

St. Paul's Views of the Body and Death contrasted with Plato's.

IT is interesting to the classical student to follow up comparisons between the theories on the above subjects that are found in classical authors and those in the Scriptures. The comparison that can be instituted between St. Paul and Plato as teachers on these sombre topics to a certain extent alleviates the gloom that encircles them. One of the speakers in the *Phaedo* says that the popular view of death in his day (390 B.C. *circ.*) was that the soul perished, vanishing like smoke or breath at the moment of its separation from the body. There can be little doubt that such a view was held by many of the writers of the Psalms, as well as by the Sadducees of St. Paul's own day. The two prevailing views of the body in Plato's day were (1) that it was a prison, (2) that it was a tomb.

In the *Phaedo* Plato described the soul as fast bound in the body, and said that it was through this *prison* that the soul must get its outlook on things as they are (83). In the *Phaedrus* he spoke of the deliverance of the soul from the thralldom of the body after initiation, which he described in the *Republic* as a means of purification. Clement of Alexandria tells us that many ancient divines bear witness that the soul has been joined to the body (*sōma*) for punishment and is buried in it as in a tomb (*sēma*). This view was popularized by the jingle *soma sema*, but the prison idea seems to have been more prevalent, Seneca, a contemporary of St. Paul saying, "Now I am detained in an earthly prison." Plato also called the body a vessel, or *skeuos* (see *Sophistes* 219 B). St. Paul followed him here saying that each man should know to possess his own vessel (*skeuos*) in holiness, etc. (2 Thess. iv. 4), and that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. iv. 7).

Again, we have the authority of Clement of Alexandria for the statement that Plato called the body an earthly tabernacle (*gēinon skēnos*). In his discourse on death, called the *Axiochus* and ascribed to Plato, we have the body called "earthly" (*geōdes*) and also "a tabernacle" (*skēnos*). Wisdom ix. 5, has "the earthly (*geōdes*) tabernacle," and St. Paul (2 Cor. v. 1) "the earthly house of the tabernacle," meaning "this tent-like habitation." In the *Timaeus*

the philosopher describes at great length the manner in which the human body is made, particular attention being given to the head, and the soul is fast bound in its frame.

In view of the incessant struggle between the soul and its body, and the troubles and evils that are caused by the latter, its mastery over the soul, and its hindrances to philosophic pursuits, the philosopher longs for release; and his life is nothing but a longing for death (*Phaedo* 63). In the meantime his one object is to release (*apoluein*) the soul as much as possible from the body, and make himself as far as he can independent of it. For he is convinced that he can know nothing purely or clearly, or employ his pure intellect when with the body, and that he will be the nearer to knowledge the less he associates with the body and is infected by its nature, and keeps himself pure from it until God shall release him. "And then being pure and freed from the folly of the body we shall be with people like ourselves, and shall know through ourselves everything that is genuine" (67). Compare St. Paul, "Now I know in part, but then shall I know fully as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. xiii. 12). "For I do not think," says Plato, "that it is permissible for one who is not pure to reach the pure"—a sentence which may have suggested the Pauline dictum, "all pure things are for the pure" (not "all things are pure to the pure") (Tit. i. 15).

The process of purification of the soul consists in separating the soul as much as possible from the body and training it to be completely independent and self-contained. If such a purification is complete the soul passes away at death completely delivered from the body and purified from its contact with it. Death is then a setting free of the soul from the body—a departure *from* the body. This latter phrase, "*apallagē tou sōmatos*," may be a parallel to St. Paul's phrase *apolutrosis tou somatos*, deliverance *from* the body (Rom. viii. 23), both genitives appearing to be objective. The state of the soul when freed from the body is called *gymnos*, or naked. The soul that is completely purified passes away to that which is immaterial like itself—the Divine, the immortal, and the intellectual. But the ordinary soul is so *weighed down* by the *earthly* and material that it is drawn back into the visible region (*Phaedo* 81).

We must now proceed to St. Paul's view. In the first place, he treated the body as a *weight*. "We who are in this tabernacle groan, being *weighed down*" (2 Cor. v. 5). In contrast to this weight of the

earthly house of this tabernacle there is to be an æonian *weight* of glory (2 Cor. iv. 17) for those who consider the invisible things. He then proceeded to give his *locus classicus* (2 Cor. v. 1-8) on the subject of the earthly tabernacle, its dissolution, and the new resurrection body. It may seem that he was influenced by Wisdom ix. 15. "For the mortal body weighs down (*barunei*) the soul, and the earthly tabernacle depresses (*brithei*) the mind (*noûs*)." But the inspiration of that passage seems to be the chariot simile in the *Phaedrus* of Plato where the charioteer of the soul is the *noûs* or mind, and where the recalcitrant steed representing the inferior part of the soul and the body combined acts as a dead weight upon the obedient steed who represents the higher part of the soul, and drags down the chariot of the soul to the earth. "For the steed that is connected with badness depresses (*brithei*) it and weighs it down (*barunôn*) to the ground" (*Phaedrus* 247 B). The Apostle's treatment of his body described in 1 Corinthians ix. 27, "I buffet and bring into bondage," reminds one of the discipline of the charioteer who gave the unruly steed, the body and its passions, to pains, so that it was *humbled* and fain to obey his will (254 E). It is because of the natural depravity and weakness of the body that man is humbled. And so St. Paul spoke of "the body of our *humiliation*" (Phil. iii. 21). But he did not despise it like the Greek philosopher. "Each man must know how to possess his vessel in holiness and honour" (1 Thess. iv. 4). For our bodies are a sanctuary (*naos*) of God, because of the indwelling Spirit, and therefore must not be defiled (1 Cor. iii. 17), but God must be glorified therein, because man was made originally as "the image and glory of God" (1 Cor. xi. 7). And the place for such image and glory is the sanctuary of God. The thought of the body as the shrine of deity is hallowing and restraining. But even so St. Paul regarded it as only a temporary structure. And the unquenchable desire of humanity, on account of the inner conflict between the higher and the lower principles, is to be delivered from this body of death. "Who will set me free from this body of death?" (Rom. vii. 24). The pagan philosopher felt acutely the miseries inflicted by the burden of the flesh, but St. Paul exceeded when he said, "We groan when in this tabernacle, being weighed down." He looked forward to the time when this earthly tabernacle or *tent-dwelling* should be taken down. It was a consoling thought to him that it was a provisional and not

a permanent structure. The same expression is said by Clement of Alexandria to have been used by Plato. St. Paul had no fear of any sort. In his case it was a true expectation, a genuine longing for the new day, the new body, the new life. In Colossians ii. 11, *et seq.*, he speaks of the putting-off of the body of the flesh by the spiritual circumcision of Christ. Such renunciation of the flesh at this present is the promise and potency of a complete conquest and future deliverance or liberation from the body. Even our Lord divested Himself of the body in order to make a show of the powers that opposed him. This is the correct meaning of Colossians ii. 15. "Stripping the powers" is meaningless; but "having stripped himself of his mortal nature" in its weakness to overcome them has some point. St. Paul's discipline of his body was severe. Here it is severer. "*Mortify* therefore your limbs which are upon the earth" (Col. iii. 5); "*put to death* the deeds of the body" (Rom. viii. 13). So far as this body was concerned, St. Paul would have echoed the wish of the pagan philosopher, "I long for death" (*Phaedo* 64 B). But death for the Apostle did not mean the beginning of a disembodied existence. He desires not only to put off the temporary and earthly, but also to put on the permanent and the heavenly, "our habitation which is from heaven," in which all that is mortal and corruptible will be absorbed. For having been clothed upon with this we shall not be found naked (*gumnoi*) (1 Cor. v. 3). The grain that is sown in the earth will not remain *gumnos* or naked (1 Cor. xv. 37). "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and when this mortal shall have put on immortality then . . ." The next words in 2 Corinthians v. 4 are difficult. "*Not for that* we would be unclothed" (R.V. and A.V.) seems wrong. Perhaps, "*Wherefore* we would not be unclothed" is more correct. The point is that the putting-off of the earthly body is a preparatory and necessary condition for the putting-on of the spiritual, but that an intervening state of nakedness is not to be desired. The Christian does not wish to be stripped of his body and left so. St. Paul could not but remember the celebrated vision of Er the Armenian at the end of Plato's *Republic*, and the description of the souls awaiting their new lives and bodies; and among these the soul of Thersites putting on the body of a monkey. St. Paul's picture of the dead appearing before the Bema of Christ, that each may receive (*komisetai*) the reward of the things done

by means of his body, reminds one of similar scenes in the *Republic* and *Gorgias* of Plato, in the former (615 B) of which this word (*komizoito*) is used. In the *Phaedo* (65) Plato spoke of the pleasures by means of the body.

But St. Paul, of course, did not believe, as Plato did, in either a transmigration of the soul into other bodies, or a state of nakedness of the soul. For such a state is covered by the new body. His simile of the germ of life in the seed putting off the husk, which is cast aside as useless, and becoming robed with a covering of greater beauty, "because God gives it a body, its own body to each of the seeds" (1 Cor. xv 38), throws light upon the passage in 2 Corinthians. The resurrection is not a resuscitation of the material body. That must be destroyed and cast aside like the useless husk. But there will be a new body, and it shall be our own body, given us by God, immortal and incorruptible and adapted to the new environment, the new powers of the soul, and the new life when we shall be "at home" with Christ. To that perfect communion this present body is a bar. "We are confident," he writes, "that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord." For this our walk is through faith and not through visible form. We are confident and well pleased to get away from the body (*ekdēmēsai*) and to get home (*endēmēsai*) to the Lord. Socrates in the *Phaedo* describes his departure as an *apodēmia*, a being away from home, and says it is made "with good hope." Cf. Romans viii. 21. "The creature is subjected to vanity (or death?) in hope." St. Paul (Phil. iii. 20) denounces those whose thoughts are fixed on the things of this world, for "our citizenship is in heaven, from which we expect as Saviour our Lord Jesus Christ, Who will change (transform) the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working of His power." This transformation implies a new appearance and a new dignity. The word *metaschematizō* occurs only in St. Paul's writings. It is a Platonic word. The Apostle eagerly awaits this change. He warns us "not to grieve the Holy Spirit in whom ye were sealed unto the day of *apolutrosis*" or deliverance (Eph. iv. 30). Then our complete deliverance will be effected when we have put off completely the old man by death, "the old man which waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit." This practically means the lower nature, in which the body, which is subject to corruption, is included.

Though "our outward man is decaying, our inner man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. iv. 16). The same thought of deliverance from the bondage of corruption, i.e., slavery to the deeds of the body which is waxing corrupt owing to the wear of life and the results of its own impurity occurs in Romans viii. 21. For such a state of advancing corruption is the prophecy of a complete dissolution. On the other hand, there is the glorious hope of "the new man" created after God's likeness, after the image of his Creator (Eph. iv. 24; Col. iii. 9). For we all with unveiled face, reflecting as in a mirror, are changed into the same image, as by the Spirit of God (2 Cor. iii. 18). For He (the Lord) is the image of God (2 Cor. iv. 4). This change, however, is not of the body, but of the new man, the *kainos* (Eph. iv. 24), the *neos* (Col. iii. 10), the *esother* (2 Cor. iv. 16). This is the new personality which has been created in us by the Divine Spirit within us after the likeness of God, the new being, or *poem*, *poiema*, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. ii. 10). This new personality requires the putting-off of the body of the flesh for its full development. The day of the deliverance *apolutrosis*, is therefore desired.

Many things might have induced the Apostle to look forward to such a deliverance and to cry out as the natural man for deliverance from "this body of death" (Rom. vii. 24), this body which has the seal of death as well as the seal of the Spirit upon it. But the chief inducement was the reflection that there can be no lasting peace between the principles of the flesh and the Spirit. "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and these are in mutual opposition" (Gal. v. 17). This subject is finely illustrated in Plato's *Republic* (439 E). There the principle of appetency is always in conflict with the principle of reason. The lower desires contend against the reason, striving for the mastery like two adversaries. And the unhappy man is torn in twain (440 B). This is a parallel to the passage in Romans vii. 22, *sq.*, where St. Paul, speaking as the natural man, says: "In my inner man, my conscience, I gladly agree with the law of God; but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and making me captive to the principle of sin which is in my members." Hence a violent and forcible repression of the natural instincts and impulses was required. But the moral law was powerless to enforce its authority, owing to the flesh (Rom. viii. 3). Plato felt the same

difficulty, and gave the high-spirited principle, the will, as an ally to the reason against appetency in the case of an internal trouble or discord of the soul, otherwise the lower principle would dominate the life and nature of man. St. Paul took strong measures with his body to keep it under, lest he should be ruined by it (1 Cor. ix. 27). He desired that Christ should be magnified in his body, either through life or death (Phil. i. 20). Therefore he bore about in the body the putting to death of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in his mortal flesh (2 Cor. iv. 10, *et sq.*). This magnifying of Christ in St. Paul's mortal flesh does not imply any future development of the body, but the exhibition of the same living principle of self-sacrifice which Christ manifested in His death. The life of Christ is made manifest in the body when the passions are not indulged but presented a living sacrifice, a service of the rational principle which controls them (Plato, *Republic* ; Rom. xii. 1).

This is to continue until the day of deliverance *from* our bodies (Rom. viii. 23). Until then we must ever experience "the slavery of corruption." The body like the law are both good, but each has its day, when it must cease to be. Both have their work to do, and when that work has been completed both are removed, because they can be done without. Deliverance from the law when a higher principle is introduced that supersedes it is good. Deliverance from this body when it is to make room for a higher and more spiritual organism—the heavenly body, or "the habitation from heaven"—is equally good. That body will be our real home, not like this "tent-dwelling" (2 Cor. v. 1), but will be adapted to the new powers and circumstances of its inhabitant spirit, because it is from heaven, and not of man's making. As grace has superseded law in its narrower sense, so this resurrection-body, this heavenly home of the spirit, shall supersede this "earthly body," the "mortal flesh," this temporary tent-like dwelling. Deliverance from this body in God's own time is desirable because it means freedom from the painful experience of the inner contest described in Romans vii., which is due to the body's opposition to the higher aspirations of man. While in the body man must regard it as the temporary shrine (*naos*) of the Holy Spirit, and the tabernacle (*skēnos*) sacred but passing of the human spirit (cf. John i. 14), and we ought so to live as in the body but not of the body, its master, not its slave.

Deliverance from the body and its "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd" existence, its infirmities and weaknesses, would not be unwelcome to one who had been so long a martyr to "a thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. xii. 7), and had so long endured the antagonism of the flesh against the spirit. His own treatment of his body was stern and unrelenting. He purposely, I believe, avoided the phrase "resurrection of the body," using the phrase "resurrection of the dead" instead. Why then should *speiretai* and *egeiretai* in 1 Corinthians xv. 44 be rendered "it is sown" and "it is raised"? Does *it* refer to *anastasis* or to a body implied in *anastasis*? Would it not be more in keeping with the Apostle's thought to say, "a natural body is sown," and "a spiritual body is raised"?

Finally with regard to the meaning suggested for *apolutrosis tou sōmatos*, viz., deliverance from the body, we have a parallel in *apolutrosis tōn parabaseōn*, deliverance from sins (Heb. ix. 15). The word occurs in sense of deliverance simply in Hebrews xi. 35, and in Ephesians i. 14, of the deliverance of the possession, the people of God, presumably from sin and "the body of sin" (Rom. vi. 6). In none of these passages does St. Paul refer to a deliverance of the body "from its frailty and mortality" (Grimm). Again, there is an interesting use of *apolutrosis* in Irenaeus' *Adv. Haer* 1, 9, 5, in connexion with *skēnē*, play or drama, viz., "the *apolutrosis* is wanting to the piece." Here the meaning would be the closing scene. In this sense the deliverance of the soul from the body would be a grand finale or close of the mortal scene. In conclusion, we think that there is some reason for holding that the deliverance St. Paul speaks of in Romans viii. 23 is not that *quâ corpus morte liberatur*, but that *quâ nos liberamur corpore* (*pace* Bengel).

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