

SHALL THE BODY STRIVE AND NOT BE CROWNED?

**Unitary and instrumentalist anthropological models
as keys to interpreting the structure of
Patristic eschatology**

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ABSTRACT

It is possible to discern a structure underlying the myriad details of Patristic eschatology through the use of two anthropological models, a unitary model, which sees the person as a unity of body and soul, and an instrumentalist model, which locates the person in the soul, which uses the body as its instrument. This latter view makes possible a judgement and entry into the appropriate eschatological state immediately after death, while the unitary view requires the resurrection to occur first. Some who held a unitary view (notably but not exclusively the Syrians) thought that the soul slept until the resurrection, while others held that the soul experienced pleasure or pain in anticipation of their future rewards or punishments to be received after the judgement.

The unitary anthropology is correlated with a positive assessment of bodily life, including marriage and sexuality, and (particularly during the first few centuries) expectation of life on a renewed earth in the eschaton following a millennium of peace.

The decline in millennialism, rise of asceticism, and glorification of virginity and denigration of marriage, as well as an eclipse of the centrality and significance of the resurrection of the body, are correlated with an instrumentalist view. Bodily life was often seen negatively, as the occasion, if not the source, of sin, and even innocent bodily gratification was shunned as a hindrance to the communion of the soul with God.

There is no direct correlation with the frequent contrast between the “resurrection of the body” and the “immortality of the soul” and the structures of Patristic eschatology. Many who held to a unitary anthropological model thought the soul immortal (although earlier Patristic writers rejected this concept), but also stressed that eschatological life also required the immortalisation of the body through its resurrection.

Those who held to an instrumentalist anthropological model mostly thought the soul was innately immortal, and provided sophisticated philosophical arguments for this view. However, it was the idea that the person was located in the soul, with the body as its instrument, that is the determining characteristic for the structure of their eschatology.

These ideas provide the background to the interpretation of Psalm 1:5, which in conjunction with John 3:18 was taken to mean that neither the saints nor the obdurate wicked would face the judgement on the last day. Others took Psalm 1:5 to mean that the wicked would not be judges, as they were wont to do during life. While there is no direct correlation between these interpretations of Psalm 1:5 and the two anthropological models discussed, it is not possible to understand the reasons for these interpretations without considering the influence of these models on Patristic eschatology.

Patristic anthropology and eschatology was shaped by the synthesis between pagan thought and Christian thought. The negative assessment of bodily life can be traced to

pagan influences, and the consequences are considerable even today. Only by repudiating the **method** of synthesis can an authentically Christian anthropology and eschatology be developed.

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Note for the electronic version of this thesis:

This electronic version of my thesis is unaltered from the original text completed in 1993, with the exception of several minor corrections. It has, however, been reformatted in a current typeface, which has in turn resulted in significant repagination, from the original 522 pages to only 342.

Chris Gousmett, January 2008

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