
“The Last Things”

God’s intention is not our annihilation - God is not like a child who quickly builds & then destroys

The fabricator of the universe wanted to create man, not as a contemptible animal but as more honourable than all; so he brought him into being and appointed him king of the creation under heaven. Having decided this, and having endowed such a being with wise and godlike qualities and adorned him with much beauty, did he bring him into existence merely with the intention that once born he would perish and suffer complete annihilation?

That would surely be an idle goal, and it would be extremely improper to attribute such thinking to God. He then resembles small children who build enthusiastically and destroy as quickly their construction, which serves no useful purpose since their thought does not arrive at any useful achievement.

The doctrine we have received is quite the reverse. He created the firstformed man immortal, but when transgression and sin intruded he deprived him of immortality as a penalty for his fault. Then the fountain of goodness overflowed with kindness and turned in pity to the work of his own hands which he had adorned with wisdom and knowledge, and he was pleased to restore us to our ancient state.¹

The resurrection is ultimately a mystery – those who speculate on it are like those at night speculating on the light of the sun

The truth about this is stored up in the hidden treasury of wisdom and will be disclosed at the time when we are taught the mystery of the resurrection in deed, when we will no longer need words to reveal what we hope for. If at night wakeful people discuss at length what the light of the sun is like, the grace of the rays by its appearance makes vain the verbal description; in the same way every reasoning which conjectures about the future restoration will be proved worthless when what we expect comes to us in experience.²

Ultimately, God will be all in all

A way lies open to all souls from every rank to that blessedness ... all will look to the same goal, and every evil will be destroyed. God will be all in all, and all persons will be united together in fellowship of the Good, Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.³

¹ *In sanctum Pascha* in A. Spira and C. Klock (eds), *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa* (Cambridge MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1981), p.11

² C. Roth (trans), *On the Soul and the Resurrection: St Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: SVS Press, 2002), p.113

³ *Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily 15* (McCambley, p.276)

Pain is a side-effect of the purification process, not divine punishment

[Macrina said] “It is not out of hatred or vengeance for an evil life (in my opinion) that God brings painful conditions upon sinners, when He seeks after and draws to Himself whatever has come to birth for His sake; but for a better purpose He draws the soul to Himself, who is the fountain of all blessedness. The painful condition necessarily happens as an incidental consequence to the one who is drawn.

When goldsmiths purify gold by fire from the matter which is mixed with it, they do not only melt the adulterant in the fire, but inevitably the pure metal is melted along with the base admixture. When the latter is consumed the former remains. In the same way when evil is consumed by the purifying fire, the soul which is united to evil must necessarily also be in the fire until the base adulterant material is removed, consumed by the fire.

Or if particularly sticky mud is plastered thickly around a rope, then the end of the rope is led through some small space, and some one pulls forcibly on the end of the rope towards the inside, necessarily the rope must follow the one who pulls, but the plastered mud must remain outside of the hole scraped off the rope by the forcible pulling. Because of the mud the rope does not move forward easily, but has to be pulled hard.

Something like this I think we should imagine for the state of the soul. Wrapped up as it is in material and earthly attachments, it struggles and is stretched, as God draws His own to Himself. What is alien to God has to be scraped off forcibly because it has somehow grown onto the soul. This is the cause of the sharp and unbearable pains which the soul must endure.”

“So the divine judgment,” [Gregory said], “as it seems, does not primarily bring punishment on sinners. As our discourse has just shown, it operates only by separating good from evil and pulling the soul towards the fellowship of blessedness. It is the tearing apart of what has grown together which brings pain to the one who is being pulled.”

“This is my opinion too,” said my teacher (Macrina). “I also think that the measure of pain is proportional to the quantity of evil in each person. For it is not likely that the one who has gone far in forbidden evils and the one who has fallen into moderate transgressions will be distressed equally as they are purified from their wretched condition. Probably that painful fire is kindled more or less hotly depending on the quantity of matter, and it burns as long as it has fuel. So if a person’s material burden is great, the consuming flame must also become great and long-lasting; but if someone is exposed to the consuming fire more briefly, the punishment relaxes its severe and piercing operation in proportion to the smaller measure of evil in the subject.

For evil must be altogether removed in every way from being, and, as we have said before, that which does not really exist must cease to exist at all. Since evil does not exist by its nature outside of free choice, when all choice is in God, evil will suffer a complete annihilation because no receptacle remains for it.”⁴

⁴ C. Roth (trans), *On the Soul and the Resurrection: St Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: SVS Press, 2002), pp.83-5