

Death

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Each day added to Man's life is a step in his path to the final scene of this biological entity (the body) which we are, though we do see beyond it or "above" it. I said "above" because you cannot understand death as part of life if you do not perceive life as bound to what is "above"; otherwise our end would have been only "a fling in the ground (earth)". It is so, had not that "above" been one of Light.

Every shock, grave illness, recurring sin, disgrace of one's country and the treachery of the institution one works in, and all what comes along with that, makes death more desired than life because Man was not created to live with deception, oppression and oblivion; all that is a disfiguration of existence. This contradiction one finds in himself leads one to long for the wholeness of one's being; a wholeness that one does not find in this earthly life, or in getting rid of life because that is another shock also stemming from what is earthly and not from what is from "above".

What is poured down on you from heaven (what is above you), pulls you towards it, even though you remain in this world (what is below heaven); that also refers to what is "below" you that yearns for what might end your disgrace, contradiction and sins. That is why we die and we do not die. We die in the sense that we leave for the earth what is of it and we yearn for that which we do not get from it. From the earth is disobedience and "what it builds on sand" of self worship and of the obliteration of others in one's imagination and mind.

Logically, at death, the good deeds we have done remain as distinct from the evil deeds we have done as they were during our lifetime. And so frustrations, impurities, hatred, and all other lusts would be on one side and love and generosity on the other side; impurity in its various forms will be cast in the dust, and there remains, "above the dust", the truth that you carried with what it had of freedom, and the purity that you have chosen to be in, because in this lifetime, these were "without dust". Such radiance crosses over death and remains one with the light it came from, that is the Heavenly Radiance, which immediately starts giving us life right from the moment of our birth while the seeds that death sows in us lead us to death since death wants to engulf what comes from it in the same way as Light would embrace what It pours down on us.

This is a simple statement about the duality of Man in his internal paradoxes, since I am not considering here the Platonic view of soul and body as it came in philosophical writings we have. In the thought of the Old Testament from which these lines come, there is no unseen soul and a body that is visible in Man. When the Fathers speak of the theological meaning of “Man being created in the image and likeness of God”, only few of them spoke of the soul as being in the image of God. But St. Basil the Great said that Man’s freedom is God’s image in us and others spoke of the mind as being so. But also there has been some among them who said that the human entity as body and soul together, is in the image of God because He made us in the image of Christ who was going to appear at the proper time. And so despite the various expressions they used, they believed in one natural and created entity that is whole and lacking nothing. It is sin that pulls it apart. Thus we find that St. Paul used the word “body” not meaning the flesh, but referring to that aspect of us which is under the control of evil. And when they speak of the spirit they mean that aspect of us in which the Holy Spirit is sovereign. Thus we see that the apostolic writings give no consideration to the duality of essence found in Plato but stress much the issue of light and darkness. This explains why Christianity does not speak only of the salvation of the soul but also of that of the body also; It also speaks of the sacredness of the body which It anoints with holy oil in childhood and in sickness professing that the body also partakes of the body of Christ risen from the dead.

And there is no doubt that He who is coming again is the same one who was and is now. So there is no role for time in this because what Christ gives us, that is Himself once and for all, is the same One who is in us now and the One who will appear on the last day. And because the body receives the light it will also be resurrected through the light on the last day. The body might seem dead but what comes down on it of the gifts of God does not die and does not get buried with it (the body); what is good remains good and any holiness that has embraced you does not end. But what is corrupt in you ends remaining in itself, in its earthiness. And the light that is in you is gathered to the Light because it is from Him. That is my understanding of what Paul says: “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” 1Cor 15:43. In this passage, the body is for Paul the whole human person and not only the flesh. And then he continues saying “it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body”. Paul does not mean here that it is an invisible body or an invisible person, but he means the entity that has been freed of the corruptibility of sin and death or of that (i.e. sin-in Paul’s thought) which leads to death;

The way Paul sees it is that the human flesh lives to unite itself to the spirit which has remained alive as he says: “what is corruptible cannot inherit what is

incorruptible". The association or the contrariness is not between the flesh and the spirit but between what is corruptible and what is incorruptible. The body is not an independent entity which in itself is liable to dissolution. What makes us disintegrate is sin. And this entity (the body), mortal due to sin, will put on itself immortality when God in His mercy puts an end to sin and Man is raised in glory upon glory.

So, if you seek after this mercy longing to see that glory, you would as well long for death, not to rid yourself of the humiliation resulting from the wounding of your spirit by the never ending daily falls into temptation, but to get to that peace which Light alone can bestow.

Yet God, in keeping you in this world, has some wisdom and purposes for you and wants to discipline you in doing what is good, by His grace which is in you and is sufficient; and probably He intends to spread it to others through you. And as you live He chastises you and in that He purifies you. And you always try to do what pleases Him and He knows when to call you to Himself or when to sympathize with your weakness. When you feel your body is ruined, and your soul is in torment, when you are in doubt of your ability to be patient and you languish for long under your burden, when you are tired of life's course and in doubt of whether it is of any benefit or not, and when you do not see any good fruit from your efforts, He knows how to extend His sympathy to you in all this fatigue. Yet you are not to long for death due to fatigue; for it has become clear to me in my old age that long life is often a grace from the Lord so we can repent further longing for Him more and more. And most probably, that fatigue strengthens hope in you fortifying you against despair; such despair is usually despair of His mercy and that is an immense slip.

Moreover you are not in a position to pass judgment on yourself or to condemn it. He alone is the one who knows how to pass judgment. He has kept from you the ability of knowing yourself till the last hour; in His eyes, you might be either better or worse than you think yourself to be. That is why He kept judgment to Himself. And you might think that you have been and still are a failure. What measure do you use for this? God does not care much whether you are successful in your field of work or not. His concern is that you grow spiritually in all what you do.

You shall stand naked before your Lord and He, from His throne, shall cast on you the bright wedding gown and gather your goodness to His after He would have washed you with mercy which is your only gateway to Paradise. And there you will see those on whom His mantle of love has been cast and you shall see the light of His face and you shall move from glory on to glory forever.

And because you love this encounter (with God) you have to prepare for it in "fear and trembling" (as Paul says) not because of your ability to effect your beauty with your own effort, but because you are given to rely on Him for that and to hope in

Him for compassion. And when you know that the kingdom is in you as the Lord said, you shall be open to receive It (the Kingdom) there (in you). In that the Kingdom is not yet to come (in the future) but it has already come (by Christ reigning in you in the Holy Spirit). And so you live in this world by the glory of the Kingdom, and you rejoice in the Heaven residing in you; you do not ascend to It, but It has come down upon you and dwelt there in you. Man does not ascend to a heaven which transcends him, because it has come down to him in his world and abided with him. That is what the incarnation of the Word in Mary's womb entails; Mary in whom dwelt all of Heaven. In the Arabic language the meaning of the word heaven (*Sama'a*) refers to God's transcendence and to where His throne is. Except that God has chosen your heart a throne for Him and the Lord is exalted by you and in you. And when He implants His heaven in you, it does not cease after death; and the sins that you have, He will not take account of because of His good will. And when He finds light in you, He will acknowledge that (the light) which He himself has instituted in you. And He does not take you to Himself (in the afterlife) except because He has gathered you to himself (in advance) in this world of yours. The radiance you carry is neither from you nor from what you have endured in this world; for you gain nothing from the good you have done, except the dwelling of God in you. In that (dwelling in you), He has done goodness to you. So you lean on his breast when you get up there, in the same way you leaned on him in this world when you answered His knocking at your door and you opened for Him; and He supped with you and you also had supper with Him, that is you had Him and He had you. And when you realize this companionship brought about by this closeness, you do not fear death anymore; death becomes for you a door, leading to an end stage, to Him who is true vision and knowledge. And if you know that, you shall not see (know) death.

(Translated by Riad Mofarrij)