. I believe we should remain silent and not waste time by pondering such troublesome matters. Who is not familiar with the fleeting character of beauty and strength, the instability of power, the insubstantial nature of glory, or the vain inclination towards material objects considered beautiful by reason of their good appearance and rarity? A close consideration of these objects pertaining to the present life is beneficial (that is, whatever concerns to the flesh), for it enables us to see whether or not they represent [M.501] a vision of [divine] beauty. Anything we discover can indeed guide our minds just as if we were to move physically from one place to another.

Our body is animated by the reciprocal action of fullness and emptiness, that is, eating and drinking, inhaling and exhaling, and cannot survive without this alteration. If it were to cease, our life would come to an end because such reciprocal actions would no longer succeed each other and fail to animate our [human] nature. This [dialectical] activity [J.32] ceases when nothing enters nor exits the dead; instead, the body's natural elements dissolve and disintegrate. Nature causes everything earthly and of the same composition to terminate, for example, what is earthly returns to the earth, and the same applies to the air, water and fire. No longer are diverse elements held together by force; rather, once the elements which compose our material existence return to their original state, they relinquish the union formerly composed of foreign elements. Sleep and waking form a similar union because our human nature is constantly subject to alterations; we fall asleep and regain our strength upon waking up, we are subject to being emptied and filled. Such alteration is characteristic of human existence, and it does us well to recall our earlier words on the character and judgment of the good, for they directly influence our life and enable us to ascertain whether or not life is good. Thus fullness in and by itself does not present an accurate picture of the good because [J.33] it clearly implies the opposite (I mean emptiness). Anything set in opposition is certainly not compatible with the good, but if the good is true to its nature, evil is indeed its opposite. But nature makes good use of both elements, and in this way neither fullness nor emptiness circumscribes the good. Therefore, fullness radically differs from the good; it is not present everywhere nor at all times, nor should we consider it extraordinary when compared with anything else. Not only can food be detrimental for persons who have been injured, it can become very dangerous and cause much harm. If our body is full and desires to be emptied, another type of fullness can easily burden it, that is, afflictions can accumulate within us and beset us with deadly suffering. Such fullness has the opposite effect upon our well being and is expressed through various qualities and characteristics. [M.504] This contrast (that is, as it pertains to emptiness) concerns persons who have submitted themselves to harmful influences; in this instance that which is beneficial now

becomes an excess. Our example will become clear if it coincides with anything useful or empty as related to time, quantity or quality. Since the form of our present life [J.34] does not concur with the character of true beauty, the sequence of our words will reveal that the changes of this life hinder us from participating in whatever is not good. It is indeed clear that the good is neither associated with emptiness nor fullness, let alone anything useful, for both fail to describe its true character.

Because true goodness is clearly opposed to that which is not good, we are faced with a contradiction. It follows that persons who separate themselves from that which is not beautiful become attached to true beauty which constantly and at all times remains good. Such a gesture have nothing to do with the temporal order; rather, the good always preserves its own integrity. The human soul migrates towards this good from corporeal existence after it has exchanged the present good for another one impossible to see clearly because we are burdened by this fleshly existence. However, we can have a notion [of this change] and draw a certain parallel between it and a possible withdrawal from that knowledge which pertains to this present life. No longer does corporeal existence weigh us down nor are we influenced by the weight of opposing elements, for this struggle within our human constitution is equally distributed and maintains our health (When [J.35] conflicting elements abound, they slacken our passions and illness sets in). Emptiness and hardship do not encumber that life; rather, it is free from every exhausting labor (By labor I mean whatever pertains to the field and the sea). Once we are set free from the struggle of conflicting elements and obligatory toil we achieve a life of leisure. No longer must we cultivate fields, constantly exert ourselves in commerce, engage in trading, be skilled at weaving, nor must we have technical expertise. According to Paul, we now lead a quiet, peaceful life (1Tm 2.2). We do not fight on horseback, at sea, in hand to hand combat, take up implements of war, levy taxes, nor do we dig trenches and walls; rather, we distance ourselves from them all. We are neither slaves nor lords; we do not suffer from poverty, are not wealthy due to a noble birth, nor are we humble because of a lowly birth. We do not have honor from exercising authority nor do life's vicissitudes afflict us. Sufficiency eliminates all these afflictions. Furthermore, the soul is immaterial by nature and is affected neither by food whether it is dry or liquid; instead, it is nourished by divine knowledge which belongs to the air and [J.36 & M.505] remains in communion with the true and Holy Spirit.

The type of enjoyment which concerns us here is not subject to this life's changes such as those things we admit or decline, acknowledge or reject; rather, it always remains full and can never be satiated. Spiritual delight is never burdensome nor experiences satiety. Because of this, [incorporeal] life is blessed and immortal, and sensible pleasures no longer delude our judgement of the good. How, then, can we be despondent when participating in anything good? Grief is totally absent once we participate in a life unencumbered by passion. Plagues do not afflict us, fire does not threaten, iron does not wound; there are no earthquakes, shipwrecks, captivity, danger of being eaten alive by

wild beasts, nor do we suffer stings or bites from creeping, poisonous serpents. This [immortal] life does not inflate us with pride, weigh us down by humiliations, enrage us with self-confidence, trample us down by fear, swell and infuriate us with anger, make us seethe with fury, nor does it infuriate or confuse us when we cannot resist fear. We do not have to bear the wrath or attention of someone in power as when kings legislate decrees [J.37] through magistrates to obtain their annual tribute. We are not their subjects nor are we burdened by such oppressive weights which resemble an endless heavy rain or a scorching drought. The same applies to other evil afflictions which cause us grief. For example, neither the sadness of abandonment nor the afflictions of widowhood can darken that life because the adversities of this existence which torment the body are banished such as jealousy arising from success, contempt of afflictions and many other similar hardships. Here freedom of speech and equality under the law are the common heritage of all who sincerely desire peace and who freely choose it.

If we have an unfortunate experience as a result of following poor counsel instead of good advice, death is not responsible for it because we have the capacity of free choice. How can persons be sad when the pain of death no longer exists? Unless a person cleanses himself of passion derived from pleasure and grief associated with the body, he would be no better off than those who wail for their friends in prison. They are sullen in appearance, have a gloomy attitude and consider this present life as filled with despondency. [J.38] Once prisoners are released from their gloomy confinement, they are unfamiliar with the splendor they now behold. They gaze upon celestial wonders, the sky's beauty, the lofty heaven, rays of heavenly lights, the chorus of stars, the sun's passage, the moon's course, the diverse [M.508] beauty and sweetness of the earth's growth and the calm sea which radiates under the sun's rays and which is rustled by a gentle wind. Whenever persons see cities deprived of public buildings adorning them like lamps and then come upon a prison, they do not bewail newly released captives who have been cut off from the good. Instead, persons not confined in prison recognize those who are still jailed as being extremely wretched and needing mercy. They sympathize with their distress and lament this life beset with pain since such persons cannot behold the heavenly, immaterial beauty, the thrones, principalities, powers (Col 1.16), governing forces, angelic array, [J.39] congregation of holy persons, the transcendent city above and the festive assembly described in it (Heb 12.22). The [Gospel] text depicts the surpassing transcendent beauty which only the pure of heart can behold (Mt 5.8), for it exceeds any hope and image we can possibly have.

We think it is fitting to lament and grieve over persons who have died. However, this mortal life is beset with many afflictions, and many people do not shoulder them as a necessary burden; instead they attempt to stay away from such hardships permanently. Our cravings for power, greed, gratification and gluttony as well as weapons, wars, fratricidal strife and any other form of distress and grief all spring from desire and free choice. On the other hand, persons who have departed [this life] do not suffer tears

because they no longer experience anguish; having left behind flesh and blood, they enjoy the life of the mind [*nous*] and spirit. They now possess that nature which no one can see nor understand because they have forsaken that deception which results from false judgement. Let us therefore reject them and ask how our minds can be out of the body and how we can reject our soul's inclination towards matter. [J.40] O man, you who partake of [human] nature, attend to Moses' injunction (Dt 15.9) and know yourself by closely examining your true nature. Whenever you pay attention to external affairs, you are not taking heed of yourself. Learn from the great Paul who considered our [human] nature and said that we are composed of the exterior and interior man; the former is corrupt while the latter is being renewed (2Cor 4.16). Thus whenever you examine your corruptibility, you fail to look at yourself [M.509] (That [nature] is free from corruption when its mortality and tendency towards disintegration is regenerated and transformed into an immortal nature not subject to disintegration [1Cor 15.42,53]. Instead, external reality is in flux, falls away and dissolves). We are no longer obliged to fix our attention upon this nature because it is simply not worth our while. Paul says, "We look not to the things that are seen but to the things which are not seen" (2Cor 4.18). What is seen is transitory whereas what is invisible is eternal. But once we have turned our minds to the invisible nature within us, we must truly believe in it, even though it escapes our perception.

Let us be mindful of the proverb which enjoins us to know ourselves (Prov 13.10) because this self knowledge purifies us from that form of deception caused by ignorance. However, a person wishing true self knowledge experiences difficulty in realizing it since he cannot accomplish anything of which he is ignorant. [J.41] Although fleshly eyes see everything, they cannot see themselves. Similarly, the soul can search and outline anything external and multiform to itself yet it cannot observe itself. With this in mind, the soul should imitate the eyes of the flesh. [Bodily] eyes lack the capacity to behold the act of seeing but they see the image of their circular form. Thus our soul must be attentive to its own image; when it beholds anything similar to itself, the soul sees this as itself. We, however, should exchange this inferior example for something better. The image of the form as seen in the mirror conforms to the archetype, and this differs from our understanding of the soul's stamp whose form expresses divine beauty. Thus whenever the soul contemplates its archetype, it sees itself clearly.

What is the divinity which the soul resembles? It is not the body, lacks form, likeness, quality, figure, depth, place, time and anything else which resembles material creation; rather, once all these attributes are stripped away, the soul reveals its nature which is spiritual, immaterial, invisible, incorporeal and unchangeable. If we contemplate the stamp of the archetype, the soul necessarily conforms itself according to that image. [J.42] The soul is recognized by its characteristics, that is, as being immaterial, without form, spiritual and incorporeal.

Let us now consider how much human nature resembles its archetypal beauty and whether or not we live in the flesh or are separated from it. Although material [M.512] flesh is united to this equally material life, the soul partakes of spiritual and immaterial existence once it has shaken off corporeality. How does this concern us? If the body is the true good, we would find difficulty in alienating ourselves from the flesh; we would then reject the good and anything belonging to it, the body included. Since we are the image of the spiritual good which transcends our perception, it follows that when we pass through death to an incorporeal state we are drawing near to it while at the same we are withdrawing from everything crass and corporeal. We have removed our fleshly garment like an ugly mask and have attained that beauty according to the archetype's image in which we have been formed from the beginning. Consideration of these matters should make us joyful, not sad, because man who is constrained by necessity no longer lives in a state of alienation. He has divested himself of which he is composed and has returned to his native home which is naturally pure and incorporeal. The body's material constituents are indeed [J.43] alien to what is incorporeal by nature, for the mind is by necessity united in this life to an alien mode of existence and sojourns there. The unity of material elements resembles diverse, disparate tongues from among many nations which have become one; they have nothing in common since each element is separated from its own nature. On the other hand, the mind is not composite; it is whole, has the same form, lives as a stranger uncontaminated by matter while at the same time it is composed of matter. The body is necessarily fashioned from many parts whose unity imparts its identity. But when these elements which enjoy a kinship and unity are fragmented, sensation also ceases; the rational part of the soul which is united with our capacity for perception is inclined by habit towards constant grief. But the mind is no longer vexed; it is restored to health much in the same way a conflict made up of conflicting elements has come to an end. Warmth makes cold looses its grip, heat puts cold to flight, dampness succumbs to dryness or visa versa. In a similar fashion death signals an end to war and the soul is at peace once it has left [J.44] the field of battle. I am speaking of the body now situated outside the battle formation which is composed of opposing elements; the soul lives by itself and abstains from its former condition, and [M.513] the body which had experienced labor is restored to peace.

The mind which dwells in the body speaks as follows: Oh men, you are ignorant of these things and have no knowledge of the place to which you will migrate. Man in his present existence cannot fathom this since he is only capable of knowledge as it pertains to life here and now, that is, the order of the body's limbs, the constitution of entrails, the self-determined movement of nerves and how they are fixed to our bones, the radiance shining in our eyes, food and drink whose nourishment extends all the way to our hair and our very fingertips, the fire continuously burning in the heart which is carried through the arteries throughout the entire body, and the drink we consume which passes to the liver where it is changed and automatically turns into blood. We are ignorant of these operations, let alone this present life. On the other hand, that life which cannot be

detected by the senses remains invisible to persons yoked to sense perception. How, then, can we see anything which transcends the senses? Thus the characteristics of both lives remain unknown; we contemplate only the [J.45] visible while conversely, the senses cannot perceive that which is invisible. Why, oh man, do you suffer such affliction? You are ignorant of this good which we have embraced. Because you are unaware of such a good, you are terrified of it for no reason at all as though it were something horrible. Many other things known by the senses and of which we are ignorant frighten us such as the heavenly luminaries, the turning of the [heavenly] spheres which revolve in an opposite direction, the earth's solid foundation, the flow of water which bubbles up continuously from the earth and never ceases, as well as many other wonders which we do not know and fear due to ignorance. We believe that the divine nature transcends all these, is blessed and escapes our comprehension. The human mind can never grasp nor discover [God's] essence. Similarly, we love what we do not know with our whole heart, soul and strength [Dt 6.5], even though it transcends our thoughts.

What, then, is this irrational fear we have about the next life? In our anxiety, fear and ignorance we resemble a youth who is afraid of insubstantial things. Anyone who wishes to see the truth of reality first considers that which by nature is beneficial, pleasant, perplexing or subject to evil. [J.46] But how can we appraise something which is not at all clear, obscure, difficult and [M.516] remote from our experience such as fire and a wild animal? For example, life teaches us not to always rely upon human custom but to continuously modify our desire in light of what is beautiful. Life does not remain in an embryonic state but as long as it is in the womb it follows its natural development. Similarly, a newly born child does not constantly remain at its mother's breast but advances from this early stage to a more advanced one. Once the child grows, it is weaned from its mother's breast. It outgrows the periods of infancy, childhood and later stages of development, thereby changing its habits with age without being depressed about this change.

If a fetus in its mother womb could speak, it would express vexation upon coming into the world and at the experience of pain. The newborn baby cries out since it has been dragged away from the life to which it had been accustomed (The newborn baby draws its first breath when coming into this world and when it suffers pain and grief at being separated from its natural environment). To me, a baby resembles persons grieved by life's changes; they suffer like them when coming to live in this distasteful material existence. [J.47] On the other hand, the pain of death acts as a midwife to another life. When men come into that light, they breathe a pure spirit and know by experience how different this life is from the former one. But those who leave behind the clammy embryonic stage are unexperienced for they are not yet men; they are not happy with the preceding stage because it had enveloped us in sadness and prevented us from participating in the good. They do not know that it resembles a baby being nourished which opens its eyes once accustomed to life outside the womb (We must have a correct

understanding with regard to the soul's eye which gazes upon the truth). As the Apostle [Paul] says, we have now become attuned to hearing unutterable words: "What man is not permitted to speak" (2Cor 12.4). A person opens his mouth and draws in the pure, immaterial breath, thereby confirming that intelligible voice and true word when he is united with those who rejoice in the chorus of the saints. He thus acknowledges the divine sense of taste mentioned in the Psalm, "the Lord is good" (Ps 33.9). By means of the sense of smell this person lays hold of the good odor of Christ (2Cor 2.14), and by the power of touch the soul perceives the truth and handles the Word as John testifies (1Jn. 1.1). If this awaits man after that birth which death heralds, why do we wish to remain in a state of anguish, gloom and dejection? Anyone considering [M.517] the nature of reality [J.48] should now respond and see which is more honorable, a false judgement of beauty as pertaining to the corporeal senses or an accurate perception of it with the soul's eye. In this way the soul can pass false judgement and incorrectly speculate about beauty. Since the soul's vigor is not divided in a child whose senses function perfectly at birth, then whatever appears good for the senses is equally good for the mind. The senses perceive beauty in their own way whereas the soul perceives that [divine] beauty transcends understanding; senses can only judge by color, mass and similar qualities. Once the soul is no longer identified with appearances after exiting the body, it is united to that good which is in accord with its nature. No more does the sight of beautiful colors entice the eye, nor do we choose anything else which delights the senses; every bodily perception has now been shaken off. There only remains immaterial thought which comprehends its own good because it freely perceives spiritual beauty which lacks color, form, interval and quantity while at the same time it transcends anything we may conjecture.

What, then, can a person say in all fairness about the misery of this passing life? Clearly [spiritual] life unencumbered by it is better than the body and anything [J.49] which pertains to ourselves. Furthermore, we say that persons unable to comprehend the full breadth of nature's order are at a distinct disadvantage. On the other hand, how blessed is that angelic life which is unencumbered by the physical body! Indeed, imperfection has nothing to do with it. This passing life is a road to our future hope and resembles a budding tree about to produce first the flower and then the fruit; the fruit is certainly not the flower. Even corn does not immediately go from being a seed to an ear; first the shoot sprouts, then comes the stem and the stalk which dies; the fruit is last in appearance and assumes the form of an ear of corn. The farmer does not question this necessary order and sequence of growth, let alone the flower which appears before the fruit, the first budding of flowers and the sprout which does not dry up in vain and yields no fruit. Anyone contemplating nature's marvels knows that fruit comes from seed and only achieves perfection with the farmer's skill. We do not eat the shoot and the sprout which appears first, for they are superfluous with no value. A person [M.520] requiring food only considers whatever is useful since nature proceeds to the fruition of harvest in an orderly manner. To begin with, [J.50] the complex form [of a plant] springs from roots lying below ground which are nourished by moisture followed by the sprout whose green

covering wards off air-born plagues. Although the sprout is not the fruit, it shields the seed in order that it may attain fruition (Nature uses the covering to protect the final fruition). This shell serves to cover the root from injuries from the air such as frost and heat. In this way the seed is shielded and fortified deep in the roots. The rest of the shoot is unnecessary because the root is no longer required for protection; rather, the shoot directs all its effort towards the stalk's growth by wisely making use of its pipe-like structure which reassembles a successive circle of tunics. During the first stages [of growth] the root requires moisture because it is weak and has a series of bonds girding the middle of the plant for strength. Once the plant attains full height, the stalk lengthens and its outer tunic points to the ear of corn which thins out into many hairs. At the same time the grain remains hidden deep inside and is nourished by receptacles within the hard outer shell. If the farmer is pleased with the seed which springs from the roots--the shoot does not sprout from the seed [J.51] and the ear from the corn--he looks for nature's harvest, the final result. He also rejects anything useless while at the same time he prunes the plant to make it more fruitful.

This example applies to us since [human] nature achieves its own goal without difficulty. The illustration of the seed should instruct you with regard to that which is always present, beneficial and necessary because we are not that agent which has brought us to birth. The Creator did not form us to remain in the womb. Also the last stage of life does not take into consideration the succeeding stages where forms continuously succeed each other and at their proper time. Neither is it aware of death which is dissolved with the body; instead all the stages through which we pass form an integral whole. The final goal of our journey is restoration [*apokatastasis*] to our original state or likeness to God. Just as the corn grows and puts forth green shoots which include the husk, grain, stem and the plant's various segments without our assistance, the edible fruit attains maturity through all these stages. In a similar fashion [M.521] we await the goal of blessedness. Whatever now pertains to the body--death, old age, youth, infancy, formation of the fetus--they all resemble green shoots, grain and stems which contribute to the final [J.52] goal. If you are well disposed to consider this, you will not be distressed, lose hope nor show impatience because these stages are transitory and subject to death.

We can profit by paying close attention to this matter of great consequence because nature relentlessly advances towards death, the goal of life's march through time. Life continuously moves towards the future from the past and never reverts to earlier stages, that is, death, for life always advances with all its stages being interdependent. The movement and vitality of life indeed ceases in its preceding stages. Death, which always follows life, is certainly of no value to us. Thus it is true to say that death is wedded to life. Another example takes into account that, materially speaking, man today is not the same as he was yesterday. As soon as man dies, he gives off an odor, becomes corrupt and is cast away just like a house which gives off a foul smell, for the body's vital force has already been committed to the earth. Paul says that we die each day (1Cor 15.31). We do

not always remain [J.53] in the body's dwelling but every time we change through the process of growth and decrease, we assume a new body. Do we not await true life through death with continual attention and diligence since we are strangers to death? In a certain sense, sleep and waking are nothing more than the intertwining of death with life: our senses are dulled in sleep and our awakening brings about the resurrection we long for.

Our observations should be clear enough and lead us to consider another matter which we have not yet examined. Recall our earlier words, namely, that the body is valuable as related to our anticipated good. If we had retained our original state, we would not have required tunics of skin (Gen 3.21) because the image of God had once enlightened us. The divine stamp sealed us right from the beginning, not according to any particular form or color; rather, it reflects the divine beauty insofar as man is adorned with freedom from passion, blessedness and incorruptibility in the image of his archetype. Because the enemy has deceived us and man freely chosen a condition proper to irrational beasts, he has unwillingly preferred that which is harmful [M.524]. He seems to have changed for the better, yet this advantage is beneficial only to those who have failed to examine it closely. However, human nature appears useless to its Maker and a complete loss in comparison to the multitude of benefits [God] has manifested [J.54]. Man is made in God's image and is blessed with free will (for divine blessedness is sovereign and self-sufficient), so if he is made subject to compulsion, he loses his dignity. Anyone who has freely made a harmful choice instead of an expedient one has rejected both the good offered us and the honor befitting God. (Free will is itself divine). By its very nature free will rejects evil, a choice which divine wisdom has implanted in us in order that we may choose what we like. In this fashion man can taste the evils he has opted for and having learned by experience from his free will, man is again freely motivated to choose the blessedness of his original state. All the passion and irrational behavior which have weighed us down in this present life is now removed. Having been cleansed through prayer and wisdom, man returns [to his original blessedness] after the purifying fire has refined him. The application of medicine can save as well as destroy a youth, but if his immaturity prevents him from seeking counsel and if he prefers to passionately seek out corrupt fruit or tries any green herb, his father is able to help him even though he permits [J.55] his child to suffer harm. Experience of these afflictions teaches the youth the benefit of paternal counsel, but the child who followed his desire for such harmful things is restored to health in his wish for a cure. Thus our loving, good Father [God] who knew what was beneficial and harmful also knew what was wrong for man and counseled him not to take it. Nevertheless, the powerful impulse to make harmful choices provided the means for a remedy to restore man to his original health. This material sweetness serves to gladden the soul and is an example of how God allows attacks upon those garment of skin (Gen 3.21) with which he covered man due to his inclination to evil and by which he partook of an irrational nature so typical of irrational beasts. In his wisdom God employed contradictory means, that is, he used irrational nature as clothing. The garment of skin has all the properties belonging to an irrational nature: pleasure, anger, gluttony,

greed, and similar tendencies which allow man to choose between virtue and evil. Man lives by his [M.525] free will. If he concludes that his nature is irrational and opts for a better manner of life, he cleanses his present existence which is contaminated by evil [J.56] and vanquishes irrationality through reason. But if man follows his irrational passions with the help of the skins belonging to irrational beasts, he will be advised in another way to choose the good after his departure from the body because he now knows how good differs from evil. He can only partake of the divinity unless he has purged his soul of filth by the cleansing fire.

Our remarks concerning the body are important because free will saves us and assists our return to the good. But the uncertain nature of this faculty inclines us to the good and directs us in this corporeal existence that we may attain a spiritual existence free from passion. The patriarchs and prophets as well as others who have followed them have informed us of this in their pursuit of perfection through virtue and philosophy (I call them apostles and martyrs. They all lived honorably while being immersed in this material existence, and although they were few in number, they rejected recurrent inclinations to evil. By their witness they avoided evil in the flesh and performed virtue). Others at the end of their life reject their inclination towards material existence in the purifying fire and choose grace [J.57] which was present in our nature from the beginning by freely desiring whatever is good. The desire for anything harmful is transitory and insubstantial. It is alien to man right from the start, whereas that [good] alone with which we are familiar and are on intimate terms is both desirable and agreeable. It abides forever and never changes. If we freely debase ourselves through passion, we will desire to do harm in the future. In this instance enjoyment does not sweeten nature but passion does, but when passion disappears, desire withdraws from our [human] nature. Nevertheless, we retain a desire for the good and are reconciled to it. The divinity is indeed pure, immaterial, incorporeal and transcends everything. Keeping this in mind, we may say that when a sharp object enters our eyes, it darkens our vision and blinds us. But if we carefully examine whatever troubles the spirit, light re-enters and is united with the pure nature of light in the eye's pupil. Evil enters the soul's eye through deception in a similar fashion; however, reason freely opts for a life shadowed over by passion and becomes accustomed to the gloom (As the [M.528] divine voice says, everyone who does wrong hates the light, [Jn 3.20]). Once evil is rendered void, [human] nature again looks to the light with pleasure because the soul has been cleansed from the darkness which had clouded it.

[J.58] These remarks clearly indicate that the soul indeed suffers by remaining in the grip of the flesh. The flesh does not cause evil (for if this were true, it would have power over everything corporeal). On the other hand, a person mindful of a life lived virtuously and not in evil clearly knows that the body does not cause their sufferings but free will which gives rise to the passions. The body functions in its own way, thereby maintaining its own equilibrium through the correct use of its impulses. Let me give some examples. Food and drink are necessary for maintaining the body; they enable it to

remain in balance and restore any deficiency. Our appetite works according to this principle. In a similar fashion the succession of death transforms the body's mortality into immortality and offers us a useful example. Our body is naked except for hair and requires clothing. Since we cannot withstand heat, cold and heavy rain, we build shelters for protection. The person who prudently considers these demands can easily deal with them since he seeks to restrain his appetites for such things as a house, clothing and food, elements which sustain human nature. But passion compels a person enslaved to pleasure since he seeks pleasure instead of sustenance, chooses ornaments instead of clothing, extravagant buildings instead [J.59] of houses, illegitimate children instead of legitimate ones as well as unsuitable pleasures. Thus greed enters the broad gates of human life along with effeminacy, leisure, pride and extravagance in its varied forms. These and similar examples resemble shoots and dry branches which spring up when desire transgresses its bounds; they extend their roots through our misdirected desire. What does a carved piece of silver and decorated stones have in common with food? What use is a cloak made of gold thread, a flowery purple garment, elaborate pictures depicting wars, beasts and the like on cloaks and other clothing which reflect the harmful greed of persons who made them? Men follow their greedy inclinations in order to possess these objects. Cupidity [M.529] is the door to insatiability which, according to Solomon, is an earthenware jar full of holes which always overflows yet remains empty (Prov 23.27). Therefore the body is not the cause of evils but free will which makes a goal out of our desire for anything inappropriate.

No one should revile the body by unbecoming language because the soul is adorned after its transformation through rebirth to a more divine state. Once death cleanses the body of superficial and [J.60] base inclinations, it is ready to enjoy the life to come. Whatever pertains to the present life does not serve the one to follow; rather, our body's constitution is a welcome home and allows us to enjoy the life we expect and to participate in the good offered us. For example (knowledge of what is familiar to us now provides a better understanding of the life to come.), a smith uses an unworked lump of iron and shapes it on an anvil. But a piece of iron must be worked over in order to thin it out; only then does fire carefully purify the lump of iron by rejecting the earth and useless material or what artisans call dross. Thus a fine piece of craftsmanship takes shape by a thorough working over on the anvil, whereas dross is removed by a process of refinement different from the anvil's work. The dross forms part of the iron's bulk and both combine to produce the same lump. Close attention to this example applies to what we are now considering. What do I mean? The body is composed of many elements considered dross; they are useful in this present life but are alien to that blessedness [J.61] we await. Thus fire purifies iron of worthless material and rejects it through a process of refinement as we can see when death rejects anything superfluous with regards to the body. Clearly the body must be carefully purified at the end [of life] so that the damage in this present life does not contaminate the next one.

Some further words of explanation are needed here. Instead of corporeal mass, desire is naturally present in all living beings and expresses itself through impulses such as pleasure, wealth, love of glory, power, anger, pride and so forth. Death carefully purges us of them all. Appetite is stripped away and purified of anything extraneous, leaving only that which alone is desirable and worth striving after. Our innate impulses direct us to seek that which is desirable; it is not [M.532] quenched but transformed in order to participate in spiritual benefits. In this realm the love of true beauty never ends; there we have the benefit of wisdom's wealth and our lovely, noble love of honor is directed aright to share in God's kingdom. Our praiseworthy desire for what cannot be satiated is never frustrated through an excess of that transcendent reality since it completely exceeds our longing. Therefore we learn that the Creator of all makes at the proper times the body's mass into a shield of grace and a breastplate of justice as the Apostle says (Eph 6.14), together with the sword of the Spirit, the helmet [J.62] of hope and the full armor of God (Eph 6.11). Such a person loves his own body according to the Apostle's law which says "No one hates his own body" (Eph 5.29).

It behooves us to love a body which has been purified as opposed to one which has been rejected. Indeed the divine voice says, "If our earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2Cor 5.1), "a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph 2.22). No shape, figure, nor pattern modeled after this present existence can describe that house not built by hands because it is a visible form which distinguishes us from everything else. These divine words not only announce our resurrection but compel us to be changed and renewed (1Cor 15.51) through the resurrection as the divine scriptures proclaim. Indeed we must remain hidden and ignorant with regard to our transformation since this present life offers no example of our future hope. Anything heavy and dense tends to fall and is opposite to the change of our bodies will undergo [in heaven] above. As it is written, once this [human] nature is changed and after all things ascend through the resurrection, "We will be caught up in the clouds before the Lord in the air and thus we will always be with the Lord" (1Thes 4,17). The body does not endure even though its weight has been transformed; once it assumes an incorporeal nature and a divine state, the rest of [J.63] the body's members undergo a similar change including its color, form, contour and anything else. We thus observe that persons who have been changed through the resurrection are not subject to compulsion because this new order has succeeded the earlier one (We cannot clearly explain our future transformation). We all compose one race when we become one body of Christ for we are stamped with one form (2Cor 3.18), and we are certain that the divine image shines everywhere with equal force. The change experienced in our [human] nature surpasses our former condition and [M.533] our speculation about it. We are not completely ignorant of this change because we are already familiar with the distinction between male and female. We can offer a different understanding of procreation, a promise made by God, which is worthy of his blessings because this capacity is altered to serve that [new] birth. The great Isaiah anticipated this when he said, "We have

conceived, O Lord, because of your fear and have been in pain and have brought forth in the earth the breath of your salvation" (Is 26.18). If this birth is good and procreation is the cause of salvation as the Apostle [Paul] says (1Tm 2.15), the Spirit which brings forth salvation never deserts the person who has begotten through this birth a multitude of blessings.

Our understanding differs substantially from the one which claims that [J.64] at a future time we will assume our present form. Many profess that our form will simply be revived, an opinion which maintains that we do not always abide in the same form since we progress through difference stages of life and our passions constantly change. For example, an infant grows into a child; soon a middle aged person passes his prime, ages and becomes elderly. Similarly a person can suffer from jaundice, be distended with water, wither away from consumption, be overweight due to a bad temper, unable to walk, have too much blood, be inflamed with an angry humor or suffer from a harsh temperament. Anyone coming back to life cannot endure these miserable conditions for when everything is transformed into a divine state, we cannot readily explain our form which blossoms again. The blessings set before us and which are reserved for believers transcend eye, ear and mind. Anyone claiming that a particular human convention reveals a form will certainly not be mistaken. Similarly, any change regarding our [corporeal] elements now manifests itself differently whether it pertains to excess or deficiency, forms which essentially differ from each other or the color of these forms. Thus [J.65] each form has its own property; they do not affect us, but only the forms of evil or virtue which produce a different form when combined with each other. For example, consider our face which reveals the soul's hidden disposition. It easily allows us to recognize sentiments of grief, anger, cupidity, joy and freedom from anger, all of which can be dignified and put at the service of discretion.

[M.536] In much the same way both our heart and our passion express our inner life. Thus it seems to me that the person who has changed his nature for something more divine is formed through custom, not by appearances; rather, he is known by being discreet, just, meek, pure, good and by his love for God. He has these and similar qualities, that is, he is either adorned by one alone or has them all to a certain degree. Such qualities reveal either good or evil, each of which radically differs from the other. This remains true until the last enemy is destroyed, as [J.66] the Apostle [Paul] says (1Cor 15.26), and evil is thoroughly ejected; then only the divine beauty according to which we have originally been formed will remain. Here is light, purity, incorruptibility, life, truth, and so forth. The sons of day and light do not fail to shine with purity and incorruptibility; neither do they undergo change nor do they fail to resemble each other since all form a single race. One grace illumines all who have become sons of light just like the sun of which the Lord has spoken (Mt 13.43). All will become perfected into one according to the Word of God in the Gospel (Jn 17.21); they will have one mind in him because his grace will radiate through them. As a result, each person will show kindness to his

neighbor, rejoice to see his neighbor's beauty, and sadness will cease to exist because evil will reveal its own deformed state.

To the best of our ability we have discussed matters which pertain to the departed. We also quote the Great Paul's advice who greatly laments that "I do not wish you, my brothers, to be ignorant of those who have fallen asleep. Do not be say as those who do not have hope" (1Thes 4.13).

If we have diligently pondered over the deceased, we should no longer remain subject to a servile, pitiful grief [**J.67**], but if we must grieve, let us embrace it in a manner which is both laudable and virtuous. Pleasure is beast-like and irrational whereas that which is pure and spiritual is opposed to evil and is a sign of virtue. Thus one form of blessed grief cultivates virtue and is alien to any irrational, servile dejection. The person obedient to it will later diligently repent and not be disturbed because he has restrained his passion. But that blessed grief does not require repentance and shame; instead, it directs us according to virtue. [**M.537**] A person should indeed lament when he sees himself falling away from the good. By comparing this mortal, wretched life with immortal blessedness, we see that it existed before evil could establish itself. Thus the more grief weighs upon such a life, the more a person aspires for the good, and anyone who perceives a loss of the good applies himself more earnestly to regain it. Persons easily inclined to grief and suffering should pay attention because the grief we are suggesting here is beneficial; we do not wish to obstruct it but counsel the good instead of having contempt for it. We therefore do not recommend a worldly kind of grief, as the Apostle [Paul] says, (2Cor 7.10) but one which is according to God and saves the soul. In vain and for [**J.68**] judgement are the tears of those who use its benefit with evil intent. He who made all things in wisdom inflicted us with this grief and saw that we required purification. He thus prepared in advance a remedy for evil by allowing us to participate in the hope for blessedness. Indeed the evil housekeeper who dispersed the wealth entrusted to him in an unprofitable manner was, as the Gospel says (Lk 16.1f), found to be at fault by his own master. All good wealth is stock up in the storehouse of heaven. I do not wish you to remain ignorant, brethren, about what we have taught regarding death since the teaching inspired by the Holy Spirit is for those who are more perfect "that you do not be sad like those who have no hope" (1Thes 4.13). We believe in the Lord of all creation who brings us the resurrection from the dead. He has died and rose that we might believe in his resurrection and remain firm in that hope which for those who have died is free from sorrow. Our God and Lord Jesus Christ who comforts the humble will comfort your hearts and make his love firm through his mercy (1Pt 5.10). To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.