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DOCTRINE OF IMMORTALITY

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Christmas Greetings

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Doctrine of Immortality

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PROCESSION OF DOCTRINE

by

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* Doctrine of Immortality

One of the most momentous questions with which the religious mind of man contends is that of immortality. The miracle described by the Evangelist Luke shows the overcoming of death by life. Luke was a skilled physician, and therefore well able scientifically to present the account of the raising, by Jesus, of the young man of Naim. The word "Naim" means "pleasantness."

This story has a happy ending. Many stories that one follows in life and fiction seem to have tragic endings, but on theological authority we know that the end of man is not death, but happiness; therefore, speaking truly, all life has a happy ending—not "ending" in the sense of termination or cessation, but in the sense of goal, aim, achievement, or consummation.

The raising to life of the young man of Naim is full of instruction; almost every word

*(Class lecture, August 30, 1959)

could be made a full and complete message of instruction. The very wording of the miracle is profound. The gift of understanding gives the ability to read far more than the mere surface account inscribed by a narrator. Saint Luke has seen fit to provide profound and meaningful depths of the message itself. Sometimes this deep seeing is called the mystical interpretation. In fact, every word of the scriptures—New Testament and Old—is inspired work, having deep in their structure mystery written into the very words themselves, which unfolds to the receptive mind another dimension of thought.

Notice the wording used by Saint Luke and presented for your consideration:

*Jesus went into a city that is called Naim: and there went with him his disciples, and a great multitude. And when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow: and a great multitude of the city was with her.

*Gospel of Saint Luke, Chapter VII.

You will notice that there are two processions, one leaving the city and the other entering the city; and the meeting which constitutes the miracle was at the gate. A gate is a contiguous point between the within and the without. It was at the gate that the meeting of the two processions took place. One procession was of death, a funeral procession going out of the city with lamenting and mourning multitudes, the dead youth being carried out of the city; and the other procession reversed the order and was coming in, the Lord and His followers entering the city.

Is not this most significant of two moving actions which pertain to life, even as a wheel has two motions which are really simultaneous? The wheel moves forward along its track into outward experience as man, by the movement of nature, passes from birth to death. Progress in experience is always moving out into external worlds. Separation from his true Self, his real Self, seems to be the result. He is like a

man looking in the mirror and then forgetting what manner of man he is.

As Saint James says in his Epistle:

*He is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

The natural movement is one of forgetfulness, and is like the funeral procession leaving the city. How true this is of most people's experience; life seems to them virtually a funeral procession; there is so much fear of death in life that a person dies a thousand deaths. And strange to say, even those who have had spiritual instruction still fear death; deep in their nature is that persistent terror of the unknown; they are afraid to face death. You see this fear stamped on the faces of people. They may deny this and try to cover it up by calling it anxiety about this or that; but, according to psychiatrists, all man's anxieties can be gathered under the general heading of "fear of death."

But what happens to the funeral procession

*Epistle of Saint James 1:23, 24

when at the gate death is met by Life; when the divine body of Life, the omnipotent Word Made Flesh, meets death in the form of the funeral procession? You have it revealed to you in the miraculous account under consideration; you see what happens when Life meets death. The spiritual action reverses the natural movement, and is eternal reunion with the Source. Both processions seem to move because life never stands still; life is action, energy, and hence it is always moving toward re-generation and away from disintegration.

Note what happened: the Lord touched the bier upon which the young man was lying; and He said to the dead youth, I say to thee young man, arise! And instantly the young man remembered his true life.

This miracle brings us to consider the doctrine of immortality. The whole meaning of Christianity revolves around the doctrine of immortality.

Almost all religions of all times and all places have believed in, taught, and emphasized

a future life of some kind, a life after death. Continuance of life is quite reasonable and quite logical, but in most cases the idea of life continued after death has been held only in relation to the soul. People in general are quite ready to accept the possibility of conscious existence continuing apart from the body; they see the body go into the grave, but they do not see the soul in the coffin. What happens to the soul? Their hopes of future life seem to depend entirely upon an immortal soul. Because they have not seen the soul go into the ground, they are more ready to believe that the soul continues a conscious existence without a body.

It says in the Old Testament "God made not death." Most people can apply this "not death" to the soul, but they hesitate with doubts when the statement is applied to the body. It seems quite understandable, this hesitancy about applying immortality to the body; for haven't they seen corruption of the flesh? They haven't seen anyone actually overcome death. Even those they really believed would not die, have

died right before their eyes. They have seen them go into their graves, not by their own power, but by the work of an undertaker. At this point faith was sorely tested. How can one believe in immortality when even those who teach it die? The impossible happened!

You, yourselves, have been faced with this experience. No need to be more explicit. Something that your heart is unwilling to accept has happened and is still happening to your friends everywhere; you, yourself, are faced with it. In fact, everyone is continuously faced with this threat of death; fear and trembling stalks us in every episode of daily life; crossing every street we are threatened with the same problem. A person would have to be awfully blind, and awfully stupid, and awfully gullible to deny the problem of death as a present liability.

Yet the statement stands, stronger than appearances, "God made not death." And we know that nothing can exist unless God made it to be; only that which the Word of God

supports has existence. All theologians are explicit on this point.

What then is the explanation; what are we to believe? Scripture tells us that God made not death, yet we see people dying all around us. You can go into any hospital ward and see the shadow of death hovering. Death seems victorious over life in every cemetery.

What is the real solution? There is joy even in the attainment of the solution, almost as much as in the solution itself. The strength we gain by knowing how to look at things is our first great joy. So let us look at the idea of overcoming death and see what it really means. Overcoming death is not a material picture of putting a stop to death. It is a far greater perception than this. It is seeing through human ideas of life and death, as points of contradiction, to God Himself in Whom there is no contradiction.

Actually the Self of every person is the contiguous point between mortality and immortality. Each has within himself the two proces-

sions of life and death, and they balance each other because they are simultaneous.

Let me put this statement in familiar terms: from God, to God, and in God; the two processions of man are always in God in Whom we live and move and have our being. "From God" seems to be the natural moving out into experience, existence; we behold ourselves in this glass and forget what manner of life we have. But at the same point where we forget, we also remember; and the movement reverses "to God"—from death to life. Paul says, I die daily to live. This life and death cycle is going on in your own body all the time. According to appearances the natural procession from life to death seems to be gaining in strength over the other procession from death to life. It seems as though you are growing older, weaker; and as though corruption and disintegration were undermining life. But this is the way it seems to you only because you are looking at the surface and making your judgment from appearances.

Finite judgments gathered from experience

are merely circumstantial evidence; and when we put this event and that event and some other event together, and try to build up to truth, our judgments go astray. Circumstantial evidence is not valid. We must not judge truth from circumstances; just the reverse, let us judge circumstances by the truth. From circumstantial evidence you would contend that death is triumphant over life, that the procession moving out from life toward death has hold of you. The young man, dead, being carried out of the city, represents the movement with which you are best acquainted. The soul passing out through the sense gateway seems like life departing from the body, for death is said to be when the soul leaves the body.

The senses are called the gates, and accordingly the Sacrament of Extreme Unction applies itself to the senses and the organs of action as gateways where the soul goes out. Senses and organs of action seem the first to show physical weakening; it is as though the soul were somehow retiring from the earthly citadel—a person

cannot see as clearly, he does not hear as distinctly, he begins to lose consciousness; and thus we are told that death manufactures its own anesthetic so that the soul slips out forgetting what manner of man he was.

At this point we need to remember to judge circumstances by truth rather than the other way round. The Lord and His followers are eternally entering the city; the Word is becoming flesh, the divine Body of Life is restoring the soul; spiritually there is eternally the return to God.

These two processions—the within and the without—are the miracle of the one substance abiding in God. There is no other place for anything to be, there is no place outside of God, therefore at every point and at every instant abundant life is victorious over death. At every point in time and space eternity is regenerating life. No matter how overwhelming mortality may seem to be, eternity is rising up in conformation of truth. Young man! I say to thee, arise! Eternity is taking flesh at every

point; yet this has nothing to do with time, nothing to do with a future life or past life. Eternity is your life. Eternity can assume time, and does; eternity is taking flesh as immortal life. Eternity never ceases to be your life.

God made not death. The Old Testament and the New both testify to the triumphant power of life over death. In the Old Testament there are three such points of encounter. Elijah and Elisha both overcame death with life in similar miracles of raising a boy to life, and finally, even the dead bones of the Prophet restored life. Then in the New Testament there are three similar accounts and a fourth miraculous event, before the resurrection of the Lord: the raising of the young man of Naim, the raising of Jarius' daughter, and the raising of Lazarus, and, finally the opening of the graves which took place at the Passion of the Lord. Seven accounts in all before the eighth—the number of infinitude—when the Lord Himself became the death of death after which there is no more dying.

Our mind grasps perceptions in sequence even when the reality is simultaneous. We are given, in our Lord, the supreme example of our own lives. It may seem to us that as yet the divine pattern has not laid hold of our lives; but, actually, His life is ours even though the perception of this still seems to need revelation. But let us remember that He is the revelation of our true body, the body that overcomes death; He is the substantial union of body and soul, not just the survival of the soul, not just conscious existence without a body. He is glorified soul in a body revealing the vigor of incorruption.

The Lord is our doctrine of immortality. Immortality puzzles all religions, and is food for all religious discussions. But Saint Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, answered all these questions and solved all these puzzles. If you want to read this for yourself, you may do so in Volume Four of the *Summa Theologica*; here he gives a Treatise on Man in which he defines man as "the substantial union of body

and soul." It is clearly shown why man's salvation is not of his soul only; his happiness is not found as a disembodied spirit but as man experiencing in the flesh the glory of the soul. When the Lord came into the world, He came as man; He had a body and a rational soul, with intellect, senses, and organs of action. He assumed the natural procession with the spiritual procession of the Word. He is the Wayfarer and the Comprehensor simultaneously. He is the Way, the Life, and the Truth at the same point. He assumed mortality to His eternity, and is Immortality or Eternity in time. He is the divinely contiguous and supreme point. He reveals to us what we are to believe about His body that overcomes our death. True immortality is not a continuation of finiteness. Nothing could be more discouraging than a continuation of finiteness; you can see it on any hospital bed. Immortality is not just stopping death. The Lord made His command, Young man, arise; He did not say, Old man, get up out of your bed and continue your decrepit and

sickly life, unable to die. Perpetuation of finitude, limitation, and age, is a worse enemy than death.

The Lord calls to all mankind the immortal youth in life itself. Eyes cannot picture immortal youth except in finite pictures, that is, as a continuation of the finite pictures; and that is why our human ideas of immortality fail. Overcoming death is not just stopping and making static the finite; it is calling truth to truth, life to life, the word of God to the word of God. This is immortality.

But any person who confuses overcoming death with an infinite continuation of the finite has not attained the real perception. Immortality is not the infinite continuation of the finite; this fate would be more terrible than any possible idea of death could be; this would be a living death. This kind of death is certainly the curse of the Paradise story, the wages of sin.

One thing we might take note of here, as we consider the subject of life and death, is that the very fact that we can consider, contemplate,

study, or think about death at all, is because we are above and beyond it. The knowledge of death puts us beyond its power, puts us above death. The very fact that we can consider it, that we can think about it, the very fact that we can, in ourselves face it, gives us power over it. This is a rational perception and a very important one. If we were not immortal, we could not really know mortality; for the positive must always be the criterion of the negative. Our mortality identifies with the Lord as the Wayfarer even as our immortality in Him is the Comprehensor. This recognition in each person enables him to look upon experiences and not judge by appearances but to judge the righteous judgment, that eternal life is not merely the infinite continuation of the finite, but is the infinite and eternal glorifying flesh.

Momentarily, a person might think that continuing a present experience would be satisfying to the soul. But the finite always contains its own death threat, the enemy of happiness. Happiness shadowed by death is not real happi-

ness. Fear persists when we are judging life by by circumstantial evidence. Only righteous judgment knows this eternity that abides in our flesh. The omnipotent Word assumes flesh; mortality was assumed by eternity that immortality might arise and be recognized—a joyous recognition.

Immortality suggests three possibilities; that is, immortality can be considered in a threefold manner. First there is immortality of spiritual substance; this is the incorruptibility which pertains to the purely intellectual subjects. We read in Genesis that God created heaven and earth. Besides the earth, He created heavenly bodies, such as angels and all other intellectual substances; these have an immortality, an incorruptibility because of their very nature. This is the kind of immortality which the angels enjoyed; they had a beginning but no end. They are pure form without matter; as, for example, the concept of a circle is incorruptible, for a circle is a circle; but if you apply circle to paper by means of pencil, something that could be

corrupted or variable has been used to manifest circle. While the concept of circle is incorruptible, when it is applied to matter, the pure intellectual concept has finite liabilities. But angels have no bodies; hence there is no matter related to them to disintegrate.

Man is a union of soul and body. God made man right. Man, himself, is an organ of touch, contiguous between heaven and earth. In man heaven and earth meet. In man God's will is intended to be done on earth as it is in heaven, and this doing of the divine will is man's immortality. Man is made right; he is an organ of touch or, as the Orientals say, he is the instrument of right knowledge. No matter how much his knowledge degenerates, basically he is still an instrument of right knowledge even when knowledge is applied falsely, as in judgment by appearances. Circumstantial knowledge is wrong application, but still man is an instrument of right knowledge; it is by rationality that he applies his knowledge correctly.

When God made man, He gave him a gift

of immortality. This was one of the preternatural gifts of justifying grace which we read of in the Paradise story. The tree of life furnished nourishment. It was only when man began to exploit his knowledge, using his instrument of right knowledge for personal gain and power, that his aim went astray; and, as the story says, man sinned, he missed the mark, he forfeited justifying grace and consequently the gift of immortality.

Immortality of the first man was not of substance but of efficient cause. God made man right as the substantial union of body and soul, heaven and earth, and for this purpose ordained him to immortality as long as he remained subject to God as the efficient cause of life. But when man forfeited his divine gift by seeking his own fortune, his preternatural gifts were corrupted by finiteness and his natural nothingness began to assert itself. Only by the providence of God was man prevented from infinitely continuing his finiteness. Infinite continuation of finiteness was prevented by with-

holding from him the fruit of the tree of life. Thus, by their very finiteness, the finite limitations of man were prevented from continuing.

Two kinds of incorruptibility are: that of substance, as the angels, and that of the first man, which was due, not to substance, but to efficient Cause. Now let us consider a third kind of incorruptibility, which is due to the overflow of the soul's glory into the flesh and is called the vigor of incorruption. The Lord Himself bestowed this on man; that is the only really satisfying immortality there is. This is a positive immortality, a positive experience of eternity, not a negative stopping of death; this immortality is of glory; it is a reality in flesh.

The spiritual action is described as taking place in the soul and rebounding to the body as an inherent disposition to life. It is a new kind of disposition, not the kind most people know as belonging to the funeral procession. This disposition reverses the order of experience and carries you up from death to life; it is regeneration, the immortality of glory.

According to Saint Augustine,

*God made man's soul of such a powerful nature that from its fullness of beatitude there rebounds to the body a fullness of health with the vigor of incorruption.

The soul has such a fullness of light and life, vigor, energy of Spirit, that it overflows into the body as health and life. The soul is called by Saint Thomas Aquinas, the form of the body. It is not form in the sense of shape or figure but in the sense of *gestalt* or what man is. When the powerful nature of the glorified soul rebounds to the body, the flesh itself is full of the vigor of incorruption. The integrity of man as he truly is becomes manifest and reveals his fullness of life and health. This is not in any sense a continuation of the finite conditions; this is the revelation, even in the flesh, of the infinite. The infinite assumed flesh, and was still infinite; eternity assumed, in time, the body of man, and was still eternal. This is the miracle, and this is what it means to have the

*Summa Theologica,
Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 4.

awareness of immortality of glory; no longer is there any fear of death. We go through the shadow of death, and its shadow cannot obscure the light because the inner light is of the glorified soul. This is not mere prolonging of finite existence; it is the awakening of that immortal youth within to which the Lord called, Young man, arise! Life has taken hold, and life is eternal and infinite; and even though it seems to move in finite circles and be in specific places, it is none the less infinite and eternal. This contiguous point is the gate where the two processions are recognized and understood, faced, and met, and estimated in their true value.

The body participates in the fullness of the soul's health and life; the soul is the principle of life to the body. But where does that principle of life in the soul come from? This comes from God. The life of the soul is God. The restoration of the soul to God has bestowed on the body immortality of glory instantaneously available. When the Word of God addresses the soul, Young man, arise, the soul replies in

the living Word; then the Son is alive in the soul.

Immortality of glory is one of soul and body, not just an immortal soul, but a glorified soul that has imparted to the body the fullness of glory. This life, health, and vigor overflow into the body to manifest itself as immortal youth. The perfection of this divine union is one of supreme love. Unless the spirit of love predominates over soul, mind, and body, unless the soul is fully possessed by love, the living Spirit of Almighty God, we cannot remember what manner of man we are. So let us re-collect ourselves and remember the Spirit of the Word of God, which Spirit of Love is our immortality of glory. The divine union is perfect in us when the mystery of love predominates, and soul, mind, and body receive immortal glory.

*May the operation of the heavenly gift
possess our minds and bodies, we beseech
thee, O Lord; that our own sense may not
rule us, but may the efficiency of that gift
ever take the lead in us.

**All the Presence there is,
All the Power there is,
All the Consciousness there is,
Is *Love*, the *Living Spirit Almighty*.

*Cf. Liturgical Year, by Dom Gueranger,
Time After Pentecost, Vol. 2, page 355

**AXIOMS: Book of Health,
by George Edwin Burnell, page 80



