

The aspect of the Body in the writing *On the Soul and the Resurrection* of Gregory of Nyssa¹

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Abstract. The dialogue entitled *On the Soul and the Resurrection* can be considered as the most important one of Gregory of Nyssa. This work, a dialogue between Gregory himself and his sister Macrina, was modeled on Plato's *Phaedo* and shows quite clearly the debt our author owes to Plato for his literary form, besides the borrowing of ideas. This paper will examine the connection of the body and the soul. The soul is totally unlike the body in essence, still dwells in it and vivifies it while the body is alive. It coalesces with the union of the bodily elements. But when the body is dissolved in death and its elements return to their own, the soul does not perish with it. Due to its intellectual and dimensionless nature, the soul does not dissolve but survives and remains attached to all the elements which were once crafted into its body. Being dimensionless, the soul is neither contracted nor dispersed as are dimensional things. Hence nothing prevents the soul from remaining present with all of natural elements of its former body, regardless of how they are dispersed. So even in death the soul survives in union with the body's elements. We will examine how Gregory has been influenced by Platonic and Neo-Platonic ideas about the body and the soul and what are his views about the Body, the soul and Desire and their connections to gender, sex, and sexuality.

Keywords: Body; soul; resurrection; Platonic and Neo-Platonic ideas.

El aspecto del Cuerpo en el escrito *Sobre el Alma y la Resurrección*, de Gregorio de Nisa

Resumen. El diálogo titulado *Sobre el alma y la resurrección* puede considerarse como el escrito más importante de Gregorio de Nisa. Esta obra, un diálogo entre el propio Gregorio y su hermana Macrina, se inspiró en el *Fedón* de Platón y muestra muy claramente la deuda que nuestro autor tiene con Platón por su forma literaria, además del préstamo de ideas. Este artículo examinará la conexión del cuerpo y el alma. El alma es totalmente diferente al cuerpo en esencia, aún habita en él y lo vivifica mientras el cuerpo está vivo. Se fusiona con la unión de los elementos corporales. Pero, cuando el cuerpo se disuelve en la muerte y sus elementos vuelven a los suyos, el alma no perece con él. Debido a su naturaleza intelectual y sin dimensiones, el alma no se disuelve, sino que sobrevive y permanece unida a todos los elementos que alguna vez fueron elaborados en su cuerpo. Al ser adimensional, el alma no se contrae ni se dispersa como las cosas dimensionales. De ahí que nada impide que el alma permanezca presente con todos los elementos naturales de su cuerpo anterior, independientemente de cómo estén dispersos. Entonces, incluso en la muerte, el alma sobrevive en unión con los elementos del cuerpo. Examinaremos cómo Gregorio ha sido influenciado por las ideas platónicas y neoplatónicas sobre el cuerpo y el alma, y cuáles son sus puntos de vista sobre el cuerpo, el alma y el deseo, y sus conexiones con el género, el sexo y la sexualidad.

Palabras clave: Cuerpo; alma; resurrección; ideas platónicas y neoplatónicas.

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1. Introduction: Gregory's of Nyssa sorrow in front of death

Church Fathers do not deny that the physical death is a tragic situation, a sobering and scary reality for the relatives of a dead man mainly, but also for dead themselves. Death causes sorrow, grief and breaks the heart of people even of the faithful one. Although Christians have the hope and the belief in the resurrection and the eternal life,³ the death remains a situation that someone can face up with a great difficulty.⁴

The Christian teaching accepts that the death is a crucial point for a man. It is a fact that defines, restricts and exhausts the humanity. It is the end of a vital process of any human being. The death is the separation of the soul from the body. Christ with His Passions, the Crucifixion, and His Resurrection abolished ontologically death and enabled man to overtake it. So for Christian who is a member of the Church and is united with Christ through the sacraments, death is not the end. This belief has shaped Christian thinking ever after the resurrection of Jesus. Although this hope of resurrection and of eternal life near God, Christ himself cried and felt sadness about Lazarus' death and at the same time He gave the hope of life with the resurrection of Lazarus.⁵

Despite of Christ's victory against the death, Gregory of Nyssa sought consolation for the death of his brother of Basil the Great in 379. Two decades before, in 356 he had mourned the death of his other brother, ascetic Naucratus, who had died. After these deaths, the embodied passion of grief was extraordinarily powerful for the Holy Father. The recent loss of his elder brother, Basil, brought more sadness to Gregory's heart.⁶ He writes: "My heart was very sorrowful for grief at so great a loss."⁷ Of course, Gregory grieves for the loss of his brother and he realizes that soon his sister, Macrina, is going to die, so the sorrow and the grief will become much more in his heart than it is. Gregory doesn't have any reconciliation with the phenomenon of death; the power of sadness has been often overwhelming in the

face of death, at least the death of his favorite brothers and sister. He feels despaired at the fact of their death.

Macrina who has deepened in Christian theology as a teacher who continuously teaches her student, uses her brother's visit to explain to him the Christian theology on the soul and the resurrection. Basing on her situation as providing the impetus for the death, the soul and the resurrection, she analyses what happens at the moment of death, explains how the soul can recognize the body on the day of resurrection. Moreover, she answers to the questions of her brother concerning the origin of the soul, the purification after death, and what kind will be the nature of the resurrection body.⁸

2. Gregory's work *On the Soul and the Resurrection*

This dialogue, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, between Macrina and Gregory was modeled on Plato's dialogue, *Phaedo*.⁹ The topic of this Platonic work is set on Socrates' last day and on defense of the existence of an immaterial soul. The emphasis here is on the fact that people need to believe in the existence of a soul in order to explain the claim that they possess free will.¹⁰

Anna Silvas supports that Gregory was influenced by Plato's work.¹¹ Plato wrote the *Apologia* of Socrates which has many details for Socrates' life and then he wrote the dialogue *Phaedo*, in order the philosophical thoughts about the death and the immortality of the soul to be presented by Socrates. Gregory follows Plato. He writes first the life of Macrina which includes information about his sister and his teacher at the same time. Then he writes the dialogue *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. In this dialogue there is the Christian teaching for the death, the resurrection of the body and the soul, sometimes is presented with the cloak of Platonism and Neo-Platonism.¹² Thus, in Gregory's of Nyssa this treatise, there is the combination of Christian teaching and Greek philosophy in a very creative way without betraying the author's Christian identity.¹³ So Gregory reveals himself not only as a Platonist but also as a bi-

³ In the creed of Nicaea – Constantinople, it is said: "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come".

⁴ Jn 11:33.

⁵ Jn 11:1–44.

⁶ "His treatise from this same period, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, in which an account of Macrina's death also appears, is also a considered philosophical essay dedicated to the memory of his elder brother", John Anthony McGuckin, "St Gregory of Nyssa: Bishop, Philosopher, Exegete, Theologian", in *Exploring Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical, Theological, and Historical Studies*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Neil B. McLynn, 17 (Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: November 2018), DOI:10.1093/oso/9780198826422.003.0002, "Giving the treatise the subtitle *Makrinia*. Cf. Migne PG 46, 11.f, though its opening words celebrate "ὁ πολὺς ἐν ἀγίοις Βασίλειος". Ibid., ref 66.

⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 12A, trans. Catharine P. Roth, (Crestwood–New York: St. Vladimir's seminary Press, 2002), 27.

⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 12A.

⁹ Elias Moutsoulas, *Gregory of Nyssa*, (in greek), (Athens 1997), 222. Hans Boersma, "'Numbed with Grief': Gregory of Nyssa on Bereavement and Hope," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 49. Elena Ene D-Vasilescu, "The epektasis [ἐπέχτασις] and the exploits of the soul in Gregory of Nyssa's *De anima et resurrectione/On the Soul and the Resurrection*", https://www.academia.edu/37883238/The_epektasis_and_the_exploits_of_the_soul_in_Gregory_of_Nyssa_s_De_anima_et_resurrectione_On_the_Soul_and_the_Resurrection, (2018): 2. Susan Wessel, "Memory and Individuality in Gregory of Nyssa's *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*", *JECs*, Volume 18, Number 3 (Fall 2010): 369-92 (especially pages 373-380 on gender)

¹⁰ Shelly Kagan, "Introduction to Plato's *Phaedo*; Arguments for the existence of the soul, Part II. "Yales Courses, *Course of Philosophy 176*, Spring 2007. Audio, 8:09. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGXYeV2v5fU&list=PLEA18FAF1AD9047B0&index=4>. Gregory of Nyssa, *The life of Saint Macrina*, PG 46, 977C: "ὅπως ἐπήρθη τῷ λόγῳ περὶ τε τῆς ψυχῆς ἡμῶν φιλοσοφοῦσα καὶ τῆς διὰ σαρκὸς ζωῆς τὴν αἰτίαν διεξιούσα, καὶ οὗτο χάριν ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὅπως θνητὸς καὶ ὄθεν ὁ θάνατος καὶ τίς ἡ ἀπὸ τούτου πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν πάλιν ἀνάλυσις".

¹¹ Anna Silvas, *Macrina the Younger, philosopher of God*, Medieval women: texts and contexts; v. 22, (Belgium: Brepols, 2008), 155.

¹² Ibid., 156.

¹³ Jean Daniélou, *Platonism et Théologie mystique*, (Paris 1953²), 8.

blical Christian.¹⁴ His philosophy is a form of Christian Platonism. For him, the Greek philosophy is not a dead academic discipline separated from Christian life; it has a strong relation with it and reveals in obscurity the truth of Christianity.¹⁵

In this dialogue, Macrina is presented as the Christian Socrates, equal to, or even surpassing, that profound intelligence.¹⁶ Macrina has a very detailed knowledge of pagan philosophy, especially Stoic and Epicurean thought. It is said that only some of the ideas about the soul and the resurrection belong to her. Many of them are Gregory's. The latter used his sister as a mouthpiece to espouse his views; an attempt similar to Plato, who consistently maintains Socrates in order to reveal his of his own ideas.¹⁷ The common question that exists in the *Phaedo* and in this Gregory's dialogue, is what we should prefer: a life of spirit or that of a body? Besides the opinion that for this christian dialogue the base is *Phaedo*, there is another thought that this work has many similarities with Plato's *Symposium*. By this view, Macrina has the role of Diotima, who teaches Socrates about Eros (furious love) in Plato's *Symposium*.¹⁸ Macrina as an emphatically Christian philosopher confirms all her conclusions in light of Scripture, but her proofs for soul's immortality are rational and not grounded directly in revelation.¹⁹

Many questions are born in our thoughts about the context of *On the Soul and Resurrection*. Does Gregory really believe whatever he supports about the death? Does he employ his sadness for the death of the members of his family in order to speak about the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of all people according to Christian theology? Is this dialogue an attempt of Gregory to reconcile his Hellenism and his Christian theology? Does Gregory present by this way the inaccuracies of Greek philosophers about death? Do the ideas that attributed to Macrina belong to the author himself?

We cannot assume with certainty why Gregory plays "the devil's advocate" in this discussion, but it is undoubted that the ideas attributed to Macrina are those of the Church Father himself. He accepts that the Holy Bible is utterly authoritative in Christian teaching. But as a man

who lost his brother and soon he would lose his sister, he wonders about the words and the teaching of Bible. He tries to find a certain assurance which comes from reasoning out this issue of death thoroughly.²⁰ By this way Gregory shows to Christians and to non Christians of all centuries that the search for the truth about God and the path that man has to follow is in the Bible and in its study. This reveals the truth of Jeremiah's words: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls".²¹

Gregory feels stunning from the death of his beloved brother Basil and the coming death of his sister and he expresses questions about the death as any man does. By this way, the sorrow appears to have a catalytic role to the Church Father's thought. It helps him to develop a deeper, richer and without doubts philosophical and theological view about death in Christian teaching²² which is characterized as a form of Christian Platonism. Of course, here, we will agree with Zachhuber that we should reject the opinion that this work is essentially Platonic. Zachhuber insists that there are many Platonic elements within Gregory's doctrine about the soul, based on Christian teaching. He rejects the pre-existence of the soul and accepts the resurrection of the dead and confirms the soul as a power of body of course in a different way from Plato's acceptance.²³ Gregory Nyssa presents all this argument for the soul, the body and the resurrection of the latter in very complex syntactical structures and highly supple vocabulary. He uses Pauline elements to his treatise covered with a Platonic cloak.

Moreover, Ilaria Ramelli supports that this treatise of Gregory based on Tertullian's works, "On the Soul and On the Resurrection." Gregory reedits both of them and creates a composition of these two treatises with a more philosophical way, as a remake of Plato's *Phaedo* on the immortality of the soul. Gregory manages to make a creative and fruitful dialogue for the definition of soul and relation between resurrection and restoration, the teaching of the gospel, of Origen and the Church Fathers, and finally of Plato, Plotinus and Proclus.²⁴

¹⁴ Ari Ojell, *One Word, One Body, One Voice. Studies Apophatic Theology Christocentric Anthropology in and Gregory Nyssa*, (doctorate's thesis, Helsinki, 2007), 25. <http://ethesis.fi>.

¹⁵ Brian Ephrem Fitzgerald, "Saint Gregory of Nyssa: On the Soul and the Resurrection", 3. https://www.st-philip.net/files/Fitzgerald%20Patristic%20series/Gregory-Nyssa_soul_and_resurrection.pdf

¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, trans. and intro. Kevin Corrigan (Toronto, Ontario: Peregrina Pub. Co., 1995), 11.

¹⁷ Mario Baghos, "Reconsidering Apokatastasis in St Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Soul and Resurrection* and the *Catechetical Oration*", *Phronema*, 27, no 2 (2012): 127.

¹⁸ Catharine P. Roth, "Platonic and Pauline Elements in the Ascent of the Soul in Gregory of Nyssa's Dialogue on the Soul and Resurrection," *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 20-30; Anthony Meredith S.J., *Gregory of Nyssa*, The Early Church Fathers Series (London: Routledge 1999), 59-75. Hans Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 110.

¹⁹ Peter Adamson, "Macrina the Younger", *History of Women Philosophers and Scientists*, <https://historyofwomenphilosophers.org/project/directory-of-women-philosophers/macrina-the-younger-327-379/>

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27-29.

²¹ Jerem. 6:16.

²² Jay Abbott, *The Wayfarer's Breviary. Advent, Christmas and Epiphany*, vol. 1, (Vallejo: The Breviary Book Press, 2015), 542.

²³ Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa. Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2014), 234-5; Idem, "The Soul as Dynamis in Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Soul and the Resurrection*", 142-60 in *Exploring Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical, Theological, and Historical Studies*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Neil B. McLynn, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), DOI:10.1093/oso/9780198826422.003.0008.; Ilaria R.E. Ramelli, "Gregory of Nyssa on the Soul (and the Restoration). From Plato to Origen", 111, in *Exploring Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical, Theological, and Historical Studies*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Neil B. McLynn, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), DOI:10.1093/oso/9780198826422.003.0007.

²⁴ Ramelli, "Gregory of Nyssa on the Soul", 111-2.

3. The nature of human body and of soul: the bond between them in Gregory's text

In this treatise, Gregory avoids repeating his anthropological teaching as it is presented mainly in his "On the making of man".²⁵ In this work that we examine, it is underlined that the human nature is a microcosm for the universe as whole. The man is a "little world", *microcosm* in which the macrocosm, or universe, is reflected. The human nature is composed of three elements, material, physical, and spiritual. This idea of human nature as microcosm exists from the time Democritus, Plato, Aristotle and in Stoics. It referred by Socrates and was employed with a great analysis by Neo-Platonists, although it Therefore, there has to be an added component to human existence, and that component is the soul.²⁶ Also, the idea of the human nature as microcosm and the analogy with the macrocosm of the universe was developed in patristic teaching in order to analyze the dual composition of human nature as soul – spirit and body. Church Fathers as Basilus of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa and later Maximus the Confessor used this idea in order to show that the wisdom of God was presented in human beings. The latter has the duty to bring the body and the soul, the sensible and intelligible world into a connection, into real relationship with the God.

By this way Gregory argues about the format of human nature and especially for body. He avoids agreeing with Origen's view about the preexistence of the soul and the lost of his spirit after the human's death. Also, Gregory expresses a different opinion from Plato as far as the body and the soul. For Cappadocian Father, the body is not something bad,²⁷ it is not the jail of the soul as it is for Plato²⁸, and for this reason the soul doesn't need any purification and to be released from the body.²⁹ Gregory employs the word flesh – σάρξ more than the word body, because flesh involves the whole human nature, body and soul, as Paul does.³⁰ It has a great importance that Gregory underlines the relationship, the strong bond between body and mind which reveals the spiritual – material nature of man. According to Ladner:

"These are the threefold nature of the nature of the soul in its relationship to matter and to spirit and the temporal and spatial unity of the human soul, in which mind and body exist as unified, notwithstanding the great distance which separates them in the hierarchy of values".³¹

The characterization of human nature is the continuous development and progress, the *epektasis*, towards God³². The term *epektasis* bases on the Philippians' epistle 3:3: "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh".³³ As for the soul for Gregory it has a threefold classification of souls. Here, the influence of Aristotle on this Christian father's thought is profane. However Aristotle makes more classifications for the soul than Gregory does.³⁴

There is a sharp and clear distinction between the soul and the body; "The soul is an essence created, and living, and intellectual, transmitting from itself to an organized and sentient body the power of living and of grasping objects of sense, as long as a natural constitution capable of this holds together".³⁵ After the death, the soul continues to exist. The natural body is dissolved after the death which is converted into a spiritual body of a just Christian after the resurrection of all people.³⁶ The "dead skins" are understood as the "form of our irrational nature which we have put on through our association with passion".³⁷ This is the ground for the arising of this question: "if the body as we know it was created by God in foresight of the fall, the final reformation of man's image – likeness to God should include the resurrection of the body" and how this kind of body will be reunited with its appertaining soul?³⁸

Gregory tries to answer this question based on the Aristotle and Platonic theory about *eidos*, of the form. There is a difference of the conception of the idea for something from the real essence of it. For him, the reunion the soul of the body can be explained with the analogy of an art painter and his painting. The painter knows how he will mix the colors for the best result, by the same way the Creator knows how the souls will be united with the spiritual body again.³⁹ If the artist creates a painting, then he knows which the quantity of a color

²⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the making of man*, PG 44, 124D. Gregory presents his anthropological teaching in many of his works, especially in *On the making of man*, *On the Soul and the Resurrection Apologeticus on Hexaemeron*, and *Catechetical Speech* and *On infant's Early Deaths*.

²⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 20A-24A.

²⁷ Plato, *Phaedo* 80e

²⁸ Plato, *Phaedo* 82e, 92a.

²⁹ Ibid., 81bc.

³⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 85D-88C. Rom. 8, Gal. 5:17.

³¹ Gerhart B. Ladner, "The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* Vol. 12 (1958), 70. DOI: 10.2307/1291117, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1291117>

³² Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 88A-89A. Ene D-Vasilescu, "The epektasis [ἐπέχτασις] and the exploits of the soul in Gregory of Nyssa's De anima et resurrectione/On the Soul and the Resurrection", 7.

³³ Philip. 3:3, transl. New King James version.

³⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 60AB. Aristotle, *De anima*, II, 3, 414a. Stephen Menn, "Aristotle's definition of soul and the programme of the *De Anima*" (2002):83-139, <https://www.philosophie.hu-berlin.de/de/lehrbereiche/antike/mitarbeiter/menn/deanimapfs.pdf>, accessed 5 November 2019. Richard Sorabji, "Body and Soul in Aristotle", *Philosophy*, 49, No 187, (January 1974): 63-89.

³⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 29B. transl. by William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson. *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 5, ed. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2915.htm>.

³⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 20B, 156A. 1Cor. 15:44.

³⁷ Ibid., PG 46, 61D– 62A.

³⁸ Ibid., PG 46, 73B. Ladner, "The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa," 86.

³⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 73AB, transl. by Moore and Wilson: "in the art of painting not only to mix opposite colors, as painters are always doing, to represent a particular tint, but also to separate again this mixture and to restore to each of the colors its

that is used is. If he dissolves the painting to its colors, he can create the same painting using the same analogies for each color. He knows the actual dye of each color very well. The same happens with the soul and the body after its separation into pieces after man's death, "So, we assert, does the soul know the natural peculiarities of those atoms whose concourse makes the frame of the body in which it has itself grown, even after the scattering of those atoms. However far from each other their natural propensity and their inherent forces of repulsion urge them, and debar each from mingling with its opposite, none the less will the soul be near each by its power of recognition, and will persistently cling to the familiar atoms, until their concourse after this division again takes place in the same way, for that fresh formation of the dissolved body which will properly be, and be called, resurrection".⁴⁰

The Church Father explains that the soul doesn't unite with one part of the body but with the whole body.⁴¹ This bond between the soul and the body remains when the body dies. Somehow, the soul will be always connected with the body's disintegrated members. On this point, Gregory contrasts the simplicity of divine nature with the complexity of human nature. He interprets this contrast underlining that God is the only primitive source for the creation. He is beyond place and time. The world and the human being as products of God are though as quite radically different from the divine nature. They are not coeternal with God. They created in a specific place and time.⁴² The soul is without material substance and incorporated. It acts and moves according to its nature. Soul is what gives life to the body.⁴³ The soul has a peculiar and distinct nature from the corporeal coarseness⁴⁴. It is named the cause of life (τό ζωτικόν αἴτιον, ζωοποιόν αἴτιον)⁴⁵; and the body is termed a compound (σύγκρημα) or concourse of elements (συνδρομή τῶν στοιχείων)⁴⁶.

Macrina defines the soul in negative terms⁴⁷ which reminds the apophaticism that Gregory uses in his theology.⁴⁸ Although, the human soul is thought non-material, imperishable, eternal and incorporated, it is quite different from the Deity. The basic difference is that God always exists beyond time, but the soul is a creature of God in the boarders of time. It is simple and without any composition.⁴⁹ It cannot be dissolved by the death of man, because it is immortal.⁵⁰ So it continues to live after body's death and decay. In comparison of human soul with God nature, it is said that it is alike God (but not God). It doesn't remain without any change as the God's nature which is unchangeable. It is important to be clarified that this great difference between "immortal" human soul which has a beginning but no end with the immortal nature of God, who has no beginning and no end. Gregory argues that neither does the soul exist before the body, nor the body apart from the soul, but there is only a single origin for both of them.⁵¹

The soul of each man is created with his body from the first moment of man's conception in his mother womb.⁵² Generally, Gregory criticizes with a strict way the idea of the soul's existence prior to embodiment. He doesn't embrace the teaching of Plato and Origen about the preexistence of souls.⁵³ But of course, as we underlined above, he doesn't accept its reincarnation, too.⁵⁴ Not only are the soul and the body created together, but they develop in parallel⁵⁵. Here, it should be clarified when Gregory says: "it is absolutely necessary that the soul should be healed and purified, and if this does not take place during its life on earth it must be accomplished in future lives", he doesn't accept any reincarnation of the soul. He means that purification and salvation come through God's love and philanthropy.

What does God's philanthropy and mercy have to do with the purification with a dead's soul? If a person had entered the stage of repentance before his death and he

natural dye. If then white, or black, or red, or golden color, or any other color that has been mixed to form the given tint, were to be again separated from that union with another and remain by itself, we suppose that our artist will none the less remember the actual nature of that color, and that in no case will he show forgetfulness, either of the red, for instance, or the black, if after having become quite a different color by composition with each other they each return to their natural dye...Let the soul stand for this Art of the painter; and let the natural atoms stand for the colors of his art; and let the mixture of that tint compounded of the various dyes, and the return of these to their native state (which we have been allowed to assume), represent respectively the concourse, and the separation of the atoms. "

⁴⁰ Ibid., PG 46, 73B.

⁴¹ Ibid., PG 46, 44B-45B, 72CD.

⁴² Ibid., PG 46, 121B, 121CD, 124A. Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 147.

⁴³ John P. Cavaros, "Gregory of Nyssa on the Nature of the Soul", *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* vol. I. (March 1955): 135. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 28C: "αὐτήν καθ' ἑαυτήν ἐν ἐξηλλαγμένῃ τε καὶ ἰδιαζούσῃ φύσει, παρά τὴν σωματικὴν παχυμέρειαν. "

⁴⁴ Ibid., PG 46, 16B, 17B.

⁴⁵ Ibid., PG 46, 24B.

⁴⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the making of man*, PG 44, 237A, Ibid., PG 44, 237D: "Ἡ δὲ νεκρότης κατὰ στερῆσιν ψυχῆς γίνεται". Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 29AB: "Ἡ γὰρ ὀργανικὴ τοῦ σώματος αὐτῆ διασκευή... ἀκίνητος μένει καὶ ἀνεκέρητος, τῆς ψυχικῆς δυνάμεως ἐν αὐτῇ μὴ οὐσης".

⁴⁷ Ibid., PG 46, 40C: "It is not anything which is comprehend by perception, neither color, nor shape, nor hardness, nor weight, nor size nor tridimensionality, nor location in a place, nor any at all of the properties which we understand in reference to matter", Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, transl. Roth, 44.

⁴⁸ Johannes Aakjær Steenbuch, "From abstraction to unsaying: how the eunomian controversy changed Gregory of Nyssa's apophatic ethics to an apophatic ethics", *Vox Patrum* 37 (2017) t. 68: 152. Ivana Noble, "The Apophatic Way in Gregory of Nyssa", P. Pokorny and J. Roskovec, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, (Mohr Siebeck, 2002): 324, 334, 335.

⁴⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the making of man*, PG 46, 232D-234A.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the making of man*, PG 44, 236B.

⁵² Ibid., PG 44, 236CD.

⁵³ Origen, *On First Principles*, PG 11, 111-114.

⁵⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the making of man*, PG 44, 237CD.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

dies, is there a post – mortem repentance? Can the cure of the soul with its purification would continue in a dead “in perpetuity”, since virtue does not have an end? This, to be sure, does not refer to those who of their own choice remained completely unrepentant and had not entered the stage of repentance. We can explain the aspect of the “future lives” about the soul which Gregory says with the view that someone who dies in the stage of the repentance is though as a friend of God. So the soul of the friend of God can ask and have forgiveness after the death. They will be enlightened under the light of the divine glory, of the sun of righteousness like the wax under the rays of the material sun⁵⁶. This happens because the love of God doesn’t obey to any law and if a dead’s soul tries to find God in order to be unite with Him, the mercy of God can give forgiveness and purify this soul of the dead man in a future life by changing his state for the hell, away from the light of God, to God’s Kingdom, near Him⁵⁷.

In Orthodox Church this is the goal of the memorial services. There, the priest asks the mercy of God to forgive the dead and during the holy Liturgy, the priest prays for the salvation of the dead, the alive and for “all who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection to life eternal”⁵⁸. This reveals the ontological relation which exists among dead and living Christians. Basing on this relation the dead man asks mercy from God through the prayers of his alive brothers who live in Christ⁵⁹. As far as the human body after the resurrection will be neither a body of an infant, of a young nor of an adult, it will be in “light fibres”. The form that the resurrection body will be the body, that God gave to men before their original sin. Macrina says to Gregory that “resurrection is the reconstitution of our nature in its original form.”⁶⁰ So the resurrection body will be a spiritual body.

Generally, her opinion of *apokatastasis* based on numerous passages from both the Old⁶¹ and the New Testament⁶², which are used to show that the creation and the human beings with their soul were created perfect and they will become perfect again. To sum up, for Gregory of Nyssa and for Macrina the resurrection is the reconstitution of the human nature in his original situation⁶³, in the state of angels that he was after his creation⁶⁴. His words reflect the passage from Paul’s epistle 1 Cor. 15:23, 28, 36-7⁶⁵. And it is obvious that his teaching about the reconstitution of manhood bases on Origen’s eschatological though.⁶⁶ This pauline passage is the basis for Origen’s model for the universal reconciliation, *apokatastasis*, and “the death will be vanquished as the final enemy of God and all things will be made subject to Jesus Christ.”⁶⁷ This passage in relation to the passage from Ephesians 4:13 expresses the strong opinion that the *apokatastasis* will be completed when everything is brought together in unity of the faith and recognition of the Son of God: “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”.

As a conclusion, Gregory uses the word *apokatastasis* in the fourth chapter of his dialogue and ostensibly implies universal salvation. Through Macrina’s answer for the place of Hades, there is meaning of the *apokatastasis*: “What then, I said, If the opponent should cite the apostle who says that all rational creation at the restoration (πρός ἀποκαταστάσει) of the universe looks toward the Governor of the whole? Among the rational creation he mentions certain subterranean beings, saying in his Epistle to the Philippians that to Him every knee shall bend of heavenly, earthly, and subterranean creatures.”⁶⁸

⁵⁶ Nikolaos Matsoukas, *Dogmatic and Symbolic theology*, vol. 2, (Thessaloniki 1996), 545, 546. John Damascene, *Against Manichaeans*, PG 94, 1573AB, 1545D-1548A. Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Theology and the Economy of the Son of God*, PG 90, 1088AB.

⁵⁷ Matsoukas, *Dogmatic and Symbolic theology*, 547.

⁵⁸ “The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom”, https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom?_101_INSTANCE_ulcNz-WPdScz6_languageId=en_US [access 15 May 2019]

⁵⁹ In the funeral service in the Orthodox Church, it is said: “Have mercy on us, O God, according to Your great mercy; we pray You listen and have mercy. Lord has mercy. Again we pray for the repose of the soul of the servant of God (Name) departed this life; and for the forgiveness of him (her) every transgression, voluntary and involuntary. Lord has mercy. Let the Lord God establish him (her) soul where the just repose; the mercies of God, the Kingdom of the Heavens, and remission of him (her) sins: let us ask of Christ our Immortal King and our God. Lord has mercy. Let us pray to the Lord.... O God of all spirits and flesh, Who has trodden down death, destroying the power of the devil, bestowing life on Your world. to the soul of Your servant (Name) departed this life, do You Yourself, O Lord, give rest in a place of light, in a place of green pasture, in a place of refreshment, from where pain and sorrow and mourning are fled away. Every sin by him (her) committed in thought, word, or deed, do You as our good and loving God forgive, seeing that there is no man that shall live and sin not, for You alone are without sin: Your righteousness, and Your law is truth”. Funeral Service’s text, <https://www.goarch.org/-/funeral-service> accessed 15 May 2019.

⁶⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 156D-157A.

⁶¹ Gen 1:26; Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 52A. Dan. 9:23; 10:11; 10:19; Num. 25:11; Prov. 9:10; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 57A. Ex. 14:7; 15:4; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 67CD. Jer. 18:3-6; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 77AB. Gen. 2:16-17; Gen. 12:1-4; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 81D, 84C. Sap. 3:6; Prov. 17:3; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 97D, 100A.

⁶² 2 Cor. 7:10; Math. 10:28; Luc. 21:9; Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 57A. Math. 13:24-30; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 64CD. Phil. 2:10; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 69CD. Rom. 11:33; Phil. 2:11 *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 72AB. Rom. 9:11; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 77AB. Luc. 16:19-31; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 80C. Hebr. 2:8-9; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 84B. Luc. 16:27-31; 2:29; 1 Cor. 15:50; Math. 16:17; Apoc. 2:11; 20:6; 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:7; Jn. 1:13; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 85CD, 88AB. 1 Cor. 13:8 9-10; 13:13 13-14; Hebr. 11:1; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 96BC. 1 Cor. 15:28; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 104A.

⁶³ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 148A: “The resurrection is the restoration of our [sc. human] nature to its original state. “

⁶⁴ Idem, *Ecclesiastes*, PG 44, 633C.

⁶⁵ Idem, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 152C.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ 1 Cor. 15:23, 26-28. Origen, *Commentary on John*, 1.120, PG 14, 49C.

⁶⁸ Phil.2:10. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, 4, PG 46, 69C, Roth, 62-3.

4. Platonic and NeoPlatonic influence of Gregory's work *On the Soul and the resurrection*.

Besides Gregory of Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa is thought as the most Platonic and neo-Platonic christian theologian⁶⁹. He had studied many Platonic works and he was influenced mainly by *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus*.⁷⁰ At the same time, the Cappadocian Father had embraced many of the works and the writers of Middle Platonism as Posidonius, Iamblichus, Stoics, Plotinus and generally many other Hellenistic philosophical texts.⁷¹ Gregory's treatise *On the Soul and the Resurrection* analyses the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of body, based on *Phaedo* and Symposium of Plato, as it is referred above, but also Platonic elements from *Phaedrus* can be found. Of course, the Platonic philosophical tradition is clothed with the christian garment of biblical revelation and Christian dogmatic anthropology in Gregory's dialogue with his sister Macrina⁷²

Despite the phenomenological similarities of this text of Gregory with the text *Phaedo* of Plato, there are important differences in their teaching about the soul. Plato underlines that the human body is only an outer garment, a cloak which, during our life, prevents the soul from moving freely and from living in conformity to its proper eternal essence. "It imposes upon the soul a law which is not appropriate to it. The soul, confined within the body, belongs to the eternal world. As long as we live, our soul finds itself in a prison, that is, in a body essentially alien to it. Death, in fact, is the great liberator."⁷³

Gregory defines the soul through Macrina's words:

"The soul is an essence, which has a beginning; it is a living and intellectual essence which by itself gives to the organic and sensory body the power of life and reception of sense impressions as long as the nature which can receive these maintains its existence".⁷⁴

The Platonic soul consists of three parts, a. the logos – λογιστικόν, logical, mind, nous, or reason, b. the thymos– θυμοειδής, or thumetikon, emotion, spiritedness, or masculine and c. the ἐπιθυμητικόν, desire.⁷⁵ On the other hand, Gregory like Plato⁷⁶, considers the soul in-

divisible and uncompounded, and accepts the classical tripartite division of the soul, as far as the way of its existence and not its nature.⁷⁷ So, Gregory follows the teaching of the Christian anthropology and accepts that the soul is undivided. On this point Cavarinos explains that "Though Gregory at times may speak of parts of the soul in discussing its activity in connection with the body, he hastens on appropriate occasions to state that one should not be led to believe that in man the soul is divided into parts or that man consists of a compound of many souls. 'The real and perfect soul (τελεία ψυχή) is one in nature, the spiritual and immaterial, which mingles with the material nature through the senses'"⁷⁸

According to the previous analysis of Cavarinos for Gregory of Nyssa the tripartite soul is the mind (νοῦς), an intellectual nature⁷⁹, the irascible part (θυμός) and desire (ἐπιθυμία, ἔρωσ). The mind (νοῦς) has a catalytic role to define human soul and distinguish it from other logic and without logic beings. The mind is incorporeal like God, but it is created and God isn't. The irascible (θυμός) and the desiring (ἐπιθυμία, ἔρωσ) are parts of man's animal nature and are not intrinsically part of the image of God, the mind (νοῦς), "It is the use by deliberate choice that a man makes of the impulses found in the irascible part (θυμός) and the desiring part (ἐπιθυμία) that constitutes virtue or vice in man."⁸⁰

Gregory in *On the Soul and Resurrection*, shows more interest for the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body than the issue of the soul's embodiment, the *ensomatosis* as Origen says⁸¹. For Gregory of Nyssa, the body is not a problem, a jail for the soul as Plato⁸² and Plotinus⁸³ accepts. Despite the influence of Platonism and Neoplatonism to Gregory of Nyssa, the Church Father remains loyal with the dogmatic theology of Church. He opposes the theory of reincarnation, according to which the soul after the death of man does not return to the imaginary place, but enters into a new rational being's or irrational being's body repeatedly. So the soul is led to the disappearance.⁸⁴

A very profane Platonic and Neo-Platonic element in this text is the teaching of Gregory for the soul that is immaterial and adiatematic. The soul doesn't have its existence in the body as it is in a place. Here there

⁶⁹ McGuckin, "St Gregory of Nyssa: Bishop, Philosopher, Exegete, Theologian", 10.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Michel Barnes, "The 'Platonic' Character of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology: The Old Canon", 1-2, https://www.academia.edu/32287483/The_Platonic_Character_of_Gregory_of_Nyssa's_Psychology_The_Old_Canon, [accessed 19 October 2019].

⁷³ Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?", ed. Krister Stendahl, (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 13.

⁷⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 29BC, trans. Roth, 37-8.

⁷⁵ David, Jones, *The Gift of Logos: Essays in Continental Philosophy*, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 33-5.

⁷⁶ Plato, *Phaedo* 78c, 80b; Idem, *Timaeus* 41cd.

⁷⁷ Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?", 13-4. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Making of Man*, PG 44, 144D, 361CD, 353C. Idem, *On the Soul and resurrection*, PG 46, 57C.

⁷⁸ Cavarinos, "Gregory of Nyssa on the Nature of the Soul", 136. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Making of Man*, PG 44, 176B.

⁷⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 176BD.

⁸⁰ Fr Theophanes (Constantine), *The Psychological Basis of Mental Prayer in the Heart. The Orthodox Doctrine of the Person* Vol. 1, (Canada, 2014), 47. Gregory of Nyssa, *The life of Moses*, 2, 96, PG 44, 397C.

⁸¹ Origen, *Commentary on John* 6.85, PG 14, 226D, 228A.

⁸² Plato, *Phaedo* 62b.

⁸³ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.7.8.

⁸⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Making of Man*, PG 44, 232D, 233A.

is a parallelism with *Enneads* of Plotinus⁸⁵: “We must say in general that neither any of the parts of the soul nor the whole soul are in body as in a place. For place is something encompassing, encompassing body, and where each divided part is, there it is, so that the whole is not [as a whole] in any place; but soul is not a body, and is no more encompassed than encompassing. It is certainly not in the body as in a receptacle either.” Thus, ‘Plato rightly does not put the soul in the body when he is speaking of the universe, but the body in the soul.’⁸⁶

Finally, Gregory of Nyssa is “applying the principle, also well attested in ‘pagan’ Platonism, of the τέλος as similar to the ἀρχή, which Origen had already applied to *apokatastasis*⁸⁷. For Gregory, the τέλος is not only similar to, but also surpasses, the ἀρχή, since at that point souls, or better rational creatures, will be in the Good (i.e. God) not as a datum, but by voluntary choice⁸⁸, and will infinitely grow in knowledge and love.”⁸⁹

5. Conclusions

The dialogue *On soul and resurrection* is regarded as the second part in a unified project of reflection on the theme of anthropology which begins with *On the making of Man, Catechetical Speech*, and finishes with *On infant's Early Deaths*⁹⁰. The dialogue *On soul and resurrection* is thought that it has the most Platonic elements of any other work of Gregory. It has many similarities with the Plato's dialogue *Phaedo*⁹¹, because both these works of Plato and Gregory deal with the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of body. Plato accepts the materialism and reincarnation, something that Gregory rejects. Like another Socrates, the dying Macrina discusses and solves her brother's questions about the status and the nature of the soul. Many scholars support that Macrina expresses the opinions of Gregory. She is the mouth of Gregory. Some others support that Macrina was really the

Christian philosopher and had deepened more in the Christian theology than Gregory had done.

In this dialogue Gregory of Nyssa explains that the whole God-created person has two parts, his soul and his body. The latter has a crucial and a catalytic role for human salvation and for the *apokatastasis* of human nature to his original situation⁹² and the universal salvation.⁹³ As Christian, he is concerned not only of death as an end, but as new beginning for a new life. The human nature will be enhanced after the resurrection, the body will be connected again with his immortal soul and because the goodness of God's grace, will leave near God for the eternity. Gregory accepts as the other Cappadocian Fathers and Greek Philosophers the idea that every human person constitutes a microcosm that represents the same order and harmony as the macrocosm, the universe.

Gregory in this specific work analyses about the reflections on the soul as intelligible essence and its nature opposed to the body⁹⁴ from which one must separate, as much as possible⁹⁵, in order to contemplate the Ideas has many references to Plato's *Phaedo*. Gregory refuses the idea of the preexistence of the souls⁹⁶ and the metempsychosis, reincarnation of them⁹⁷. Plato analyses the three parts of the soul⁹⁸ and Gregory uses this three part's division and refers to “rational”, “irascible” and “concupiscent” parts of the soul⁹⁹. Sometimes, the Cappadocian Father speaks about the nous and the soul. The latter gives life to the body and there nous can be found¹⁰⁰.

To sum up, Gregory in his *On soul and resurrection*, makes profane his knowledge for Plato's and Plotinus' work. He manages to employ some of their ideas under the Christian garment of theology. For this reason he is called a “Christian Platonist”. On the other hand, we can observe that Origen had influenced Gregory for the subject of the *apokatastases*, because Gregory refuse the eternal situation of punishment for the sinful souls and he accepts the purification of the souls in order the *apokatastases* of them to take place¹⁰¹.

⁸⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads*, 4.3.20.10–16

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ For Origen's influence on Gregory see I. Ramelli, “Apokatastasis and Epektasis in Homilies in Canticum Canticorum: The Relation between Two Core Doctrines in Gregory and Roots in Origen”, in *Gregory of Nyssa: In Canticum Canticorum. Commentary and Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the XIII International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa, Rome, 17–20 September 2014*, ed. Giulio Maspero (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 312–39.

⁸⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, PG 46, 81BC, 56AB, 101C-104A. 1 Cor. 15:28.

⁸⁹ Ramelli, “Gregory of Nyssa on the Soul”, 130.

⁹⁰ Giorgio Maturi, “De anima et resurrectione” in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, (ed.), ed. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, trans. Seth Cherny (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 27

⁹¹ “Moreover, not only was Plato's *Phaedo* the model for Gregory's *De Anima et Resurrectione*, but also his *Symposium*, especially with respect to Macrina's character, which is shaped not only by Plato's Socrates in the *Phaedo*, but also on Diotima in the *Symposium*,” Ramelli, “Gregory of Nyssa on the Soul”, 115.

⁹² Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, 6, PG 46, 89BC. 93AB, Roth, 77, 78, 79. Giulio Maspero, ‘Apokatastasis,’ in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, (ed.), ed. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, trans. Seth Cherny (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 55-56.

⁹³ Morwena Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner*, The Oxford Theological Monographs Series (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-4.

⁹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, PG 46, 36A.

⁹⁵ Ibid., PG 46, 88A, 89C.

⁹⁶ Ibid. PG 46, 113D-117C, 125C-128A.

⁹⁷ Ibid. PG 46, 103B-121A.

⁹⁸ Plato, *Phaedrus* 245c.

⁹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, PG 46, 48CD

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., PG 46, 29B.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., PG 46, 89BC, 97C-100C, 157B-D, 160C.

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