

*SINGULARITER IN SPE*  
*CONSTITUISTI ME:*  
ON THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE  
TOWARDS DEATH\*

• Adrian J. Walker •

“The Risen Lord has victoriously filled death with the only substance and intelligibility it can have: himself.”

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Christ’s victory over death is the foundation of the Church’s entire proclamation, which is just vain talk unless the Lord has truly been raised from the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:17). By the same token, the Church must turn to the Risen One in order to unmask the shadowy “world-rulers of this present darkness” (Eph 6:12), to reveal the hidden unity underlying the (apparently) contradictory behavior of our secularized societies, which flee death by seeking it (cf. euthanasia) and seek death by fleeing it (cf. “aggressive treatment” designed to prolong life at all costs). Of course, since the Church is called to unmask these contradictions only in order to heal them, she must always be ready to give an account of “the reason of the hope” (1 Pt 3:15) that is in her. Her very confidence

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\*The title is a citation from Ps 4:10, which I render thus: “Thou hast singularly constituted me in hope.” This and all translations in what follows are mine. I would like to thank Michelle Borrás, Stratford Caldecott, Conor Cunningham, and Francesca Aran Murphy for their helpful comments and criticisms on earlier drafts of this paper.

in Christ's victory requires that (in the person of her theologians and philosophers) she think about death, and that she do so with no less seriousness and no less humor than Socrates in the *Phaedo*.<sup>1</sup> Can hope truly stand the test of death, or does death put an end to all hope?<sup>2</sup>

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who . . . has regenerated us unto a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pt 1:3). Peter's exultant benediction reminds us that our first and last word about death can only be Christ, who, in “trampling down death by death,”<sup>3</sup> has broken its power, not just over the individual believer, but over the whole cosmos. Christ's paschal victory extends his lordship into the very heart of matter itself: “I am the First and the Last, and the Living One, and I was dead, and behold I am alive unto the ages of the ages, and I hold the keys of death and of Hades” (Rv 1:18–19). What follows, then, for the Christian's attitude towards death?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In order to see death as it is (and is not), we need a lucidity that neither banalizes it nor solemnizes it, and that, above all, refuses to bend the knee to it in any way. We can learn this lucidity above all from the saints who kept their sense of humor to the very end, such as Thomas More: “Assuredly there is nothing of the hysterical patient there. He shows the clearest proof of sanity, the capacity for seeing a joke, and indeed for seeing a joke against himself”—even when mounting the gallows. The citation is from the second sermon on Saint Thomas More in *Ronald Knox. Pastoral and Occasional Sermons*, ed. Philip Caraman, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 747.

<sup>2</sup>Though I will be focusing on human death, we should not forget that man shares mortality with all non-human living creatures. Meditation on the *analogia mortis*—on the simultaneous similarity and dissimilarity between human and non-human death—will have to wait for another occasion.

<sup>3</sup>This is a citation from the Easter troparion of the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom.

<sup>4</sup>In the following pages, I will be focusing on the individual Christian, but we must not forget that he hopes only as a member of the Body of Christ. The Church, however, can be the primary Subject of Christian hope only because, in Mary, she is already part of hope's Object. The Virgin Mother is *spes nostra*, who perfectly embodies our “hoping” insofar as she perfectly embodies what we “hope for.” Finally, we also need to bear in mind that the range of Christian hope is coterminous with the universal range of the Lord's Resurrection, which not only touches every man, but every cosmic entity in its very “beingness.”

“*Tu, Domine, singulariter in spe constituisti me*” (Ps 4:10): The Christian’s “singular” hope includes a fully human acceptance of the end that the divine will determines for him. Consider the example of the martyr, who neither runs away from death nor suicidally courts it, but consents to it for the love of God. The martyr knows, of course, that death is not desirable in itself. But he also knows that the divine will is always intrinsically more desirable than any object he might desire apart from it—including, as the case may be, his own continued existence in this world. The martyr, we could say, is an embodied confirmation of the distinction between the natural fear of death and the cowardly refusal of it, but also of the distinction between true courage and mere recklessness.<sup>5</sup> Of course, behind the Christian martyr stands the Lord himself, who in Gethsemane freely consents to the “chalice” out of love for his Father.<sup>6</sup>

Let us go one step further: As the inheritor and consummator of what (at the risk of drastic simplification) I propose to call “pagan wisdom,” the Christian cultivates the greatest possible lucidity about the curious intertwining of life and death in the present human condition. For the same reason, he knows that the goodness of a human life *simpliciter* consists neither in its quantity (its mere length) nor in its so-called “quality” (especially when reckoned according to some hedonist calculus), but in its

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<sup>5</sup>That said, Balthasar is certainly right to distinguish *both* these forms of fear of death from what he calls “*Angst*.” By the term “anguish,” which is of course not original to him, Balthasar means the vertigo that seizes man when he catches sight of the nothingness from which he was originally drawn—but goes on in the next moment to reify it, transforming it (in his fancy) into an object that he contemplates without reference to the goodness of the Creator. *In concreto*, Balthasar holds, this anguish is a fruit of original sin from which Christ’s “redemptive anguish” alone can liberate us. On all of this, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Der Christ und die Angst* (Einsiedeln-Trier: Johannes Verlag, 1989).

<sup>6</sup>For a classic account of Christ’s fully human consent to the Father’s will, offered in free obedience in the face of the natural fear of death (as opposed to irrational cowardice), see Maximus the Confessor, *Opusculum 6*, translated under the title “Human Freedom as the Pivot of the Providential Economy,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 29 (Fall 2002): 603–5.

accomplished form.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Christian fulfills pagan wisdom even (or perhaps most of all) in his acknowledgment that the achievement of life's form requires sacrifice. In this sense, the Christian must be a fierce critic of the regnant bourgeois utopianism, a thoroughly *unpagan* monster that is incapable of giving life (cf. contraception)—because it cannot or will not acknowledge how deeply the fruitfulness of our existence is bound up with a certain (sacrificial) acceptance of death.

While the Christian is called to enact the only fully consistent realism about death, we mustn't forget that his primary task is to radiate confidence in Christ's cosmic triumph over death (cf. Rom 8:18–24) and that he makes his own the Apostle's almost swaggering taunt: "Death has been swallowed up into victory! Where, O death, is thy victory? Where, o death, is thy sting?" (1 Cor 15:54–55). But if the Crucified and Risen Lord has robbed death's "vanity" (*mataiotês*: cf. Rom 8:20) of all power over us, how can the Christian still take death seriously enough to be "realistic" about it? Isn't what I have been calling the Christian's fulfillment of pagan wisdom actually a betrayal of the Gospel?

The Pauline taunt I cited just now is a prophecy of what *will* happen "when this corruptible reality will put on incorruption and this mortal reality will put on immortality" (1 Cor 15:54). Nevertheless, Paul's prophecy is based on an already accomplished deed: The Risen Lord has already exposed death's vain emptiness once and for all, even more: He has already filled this emptiness with the (hyper)substance of his own Eucharistic self-gift. The result is that we can live our earthly death to its very end with a changed meaning: It is no longer (simply) a "testament that you resist the proud,"<sup>8</sup> but also (primarily) a testament to our creaturely dependence on God. Christ's victory over the grave does not exempt us from our death, but converts it, however terrible or

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<sup>7</sup>For a modern exposition and defence of this pagan wisdom about life's accomplished form, see "Quantity versus Form," in Wendell Berry, *The Way of Ignorance: And Other Essays* (Washington, DC: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2005), 81–91.

<sup>8</sup>Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 1.

sordid, into a chance to acknowledge the liberating truth of our utter nullity apart from him (cf. Jn 1:2–4).<sup>9</sup>

Of course, post-lapsarian death is primarily a punishment for sin, but the justice of this chastisement already conceals a medicinal mercy, an opportunity to come to our senses, to wake up from the perverse illusion of godlike autonomy without God. On the Cross, Christ welcomes this chance on our behalf (but at the cost of Godforsakenness). By doing so, he fulfills the repentant sinner's "Yes" to the bitter medicine of divine mercy—and, at that moment, converts the sinner's consent into the redeemed creature's "Yes" to its dependence on God. We cannot, it is true, appropriate this "Yes" without pain, but our travail is itself hiddenly transfigured, it is already the birth-pangs of a new creation out of the womb of the old. Christ's supernatural conversion of death into the sacrament of eternal life thus includes—as a fruit and as an internal, subordinately prior condition—its transformation into a *confessio* by which we fulfill our nature through the self-return into the hands of the Creator that we once refused him in Paradise.<sup>10</sup>

Christian hope includes the confidence that Christ's Resurrection has transfigured our earthly death into the gateway to an unlooked-for fulfillment in heavenly incorruption. But does the Christian hope to receive incorruption's radiant integrity for himself alone? Or does he also hope for all men who share in the nature that God intends to clothe with glory? If, with Balthasar and de Lubac, we opt for this latter possibility, doesn't it follow that,

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<sup>9</sup>This remark, by the way, is perfectly consistent with a firm repudiation of the slogan about "death with dignity," which actually expresses a refusal of the true dignity of the (dying) person. Mysteriously, this dignity is inseparable from the humiliation that death's radical passivity imposes on us.

<sup>10</sup>Thanks to the ongoing formal causality of the soul, of course, even a totally unconscious person remains present in and to his own dying. Indeed, this lack of consciousness can express the deepest truth about his personhood, namely, that he does not belong simply to himself, either in life or in death, but to God. *A fortiori*, the form of a life shaped by conscious love of God continues to radiate even in a death suffered without awareness, whose extreme passivity in fact reveals what this form-shaping love always was. For the love of God is not just a giving, it is also a being taken (indeed: a having been taken)—into the hands of the Creator, in whose encompassing grasp our self-gift is fulfilled beyond the end of all our conscious possibilities.

consciously or unconsciously, the death of the Christian is a universally representative action (or passion), an imitation of the death of the Lord, who “tasted death on behalf of all” (Heb 2:9)? An affirmative answer to this question implies, in turn, that the Christian’s death somehow recapitulates the death of humanity’s best non-Christian representatives, whose “pagan wisdom” about death thus turns out to be (in an analogous sense of the word) “prophetic” *chiaroscuro*, a darkness, to be sure, yet one already illumined by the light of the Resurrection peeping through the gloom. Paradoxically, however, the Christian lives the fulfillment of the prophecy within its original terms. He does not leave behind the earthly interweaving of death and life, but lives it with a new intensity whose force often leaves him *weaker* than the great pagans whose “wisdom” his “folly” (cf. 1 Cor 1:21) is to fulfill:

We have this treasure, however, in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power might be of God and not from us . . . [We are] always carrying about the dying of Jesus in the body, so that the life of Jesus might be manifested in our body. For we, while living, are always being handed over to death on account of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal flesh. Death, then, works in us, but life [works] in you (2 Cor 4:7–12).<sup>11</sup>

No sooner have we begun to answer one objection (to which we’ll return later in a related form) than we suddenly find ourselves faced with another: *Whom* is Christ’s “transformation of death” actually supposed to benefit? Even granting that it might benefit the dying person, how could it possibly benefit a person who is already dead? Surely, death is not an *energeia* in its own right,

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<sup>11</sup>Rather than seeking to replace pagan wisdom about death, the Christian gratefully acknowledges its irreplaceable role under God’s Providence, just as Dante gratefully accepted Virgil’s indispensable guidance to the earthly paradise. Who, after all, could outdo Socrates as a master of aporetic wonderment at death’s mixture of the familiar and the unknowable? But the Christian doesn’t have to outdo pagan wisdom in order to demonstrate the “singularity” of his hope; he only needs to re-read its teaching *without* the hermeneutic blinders that even the greatest pagan sages wore so long as they assumed that death is an inevitable “fact of life.” The “singular hope” by which the Christian inherits and completes pagan wisdom lies in his childlike confidence in Christ’s victory over death.

but, if anything, a privation of the *energeia* we call “being alive.” Moreover, death is no ordinary privation: Whereas the latter “inheres” in a supposit, the former spells the end of the very supposit in which *ex hypothesi* it would have to inhere to ground a meaningful ascription of “being dead.” Admittedly, life in itself may remain gloriously immune to death, but individual “living things” (physical ones, at least) eventually lose their hold on the being that “for them” is “to be alive.”<sup>12</sup> Don’t these considerations reveal that the “dead” actually no longer exist, and that we can’t take literally our talk of their “being dead,” on pain of foolishly attempting an impossible hypostatization of what, in fact, is the cessation of the very human hypostasis itself? But that is not all: If the dead no longer exist—which, after all, is what it means for them to “be dead”—how can they benefit in any way from Christ’s “transformation of death”? Isn’t this so-called “transformation” really just a pious fiction, a religious anesthetic we concoct for ourselves to ease the fear of a passing we will have to endure in any case?

A satisfactory response to this objection would require a full exposition of Aristotelian-Thomist anthropology. Given limitations of space, I can only sketch the roughest outlines of such an account. In the next paragraph, then, I merely telegraph, unargued, a few essential claims on which the discussion in the following paragraphs will depend.

Man, as a rationally alive body, must be constituted in being by a rational, indeed, intellectual soul. Man’s soul is of course distinct from his body as act is distinct from what it actualizes. But, as the originality of man’s intellectual operation with respect to matter assures us, the human soul can also outlive the body.<sup>13</sup> The Church is therefore right to define man’s death as the “separation” of his soul from his body, though we mustn’t forget the radical frustration that (in at least one respect) overshadows the condition of the now separated soul. The *anima separata*, after all, suddenly finds itself unable to fulfill its natural desire for incarnation by any innate power in its possession.

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<sup>12</sup>Aristotle, *De Anima*, II, 4: 415b13.

<sup>13</sup>It is important to bear in mind, however, that the same soul that, as intellect, transcends the physical cosmos is, as the form of the human body, the *telos* of the cosmic hierarchy of material natures.

But what are we really claiming when we say that the separated soul survives death with a frustrated yearning for its body? Aren't we in fact asserting that the person survives his death—as the supposit of the ongoing, (naturally) irreparable separation of body and soul in which that very death consists? Aren't we affirming that, in the guise of the separated soul, the human person continues to live as one mortally wounded in the very root of his life, “*sicut vulnerati dormientes in sepulcris*” (Ps 87:5–6)? That he continues to live as a dead man, as one delivered over helplessly to the *visio mortis*, the “experience” (if that is the right word) of having died and of remaining dead? It's as if death couldn't affect us as self-reflecting beings unless we somehow survived it as the subjects (qua separate souls) of the very loss of subjecthood (qua earthly composites) in which it consists!<sup>14</sup>

The objector, it turns out, has gotten things backward, for we have to survive our deaths in order to die them, and, *a fortiori*, to experience them as a punishment for our sin. Yet in justly inflicting this punishment on us, God does not reduce us to sheer nothingness, but mercifully preserves us in being for a purpose that

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<sup>14</sup>Although a privation has no *energeia* of its own, it does retain a kind of existence so long as it inheres in the *energeia* of some substance that underlies it. Take blindness, for example. Blindness is the deprivation of the *energeia* of seeing, the death of the eye as an eye. Nevertheless, to the extent that the eye remains alive in some other respect, for example as a bundle of living non-optic cells within an otherwise healthy body, it conserves just enough suppositional force to maintain blindness in existence—of course as a privation and not as an *energeia*. Now, just as the privation of blindness keeps on existing in the eye that has died as an eye, but survives in another respect, so, too, the privation of death keeps on existing in the dead man, who has died as a human composite, but who survives in the guise of the separated soul. Of course, the analogy limps, since the injured eye remains part of a living body, whereas the separated soul once constituted the whole of the living body itself. And yet this very discrepancy brings home the point I wish to make: The continued existence of the separated soul enables the person to survive death as the subject of his loss of subjecthood, hence, as the underlying bearer of a state of death that, barring an intervention of divine omnipotence, lasts as long as the separated soul does. Thomas is right to emphasize the activity of this state (as in his discussion of the separated soul's cognition in *S.Th.*, I, 89), but the passivity interwoven with its activity also bears emphasizing. One implication of this passivity is that the glory of the blessed in heaven before the general resurrection presupposes their participation in the Life of the Risen Lord even while they still await their bodies.



he unveils in raising Jesus from the dead. Without blessing the catastrophe of sin in any way, God freely converts the post-lapsarian mortality it causes into a pathway to a new creation.<sup>15</sup> The Lord's death and rising graciously transform our mortality from the revelation of our empty, because God-less, self-affirmation—into an unrestricted “Yes” to God's will, and so into the dawning of eternal life.<sup>16</sup> “[*Christus*] *mortuus est pro nobis ut, sive vigilemus sive*

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<sup>15</sup>Put in more metaphysical terms: If the separated soul keeps the *esse* of the composite, it is no less true that the *esse* of the composite also keeps the separated soul. Better: *God* (through *esse*, his “proper effect”) keeps the separated soul—for the sake of his creative fidelity towards the composite, i.e. towards the whole man whom he wishes to raise from the dead with his Son.

<sup>16</sup>If Christ is going to transform death for the benefit of the dead, they must continue to exist in virtue of the incorruptible spiritual nature of their (separated) soul. Let us not forget, however, that the spirituality of the intellectual soul is a specific form of participation in *esse creatum*, whose plenitude as created act includes the (good) poverty of its *non*-subsistence. This suggests a helpful way of thinking about the survival of the separated soul: The *anima separata* keeps the *actus essendi* of the composite, to be sure, but it does so in a drastically altered way, since death is now included within the “noughting” bound up with the *non*-subsistence of *esse creatum*. But in what sense can created *esse*'s “noughting”—which is a good—be said to include post-lapsarian death, which is concretely entangled with sinful alienation from God, the life of our life? Clearly, the *non*-subsistence of *esse creatum* cannot be the essential origin of post-lapsarian death, but, at most, the accidental condition of its possibility: Post-lapsarian death is vanity, whose emptiness distorts the goodness of created *esse*'s *non*-subsistence like a funhouse mirror throwing back a hideously twisted reflection of a lovely face. Nevertheless, *non*-subsistent *esse* must be able to contain fallen mortality in another way, a way that the New Adam reveals by converting our post-lapsarian death into what the Old Adam once refused: affirmation of his creaturely dependence, free recapitulation of his created *esse*'s *non*-subsistence. The Incarnate Son does not, of course, replace the original “nihilation” of the created *actus essendi*; rather, he uses the “space” it leaves open within *esse creatum* to reveal his own uncreated hypostatic *esse: superior summo* to the created act of being, but also *interior intimo* to it as well. Put another way, it is as if Christ had a subordinate human *esse*, but possessed it only in an unceasing, fluid exchange with the Theotokos. Mary plays a permanent role in Christ's metaphysical constitution qua “compound hypostasis”—including when she stands under the Cross as Co-redemptrix. The source of the foregoing remarks can be found in Ferdinand Ulrich's meditation on “living in the unity of life and death,” in idem., *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1999).

*dormiamus, simul cum illo vivamus*” (1 Thes 5:10).<sup>17</sup> Contrarily to our objector’s assertion, then, the resurrection is not a recreation “from scratch,” but a recapitulation of the original creation—achieved in the “very place whence the enemy had wounded” our nature.<sup>18</sup> Maintaining this claim requires, however, a doctrine of the separated soul, understood as an account of the mysterious fate of the *whole* man, whose lost wholeness remains enfolded in the mantle of the Creator’s enduring fidelity until it is restored in the resurrection. The doctrine of the separated soul is not a rival to faith in the resurrection, but a guarantee of its intelligibility, of its correspondence with the *grandeur et misère* of man, whose thought assures him an immortality as spirit that it seemingly cannot assure him as flesh.<sup>19</sup>

“Thou, O Lord, hast constituted me singularly in hope” (Ps 4:10): The Psalmist’s exclamation can be read as an exact formulation of the deepest ontological claim that Christian anthropology proposes about man, namely, that he is made to see God: “The glory of God is man alive, but the life of man is the

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<sup>17</sup>The foregoing sketches an account only of Christ’s transformation of death, not an account of judgment, heaven, hell, or purgatory. Nevertheless, what I have said here may shed some light on Balthasar’s claim that the “last things” *presuppose* the Paschal Mystery (as a Trinitarian event).

<sup>18</sup>I am citing from Venantius Fortunatus’ hymn “Pange Lingua”: “*Et medelam ferret inde, hostis unde laeserat.*”

<sup>19</sup>We never do escape some at least implicit affirmation of our continued existence beyond the tomb, precisely because we cannot grasp our death “in itself,” but only in relation to our (intelligent) life, of whose *energeia* death is the privation (which otherwise has no “in itself”). Indeed, our intellectual self-apprehension even offers a kind of pledge of our immortality: “[E]ach thing,” in fact, “naturally desires to be in its own mode. But in things that know, desire follows knowledge. Now, whereas sense does not know ‘to be’ except under the aspect of the here and now, the intellect apprehends ‘to be’ absolutely and without temporal restriction. Hence it is that everything having intellect naturally desires to be for ever. But a natural desire cannot be in vain. Therefore, every intellectual substance is incorruptible” (Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.*, I, 75, 6). Yet even granting that man, in becoming aware of his earthly end, surpasses it by that very awareness; even granting, further, that this transcendence, as a reflection of the originality of man’s intellectual operation, implicitly contains a pledge of his immortality—even granting all of this, it remains that man has no innate power to fulfill the longing for bodily immortality that is bound up with the fragile unity of his psychophysical being.

vision of God.”<sup>20</sup> But—and here we reframe our first objection in a different form—if the vision of God is man’s true life, doesn’t the “natural” character of death turn out to be “unnatural” in another and deeper sense? Indeed, how can the word “death” even designate any intelligible reality at all beyond the shadowy pseudo-subsistence of an accidental privation of life that is destined to disappear altogether in heaven?

In his *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, Athanasius writes that the Creator “foresaw that by reason of his coming-into-being out of nothing man lacked the innate capacity to abide [*diamenein*] forever.”<sup>21</sup> A little further on, he adds that “corruption” [*phthora*] is “according to nature” [*kata physin*].<sup>22</sup> Yet however “natural” he may think it is in one respect, Athanasius regards corruption as profoundly abnormal in another: We were never meant to experience it, but have perversely brought it upon ourselves by our refusal of the creative Word apart from whom we cannot endure in being. Post-lapsarian death, Athanasius is telling us, is an inextricable tangle of nature and sin, an unintelligible mess lacking any ultimate sense apart from Christ.

Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that Christ teaches us to find some intrinsic meaning in post-lapsarian death. No, what Christ does is fully unmask its intrinsic meaninglessness, its absurdity, for the first time. Yet Christ’s very exposure of fallen death’s vanity gives it a place in the Providential economy that it otherwise could never have had. For now it is forced to serve a new salvific purpose contrary to its own (il)logic. Outwardly, of course, our death remains overshadowed by corruption; inwardly, however,

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<sup>20</sup>“*Gloria Dei vivens homo: vita autem hominis visio Dei*” (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 34, 7).

<sup>21</sup>Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, 3; cited from the Greek text in *Athanasius. Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, ed. Robert W. Thomson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 140.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid. Compare Aristotle’s remark to the effect that “none of the corruptibles [*phtharta*] is capable of abiding [*diamenein*] one and the same in number” (Aristotle, *De Anima*, II, 4: 415a4–5).

it is already a testament that the Risen Lord has victoriously filled death with the only substance and intelligibility it can have: himself.<sup>23</sup>

How, then, does the Christian's attitude towards death, his "singular hope," fulfill pagan wisdom about death? In *De Bono Conjugali*, Augustine entertains the hypothesis that even an unfallen Adam would eventually have had to exchange the "animal" condition for the "spiritual."<sup>24</sup> Had man not fallen, this hypothesis holds, he would still have had to undergo an earthly end, though he would have known it as a purely joyous transition into the eschatological state, without any stain of constraint, privation, or corruption.<sup>25</sup> If we adopt this hypothesis—which Augustine regards as at least tenable—then we can say that only the Dormition of Our Lady fully reveals what a "natural death" would have to look like.<sup>26</sup> For the same reason, the believer who recognizes the Theotokos as "our life, our sweetness, and our *hope*" would be charged with the task of keeping alive, and even intensifying, the pagan's wonderment over the strange interweaving of life and death in the *conditio humana*. For this wonderment would itself be an internal requirement of the believer's confidence that, in filling fallen death with his risen eternity, Christ also quickens it with a breath of Eden's morning freshness, a hint of the radiantly beautiful form in which unfallen Adam would have gathered his earthly existence into the beginning of incorruption: "pure nature" as the ripe fruit of the

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<sup>23</sup>For a beautiful exposition of this point, see "Der Tod vom Leben verschlungen," in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Homo Creatus Est. Skizzen zur Theologie: V* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1986), 185–91. Balthasar highlights the indispensable Trinitarian background that has remained mostly implicit in the foregoing reflection.

<sup>24</sup>This is a reference to Paul's distinction between the "psychic" and the "spiritual" in 1 Cor 15:44–46.

<sup>25</sup>See Augustine, *De Bono Conjugali*, 2.

<sup>26</sup>This intuition contains the seed of a demonstration that Mary's Assumption could involve her death without prejudice to her Immaculate Conception.

Tree of Life. “All things return to their integrity through Him from whom they took their origin, Our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>27</sup> □

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<sup>27</sup>“[P]er ipsum redire omnia in integrum, a quo sumpsere principium: Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum”: Oration after the third Old Testament reading in the Latin Church’s pre-Conciliar Easter Vigil.