

## XVI.

## Our Death.

“You who were dead in trespasses and sin.”—*Ephes. ii. 1.*

Next in order comes the discussion of *death*.

There is *sin*, which is deviation from and resistance against the *law*. There is *guilt*, which is withholding from God that which, as the Giver and Upholder of that law, is due to Him. But there is also *punishment*, which is the Lawgiver’s act of upholding His law against the lawbreaker. The Sacred Scripture calls this punishment “death.”

To understand what death is, we must first ask: “*What is life?*”

And the answer in its most general form is: “A thing lives if it moves from within.” A man found in the street, leaning against a wall, perfectly motionless, is supposed to be dead; but if he turns his head, or moves his hand, we know that he is alive. The motion, tho almost imperceptible and so feeble that it requires the practised fingers of the physician to detect it, is always the sign of life. The muscles may be paralyzed, tendons and sinews rigid, yet so long as the pulse beats, the heart throbs, and the lungs inhale the air, life is not extinct. In the doubtful cases of drowning, trance, or paralysis, the doubt is not removed, if removed at all, until motion has been observed. Hence we may safely say a body lives if it moves from within.

This can not be said of a clock, for its mechanism lacks inherent, self-moving power. By winding, energy may be stored in its mainspring, but when this is spent the clock stops. But life is not a force added to a prepared organism, mechanically and temporarily, but an energy that inheres in the organism as an organic principle.

Hence it is plain that the human body has no vital principle in itself, but receives it from the soul. The arm is motionless until moved by the soul. Even the functions of circulation, breathing, and digesting are animated by the soul; for when the soul leaves the body all these functions stop. A body without a soul is a corpse. As physical life depends upon the union of body and soul, so is physical death the result of the dissolution of that bond. As in the beginning God formed the human body out of the dust of the earth and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, so that it became a living being, so is the dissolving of that bond, which is death to the body, an act of God. Death is therefore the removal of that wonderful gift, the bond of life. God withdraws the forfeited blessing, and the soul departs in separate disembodiment; while the body, freed as a corpse, is delivered unto corruption.

But this does not finish the process of death. Life and death are awful opposites, embracing body and soul. “Dying thou shalt die” is the divine sentence, which includes the entire person, and not the body only. That which possesses creaturely life can also die as a creature. Hence the soul, being a creature, can be dispossessed of its creaturely life.

We admit that in another aspect the soul is immortal; but to prevent confusion, we beg the reader to put this fact for a moment out of his mind. Presently we will return to it.



Applying our definition of life to the soul as a living creature, it follows that the soul lives only when it moves, when acts proceed from it, and energies work in it. But its vital principle is not inherent any more than in the body, but comes from without. Originally it was not self-existing, but God gave it an increated vital principle and moving power which He sustained and qualified for work from moment to moment. In this respect Adam differed from us. It is true that in the soul of the regenerated there is a vital principle, but the source of its energy is outside of ourselves in Christ. There is *indwelling*, but not *interpermeation*. The dweller and his house are distinct. Hence in the regenerated man life is extraneous, its seat is not in himself. But not so in Adam. Altho the life-principle energizing the soul proceeded from God, yet it was deposited in Adam himself.

To obtain gas from the city's gas-works is one thing; to manufacture it at one's own cost, in one's own establishment, is quite another. The regenerated child of God receives life directly from Christ, who is outside of Him at the right hand of God, through the channels of faith; but Adam had the principle of life within him from the Fountain of all Good. The Holy Spirit had placed it in his soul, and kept it in active operation; not as something extraneous, but as inherent in and peculiar to his nature.

If Adam's life originated in the union which God had established between his soul and the life-principle of the Holy Spirit, it follows that Adam's death resulted from God's act of dissolving that union whereby his soul became a corpse.

But this is not all. When the body dies it does not disappear; the process of death does not stop there. As a unit it becomes incapable of organic action, but its constituent parts become capable of producing terrible and corrupting effects. Left unburied in a house, the poisonous gases of dissolution breed malignant fevers and cause death to the inhabitants and the community. After this dissolution of flesh and blood, which can not inherit the kingdom of God, the body as such continues to exist, with the possibility of being reanimated and refashioned into a more glorious body, and of being reunited with the soul.

All this can almost literally be applied to the soul. When a soul dies, *i.e.*, is severed from its life-principle, which is the Holy Spirit, it becomes perfectly motionless and unable to perform any good work. Some things may remain, like loveliness upon the face of the dead; yet, however lovely, it is useless and unprofitable. And as a dead body is incapable of any act and inclined to all dissolution, so is a dead soul incapable of any good and inclined to all evil.

But this does not imply that a dead soul is devoid of all activity, any more than a dead body. As the latter contains blood, carbon, and lime, so does the former possess will, feeling, intelligence, and imagination. And these elements of a dead soul become equally active with still more terrible effects, which are sometimes fearful to behold. But as the dead body by all its activities can never produce anything to restore its organism, so can the dead soul by



all its workings accomplish nothing to restore a harmonious utterance before God. All its utterances are sinful, even as the dead body emits only offensive odors.

Yea, the parallel goes still further. A corpse may be embalmed, stuffed with herbs, and encased as a mummy. Its corruption is invisible, all unsightliness carefully concealed. So do many men embalm the dead soul, fill it with fragrant herbs, and wrap it like a mummy in a shroud of self-righteousness, so that of the indwelling corruption scarcely anything appears. But as the Egyptians by their embalming never could restore life unto their dead, so can these soul-mummies with all their Egyptian arts never kindle one spark of life in their dead souls.

A dead soul is not annihilated, but continues to exist, and by divine grace can be reanimated to a new life. It continues to exist even more powerfully than the body. The latter is divisible, but the soul is not. Being a unit it can not be divided. Hence soul death is not followed by soul-dissolution. It is the poisonous working of the soul-elements after death that causes a terrible strain, creating in the indivisible soul a vehement desire for dissolution; friction and confusion of elements that cry for harmony and peace; violent excitement kindling unholy fires; but there is no *dissolution*. Therefore the soul is called *immortal*, i.e., it can not be divided nor annihilated. It becomes a corpse insusceptible of dissolution, in which the poisonous gases will continue their pestilential work in hell forever.

But the soul is also susceptible of new quickening and animation; dead in trespasses and sin, severed from the life-principle, its organism motionless, incapable, and unprofitable, corrupt and undone, but still a human soul. And God, who is merciful and gracious, can reestablish the broken bond. The interrupted communion with the Holy Spirit can be restored, like the broken fellowship of body and soul.

And this quickening of the dead soul is regeneration.

We close this section with one more remark: The breaking of the bond which causes death is not always sudden. Death from paralysis is almost instantaneous, from consumption slow. When Adam had sinned, death came at once; but so far as the body was concerned, its complete severing from the soul required more than nine hundred years. But the soul died at once, died suddenly; the bond with the Holy Spirit was severed, and only its raveling threads remain active in the feelings of *shame*.

When we say that soul-death may be less pronounced in one case than in another, we do not mean to imply that while the one is dead the other is only dying. Nay, both are dead, the soul of each is a corpse; but the one is embalmed as a mummy, and the other is in the process of dissolution; or, the conflicting, poisonous, and destructive workings in the soul of the one have just commenced, while in the other they were stimulated and developed by



education and other agencies. These differences among different persons depend upon the divine grace.

Dissolution in a body at the North Pole is checked; in a body under the Equator it is rapidly accomplished. In like manner dead souls are placed in different atmospheres. Hence the differences.

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**Third Chapter.**

**PREPARATORY GRACE.**

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