

SOULS AND BODIES, HISTORY AND ETERNITY: JOHN SCOTTUS ERIUGENA AND THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

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SUMMARY: I. *Overcoming the dualism of history/eternity: the eight ages.* 1. Augustine and the ages of history. 2. Eriugena and the ages of history. II. *Overcoming the dualism of soul/body: intermediate embodiment.* III. *The unity of states in Christ.* IV. Conclusion.

THOUGH eschatology remains a stimulating topic in contemporary Christian theology, the problem of the so-called “intermediate state” – the state of the dead prior to the general resurrection – receives little treatment. Yet this theme deserves greater attention since it involves important questions regarding Christian anthropology and soteriology.

The teaching has suffered its share of controversy over the centuries. For instance, the scholastics engaged in a lively debate regarding the dualism that the intermediate state implies: if the human person survives for a period as a disembodied spirit, the body must not be essential for human identity.¹ Pope Benedict XII (d. 1342) would establish the essential Catholic teaching in his *Benedictus Deus* (1336), which affirmed the immediate experience of the Beatific Vision even before the general resurrection, though it does not tackle the problem of the *anima separata*.² Twentieth century studies in Biblical anthropolo-

¹ This led to Thomas’s famous definition of the soul as the form of the body. Cfr. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 76, a. 1. Yet, one can still see Thomas struggling to explain the manner in which a substantial form – the soul – could exist apart from a body. Thomas treats this question in *Summa Theologica* I, q. 89. In a. 1, for instance, he discusses the manner in which the *anima separata* acquires knowledge and notes the difficulties in reconciling the soul’s natural union with the body with the soul’s disembodied state. Though he acknowledges that the separated soul may know through participated species in the divine light – not through innate species, like the angels – nevertheless the soul is still naturally ordered toward the body. One can therefore ask: if the disembodied soul can understand through the divine light, why would it require the body for its fulfillment? For a summary of this renewed debate between Plato and Aristotle in a Christian key cfr. A. PEGIS, *St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul in the Thirteenth Century*, Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto 1934, 13-25.

² “All these souls, immediately (*mox*) after death and, in the case of those in need of purification, after the purification [mentioned above], since the ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into heaven, already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment, have been, are and will be with Christ in heaven, in the heavenly kingdom and paradise, joined to the company of the holy angels”. H. DENZINGER, R. DEFERRARI, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 13th ed., Herder, London 1957, 296-297. On the debates and solutions to the question of the Beatific Vision during this period cfr. C. TROTTMANN, *Vision béatifique et resurrection de la chair: quelques remarques historiques et doctrinales*, «Théophilyon» 11 (2006) 308-316.

gy¹ and contemporary concerns over soul-body dualism in both Protestant and Catholic circles,² once again led to a questioning of the doctrine's validity. At the heart of these controversies stand, in fact, two problematic dualisms: the platonic division between body and soul and the chasm that divides history from eternity.

One source that offers some important reflections upon this issue is the ninth century theologian and mystic, John Scottus Eriugena. The enigmatic Irishman, who appeared on the continent during the reign of Charles the Bald (840-877), made major contributions through his translations from the Greek and through his original works. Gregory of Nyssa, Ephiphanius of Salamis, pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor all found their way into Western thought through Eriugena's hand, while such works as the *De praedestione liber*, *Commentarius in evangelium Johannis* and, above all, the *Periphyseon (De natura)*³ provided brilliant – and controversial – syntheses of Latin and Greek learning. Eriugena continues to attract the attention of modern philosophers and theologians for his profound learning and dazzling vision.

In his works, Eriugena discusses the problem of the intermediate state in ways that anticipate later controversies. This essay discusses his attempt to overcome the two dualisms inherent to the doctrine of the intermediate state – the divisions of history/eternity and body/soul – and to unite all of creation in the person of the Incarnate Word. Furthermore, he demonstrates that the belief in an intermediate state of the dead is an essential and inspiring doctrine for Christians.

¹ For a summary of scriptural terms for body, soul and spirit and their treatment in Biblical theology, cfr. J. COOPER, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mi 2000, 38-43; N. MURPHY, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, 6-11; 16-22. For one of the earliest treatments of *soma* (body) as defining “the whole person” in New Testament theology cfr. R. BULTMAN, *Theology of the New Testament*. I, Scribner, New York 1951, 192-203. Oscar Cullman also contrasted the Greek notion of the soul with the Christian position that emerges from the New Testament: “The contrast with the Greek soul is clear: it is precisely apart from the body that the Greek soul attains to full development of its life. According to the Christian view, however, it is the inner man's very nature, which demands the body”. O. CULLMAN, *The Immortality of the Soul or the Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament*, Epworth, London 1958, 33.

² For examples cfr. P. ALTHAUS, *Die Letzen Dinge: Lehrbuch der Eschatologie*, C. Bertelsmann Verlag, Gütersloh 1933, 157; K. BARTH, *Church Dogmatics III/2*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1960, 432-433; H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory v: The Last Act*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1998, 348-351; H. KUNG, *Eternal Life?*, Double Day and Co., New York 1984, 111; K. RAHNER, *Intermediate State*, in K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*. XVII, Crossroad, New York 1981, 115. For a discussion of other theologians who sought to escape the dualism implied by a bipartite anthropology cfr. P. O'CALLAGHAN, *Christ Our Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology*, Catholic University Press, Washington 2011, 19-23.

³ All references to the *Periphyseon* come from the Jeuneau edition: JOHN SCOTTUS ERIUGEN, *Periphyseon (Peri.)* I-V, (CCM 161-165; ed. É. A. Jeuneau, Brepols, Turnholt 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2003).

I. OVERCOMING THE DUALISM OF HISTORY/ETERNITY: THE EIGHT AGES

The first form of dualism, between history and eternity, remains a prominent one in Christian belief and often shapes Christian spirituality. While it is true that eternity represents a radically different state of existence, to separate it entirely from the movement of the divine economy in time inadvertently creates a space for a radical secularism: history, the state of composite beings of body and soul, works itself on one side of the divide, while eternity, the state of disembodied souls, remains self-fulfilled on the other. History is the realm of the secular, in which God appears as an intruder; eternity is the kingdom of the saints, in which God is fully present. The living continue to struggle, while the dead rejoice, suffer in hell, or pass through purgatory.

At the very least, however, Christianity's teaching on the *general* resurrection at the end of time should give one pause in regard to this bifurcation. Henri de Lubac notes that "if this resurrection can only take place at the end of time it is because the penalty which is the result of original sin, extending as it does to the whole of that nature in which all men are one, cannot be finally lifted from one without being lifted also from the others. Thus the saints in heaven must await both the salvation of those still on earth and their own resurrection".¹ A universal resurrection implies that eternity must remain mysteriously tied to history's consummation.

Eriugena's understanding of the unified fulfillment of time *and* eternity finds its voice in his treatment of the eight ages of salvation history. One finds the division of history into "ages" in both non-Christian and Christian thought.² Though at times infected by millenarianism, this teaching allowed adherents to understand their place within the unfolding of God's plan and to anticipate creation's denouement. For Christians, these divisions often reflected Biblical categories – for example, the ages mirror the six days of creation and the Sabbath rest – and found their resolution in the Second Coming and general resurrection.

Eriugena developed his schema of eight historical ages under the inspiration of St. Augustine – but with significant differences. An understanding of the full importance of these differences and their relation to the intermediate state first demands a consideration of Augustine's use of the theme.

¹ H. DE LUBAC, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1988, 130.

² For an extensive examination of this theme in Augustine cfr. A. LUNEAU, *L'Histoire du Salut chez le Pères de l'Eglise: la doctrine des ages du monde*, Beauchesne, Paris 1964, 285-383. Also cfr. R.A. MARKUS, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1970, 17-21.

1. Augustine and the ages of history

In a number of works Augustine out-lines a six-fold division of history: 1) from Adam to Noah; 2) from Noah to Abraham; 3) from Abraham to King David; 4) from King David to the Babylonian captivity; 5) from the Babylonian captivity to Christ's birth; 6) from Christ's birth to the consummation of history.¹ In some cases, he adjoins a seventh age, that of the Sabbath rest, and an eighth age, the general resurrection.²

Though the events that separate the ages in part come from Mt 1,17,³ Augustine sometimes changes the event that marks the sixth age. For instance, though he generally highlights the birth of Christ, the Virgin Birth, or simply the coming of Christ as the beginning of the sixth age,⁴ in *De Genesi contra manichaeos* he marks the shift specifically with Christ's preaching, that is, the beginning of his public life.⁵ More strikingly, however, Augustine sometimes establishes the transition with John the Baptist, since either the Forerunner's preaching or his baptism of Christ separates the fifth from the sixth age, which marks the movement from the Old Law to the New Covenant in Christ.⁶ Thus the sixth age may begin with the birth of Christ, with Christ's active life, with the preaching of John the Baptist, or with John's baptizing in the Jordan.

What do such divisions mean for Augustine? Two main movements come to the fore. First, Augustine links the six ages to the six days of creation in the *Book of Genesis* and shows how the ages reflect the creation story in the movement from man's decay in sin to rejuvenation in Christ.⁷ For example, in *De Genesi Contra manichaeos*, Augustine makes the following parallels:

	Creation in Genesis	Age of History
Day One / Age One Gen 1,3	The light	Adam to Noah: the infancy of humanity (<i>infantia</i>). 10 generations.

¹ For instance, cfr. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *De Genesi contra manicheos* (*De Gen. man.*) I, xxiii, xxxv-xl, (CSEL 91: ed. D. Weber, Universität Salzburg, Vienna 1998, 104-11); *De diversis questionibus octoginta tribus* LVIII, ii, (CCL 44A: ed. A. Mutzebecher, Brepols, Turnholt 1975, 105-107, 26-82); *De catechizandis rudibus* (*De cat.*) XVII, xxviii-xxii, xxxix, (CCL 46: ed. I. B. Bauer, Brepols, Turnholt 1969, 152-164); *De Trinitate* (*De Trin.*) IV, iv, vii, (CCL 50: ed. W. J. Mountain, Brepols, Turnholt 1968, 169-171).

² For instance, cfr. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *De civitate Dei* (*De civ.*), xxii, xxx, (CCL 48: ed. B. Dombart-A. Kalb, Brepols, Turnholt 1955, 866, 138-148).

³ "So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations."

⁴ For instance, cfr. AUGUSTINE, *De civ.* xxii, xxx, (CCL 48: 863, 134-135); *De cat.* xxii, xxxix. (CCL 46: 163, 15-16); *De Trin.* IV, iv, (CCL 50: 170, 20).

⁵ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *De Gen. man.* xxiii, xl, (CCL 91:108, 24-27).

⁶ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *De Trin.* IV, iv, (CCL 50:170, 24-27); *In Iohannis Evangelium* (*In. Io.*) IX, xvi, (CCL 36, ed. D. Radbodus Willems, Brepols, Turnholt 1954, 98, 1-3; xv, ix, 154, 5-6).

⁷ AUGUSTINE, *De Gen. man.* I, (CCL 91: 23, 35-40; 104-11); MARKUS, *Saeculum*, 80.

	Creation in <i>Genesis</i>	Age of History
Day Two/Age Two Gen 1,6	The firmament	Noah to Abraham: the childhood of humanity (<i>pueritia</i>). 10 generations.
Day Three/Age Three Gen 1,9	The separation of the waters	Abraham to David: the adolescence of humanity (<i>adolescentia</i>). 14 generations.
Day Four/Age Four Gen 1,14	The stars in the heavens	David to Babylonian captivity: the youth of humanity (<i>iuventus</i>). 14 generations.
Day Five/Age Five Gen 1,20	The flying beasts, etc.	Babylon to Christ: the old age of humanity (<i>gravitas</i>). 14 generations.
Day Six/ Age Six Gen 1,26	The living soul of man	Christ to the consummation of history: the birth of the new man from the old man (<i>senectus</i>). No fixed generations, ongoing.

While the progression of the ages displays a gradual decay of the original creation – from infancy to senescence – this decay comes to a halt in the sixth age. Just as God *created* man in his image and likeness on the sixth day, so in the sixth age did Christ *recreate* man in the Incarnation. The sixth age is therefore a new beginning, which is still unfolding and will terminate in the unknown hour of Christ's return.

Second, Augustine finds a further meaning in the divisions when he groups them under three headings: 1) before the law – Adam to Noah, Noah to Abraham; 2) under the law – Abraham to David, David to Babylon, Babylon to Christ; and 3) under grace – the Virgin Birth to the end of the sixth age.¹ These headings, inspired by St. Paul (Rom 6:14), allow one to see a gradual liberation of humanity from sin within salvation history: man moves from the reign of sin to the discipline of the law; from the discipline of the law to the infusion of Christ's transforming grace.

Two ages succeed the consummation of the sixth age that will take place in Christ's return: the seventh age of the Sabbath rest and the eighth age of the resurrection. The early Augustine taught a "mild" millenarianism that understood the Sabbath rest as a fixed period of the saints' peaceful rule on earth prior to the resurrection.² Later, however, he would identify the Sabbath of the seventh age with a spiritual rest for the saints before their reunification with the bodies on the eighth day of the resurrection. In *De civitate Dei*, Augustine writes:

¹ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *De Trin.* IV, iv, (CCL 50: 170, 24-30).

² For example, cfr. AUGUSTINE, *Sermones* CCLIX, ii, (PL 38, 1197-1198). Also cfr. MARKUS, *Saeculum*, 19-21.

For we ourselves will be the seventh day, when we will be full and remade by his blessing and sanctification. There, at rest, we will see that he is truly God. This is what we wanted ourselves to be, when we abandoned him and separated ourselves from the true God, listening to the words of the seducer: "You will be gods." God would have made us gods by participation in him, not by desertion. What have we done without him, except decay in his anger? Yet, having been remade by him and perfected by a greater grace, we will rest in eternity, seeing that he is God, through whom we will be full when he himself will be all things in all things.¹

The seventh age therefore is the age of spiritual deification of the saints, which will be followed by the deification of the whole person – body and soul – in the resurrection. Augustine concludes: "Thus this seventh age will be our rest, the end of which will have no evening. Yet, the Lord's day, as the eternal eighth day, is made sacred by Christ's resurrection. It prefigures not only the eternal rest of the spirit, but also the fulfillment of the body".²

Augustine does not, it must be noted, clearly designate the seventh age as the intermediate state within the movement of the eight ages.³ In general Augustine describes ages that flow *progressively*: one age ends and another follows. This works well with the first six ages, which all take place in time, but becomes rather awkward when discussing the seventh and eighth ages, particularly after Augustine abandons his chiliastic tendencies.⁴ The seventh age of the saints – the deification of the blessed and the final movement of the person toward the fulfillment of the resurrection – still seems to *follow* the sixth age in a temporal progression.

Thus Augustine generally understands a linear progression of the six or eight ages, from creation to the general resurrection. This progression may be understood as the decay and rejuvenation of man, or the movement from the reign of sin to the reign of grace, that finds fulfillment in rest and the rising of the dead.

2. Eriugena and the ages of history

Eriugena, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, adopts and adapts the six ages of Augustine as they are found in Augustine's own commentary on the Gospel. It is worth seeing Augustine's version before examining Eriugena's. In this pas-

¹ AUGUSTINE, *De Civ.* xxii, xxx, (CCL 48: 865, 105-115).

² AUGUSTINE, *De Civ.* xxii, xxx, (CCL 48: 865, 141-145).

³ Yet, Augustine does speak of the intermediate state elsewhere. For instance, cfr. AUGUSTINE, *De Civ.* xx, ix, (CCL 48: 715, 6-10). "Even now his saints reign with him, to whom he said: 'Behold, I am with you until the end of the age' (Mt 28,20). Yet, this is in a far lesser sense [than the consummation of the Kingdom in Christ's coming], or it would not be possible now to call the Church his Kingdom or the Kingdom of Heaven." Also cfr. B. E. DALEY, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*, Hendrickson, Peabody (Ma) 2003, 137-139.

⁴ For the development of the early Augustine's thought on the Sabbath rest cfr. G. FOLLIET, *La typologie du sabbat: Son interprétation millénariste entre 389 et 400*, «Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes», 3-4 (1956) 371-390.

sage, Augustine links the sixth hour of Jesus's arrival at Jacob's well to the six ages of the world:¹

Why, then, the sixth hour? Because it is the sixth age of history. For in the Gospel one hour is as one age, the first being from Adam to Noah; the second from Noah to Abraham; the third from Abraham to David; the fourth from David to the exile to Babylon; the fifth from the exile to Babylon to the baptism of John; from there the sixth age is being enacted. Why do you marvel? Jesus came and, humbling himself, he came to the well. He came exhausted, because he bore the weak flesh. It is the sixth hour because it is the sixth age of the world. He came to the well, because he came to the depth of our dwelling. Thus the Psalm says: "From the depths I cried to you, O Lord (Ps 129,1)". He sat, as I said, because he was humbled.²

Augustine discusses only six of the eight ages in this passage. Though he inaugurates the sixth age with the Baptism of John, that is, the beginning of Jesus's public life, nonetheless he stresses the impact of the Incarnation on the formation of the sixth age. The "exhaustion" of the Word's assumption of the flesh reflects the decay and senescence of the sixth age; yet God's humility also begins the stage of renewal, the movement towards divine fulfillment. It should also be noted, once again, that this is a *linear* progression, a movement from one hour or age to the next.

Eriugena takes the same starting point – the sixth hour at the well – but makes significant changes in Augustine's schema:

"It was around the sixth hour". The sixth hour prefigures the sixth age of the world. The first age is calculated from the expulsion of the first man from paradise up to the altar, which Noah, exiting from the ark, constructed after the flood (Gen 8:20); the second, from then up to the altar, upon which Abraham was ordered by God to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22,1-14); the third, from then up to the altar of king David on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite (1Chr 21,18); then the fourth, up to the altar of Zorobabel in the reconstructed temple (Ezra 3,2-3); then the fifth, up to the baptism of John, or, as it does not seem unreasonable to many, up to the true altar, that is, up to the cross of Christ, of which all the previous altars were types. Thus, the sixth age is extended to the end of the world; it is taking place now. For the seventh age is perfected in another life in the souls liberated from their bodies; this age begins from the martyrdom of Abel and will terminate at the end of the world with the resurrection of all. After this, the eighth age begins to appear, which no termination can enclose. The perfected light of grace is also symbolized typically in the sixth hour, which, when Christ became man, fully shone in the world. Six, therefore, is a perfect number.³

Three changes stand out in this reformulation of Augustine's interpretation. First, history begins not with the creation of Adam, but with the expulsion of

¹ Jn 4,5-6. "So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour".

² AUGUSTINE, *In Io.* xv, ix, (CCL 36: 153-154, 1-11).

³ JOHN SCOTTUS ERIUGENA, *Commentarius in Sanctum Evangelium secundum Iohannem (Comm.)* IV, ii, (SC 180: ed. É. A. Jeaneau, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1972, 333B-C, 288-290, 42-61).

Adam from paradise. This means that history – man’s movement through time – emerges from the fall into sin and unfolds as a period of both suffering and healing.¹

Second, though Eriugena preserves Augustine’s basic divisions, he marks the transitions specifically by the construction of altars: a sacrifice marks the division of each age. This creates a typological vision of history that culminates in the cross of Christ, the true altar. Thus Jesus recapitulates the first five ages of history through his self-sacrifice, perfecting all past offerings and directing them into the final period of history, the sixth age.

Third, Eriugena adds a discussion of the seventh and eighth ages. As we have seen, Augustine himself discusses these ages elsewhere. Eriugena, however, rejects Augustine’s progressive, linear understanding of the seventh and eighth ages. Instead, he explicitly says that the seventh age belongs to the dead prior to the end of the sixth age: the seventh age is the intermediate state. This age of spirit, the intermediate state, remains intimately connected with history. It *begins* in history with the death of the first just man, Abel; it runs *simultaneously* with the six ages of history and even depends upon the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross for future fruition; it *ends* with the termination of history, when Christ comes to judge the living and the dead at the start of the eighth age, the age without end. The seventh age, the intermediate state, therefore coexists with history and maintains an intimate connection with those still on their temporal pilgrimage; it is not a waiting period between the end of history and the general resurrection.

Eriugena stands out as the first to understand this intermediate state as a period that both runs simultaneously with history and remains outside it.² By escaping the linear framework that one effectively finds in Augustine, he links time and eternity to the salvific work of Christ. Both salvation history (ages 1-6) and the intermediate state (age 7) unfold within the framework of the frustrated sacrifices that ultimately find fulfillment in Jesus’s death and resurrection. Jesus, therefore, recapitulates not only salvation history, but also the state of the dead who yearn for the resurrection.³

¹ On this point cfr. T. GREGORY, *L’Eschatologie de Jean Scot*, in R. ROQUES (edited by), *Jean Scot Érigène et l’histoire de la philosophie. Organisé dans le cadre des colloques internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique à Laon, du 7 au 12 juillet 1975*, Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris 1977, 380.

² On this point cfr. J. RATZINGER, *The Theology of History in Bonaventure*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1989, 173, note 3.

³ In the *Periphyseon* Eriugena links the eight ages to the five-fold natural elevation of the human person (earthly body to vital motion; vital motion to sensation; sensation to reason; reason to mind), followed by the three-fold divine elevation of the human person (mind to the knowledge of things that come after God; knowledge to wisdom; wisdom to divine union or deification). Cfr. ERIUGENA, *Peri. v.* (CCM 165: 1020C-1021B, 224-225, 7302-7333). He also uses the image of the eighth day and the fulfillment of Christ in his best known poem, *Aulae sidereae*. Cfr. JOHN SCOTTUS ERIUGENA, *Carmina xxv*, in *Carmina (Carm.)* (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 12: ed. M. Herren, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin 1991, 116-118, 31-44). Also cfr. B. MCGINN, *Eriugena Confronts the*

This unifying simultaneity overcomes the time/eternity dualism inherent to traditional understandings of the intermediate state. The dead, prior to the resurrection, do not divorce themselves from history and enclose themselves within the isolated enjoyment of the beatific vision. In a mysterious way, they remain tied to the movement of creation that is still groaning in anticipation. There is a “not yet” even for the blessed, who cannot experience the totality of divine union until the general resurrection and unification of creation with God, the eighth day.¹

II. OVERCOMING THE DUALISM OF SOUL/BODY: INTERMEDIATE EMBODIMENT

The doctrine of the intermediate state suggests a second dualism: the distinction between body and soul. This division, which may lead to a radical condemnation of the physical in favor of the spiritual, has remained a dilemma throughout the history of Christianity. The scholastic solution that affirmed the composite nature of the human person – the soul is the form of the body – still found itself mired in the quandary of justifying a beatific vision for disembodied persons after death. Does not such a teaching allow for a conception of man as pure spirit, an angel liberated from the shackles of embodiment?

Two later attempts at a solution still leave much to be desired. Martin Luther formulated one influential position in his teaching of “soul sleep.” In commenting on Eccl 9,5 (“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost”), Luther wrote: “Solomon seems to feel that the dead are asleep in such a way that they know nothing whatever. And I do not believe that there is a more powerful passage in Scripture to show that the dead are asleep and do not know anything about our affairs”.² Thus the souls of the dead enter a period of suspended animation until their reunification with their bodies. The soul, because it is not

End: Reflections on Johannes Scottus's Place in Carolingian Eschatology, in M. DUNNE, J. MCEVOY (edited by), *History and Eschatology in Eriugena and his Age. Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Maynooth and Dublin, August 16-20, 2000*, University Press, Leuven 2002, 14-15.

¹ Joseph Ratzinger also held this position regarding the close unity between history and eternity and between the unfolding economy and the intermediate state. In particular, he noted that the *fullness* of the beatific vision will not take place until the effects and pain of sin come to an end. One can ask, he writes, “whether a human being can be said to have reached his fulfillment and destiny so long as others suffer on account of him, so long as the guilt whose source he is persists on earth and brings pain to other people.” RATZINGER, *Eschatology*, 187. On the effects of personal sin in history cfr. H. DE LUBAC, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1980, 136-137.

² M. LUTHER, *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, in J. PELIKAN, H. OSWALD (edited by) *Luther's Works. xv. Notes on Ecclesiastes, Lecture on the Song of Solomon, Treatise on the Last Words of David*, Concordia Publishing, Saint Louis 1972, 147. N.T. Wright interprets the “sleep” of the dead as the sleep of the body alone, while the person survives within “the conscious love of God”. Cfr. N.T. WRIGHT, *Surprised by Hope*, HarperOne, New York 2008, 169-170.

complete without the body, cannot exist in a fully “human” state and awaits the general resurrection in blissful ignorance.

This teaching, however, remains problematic since it implies a limitation to the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ. Joseph Ratzinger has rightfully noted that “existence with Christ inaugurated by faith is the start of resurrected life and therefore outlasts death (see Phil 1,23; 2Cor 5,8; 1Thes 5,10). The dialogue of faith is itself already life, which can no longer be shattered by death. The idea of the sleep of death that has been continually discussed by Lutheran theologians [. . .] is therefore untenable on the evidence of the New Testament and not even justifiable by the frequent occurrence in the New Testament of the word ‘sleep’”.¹

A second, more recent, solution bases itself upon a radical distinction between time and eternity: the immediate experience of the resurrection by each individual. According to this theory, when one dies, one effectively steps out of history and into the immediate life of the resurrection in eternity. The general resurrection therefore only marks the end of the historical created order and has no significance for those who have already died. Jurgen Moltmann states this position succinctly: “If with God there is no earthly time in which human beings succeed one another, then all human beings, at whatever earthly time they may have died, encounter God at the same time – in God’s time, the presence of eternity”.² This position avoids the problem of soul/body dualism by eliminating the intermediate state altogether.

Yet, despite the advantages of this theory of “immediate resurrection”, one has good reason to be skeptical. Above all, it fails to maintain the communal nature of salvation. The teaching of the *general* – not individual – resurrection of the dead prevents Christians from turning in on themselves and following an individualistic form of spirituality.³ Furthermore, the theory of “immediate resurrection” strips history of its full meaning, since its consummation has no consequences for those who have exited its confines in previous ages.⁴

Eriugena suggests a surprising solution to this problem: the souls in the intermediate state are, in fact, still *embodied*. The human person, as a composite, can never be separated from his body, though the body passes through different states in its journey from the fall from paradise to the return to divine unity.

¹ J. RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1990, 353.

² J. MOLTSMANN, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2005, 103. Other theologians who lean toward this theory include Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Cfr. K. BARTH, *Church Dogmatics III/2*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1960, 432-433; H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory v: The Last Act*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1998, 348-351. For a more extensive discussion cfr. O’CALLAGHAN, *Christ Our Hope*, 309-326.

³ Cfr. DE LUBAC, *Catholicism*, 354.

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger notes: “It would also mean that, viewed from the other side, history would be an empty spectacle in which people think they are striving and struggling, whereas simultaneously in ‘eternity’, in the already ever present Now, everything is long since decided”. J. RATZINGER, *Credo For Today: What Christians Believe*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2006, 170. Also cfr. N.T. WRIGHT, *Surprised by Hope*, 162.

The first state of embodiment belongs to the fallen order. In the beginning God created man as a body/soul composite.¹ The intended nature of this original body was spiritual – a state in which it would have lived in perfect conformity with the soul.² Man, however, in turning from God and desiring to exploit creation as if it existed apart from the Creator, dragged himself down to the corrupt state of material existence.³ As a result, the body is now weighed down by superadded features: “the animal, terrestrial, corruptible body; the sexual distinctions of masculine and feminine; the multiplication through procreation that is similar to [the manner of] beasts; the need for food and drink; the increase and decrease of the body; the alternating and inevitable necessity of sleeping and waking; and other similar things from all of which human nature, if it had not sinned, would have remained entirely free, and one day will be free”.⁴ This first state of man’s embodiment – the fallen state – is therefore the result of sin, but in no way detracts from man’s composite nature itself: God created man as body and soul; man, however, is the cause of the tragic *state* of his material body.

The second state of embodiment – and the one that concerns us most here – is that of the intermediate state. Eriugena does not believe that the dead, prior to the resurrection, exist in total separation from their bodies and matter, but rather that their *manner* of embodiment changes. He summarizes this position in the following passage:

¹ “But be careful lest, for these reasons, you begin to conjecture that the creation (*creatio*) of the soul preceded the creation (*conditio*) of the body by some temporal gap. Indeed, the soul precedes the body by its dignity and excellence of nature alone, but not by place and time. For all at once, in one single man, who was made in the image of God, the primordial causes of all men were created in soul and body. For in no way, by some temporal delay, does the essence of the soul precede the essence of the body, nor does the essence of the body precede the essence of the soul.” ERIUGENA, *Peri. II*, (CCM 162: 582A, 76, 1787-1795). Also cfr. *Peri. IV*, (CCM 164: 800C, 83, 2446-2448). On the spiritual body’s relationship with the soul cfr. C. STEEL, *The Return of the Body into the Soul: Philosophical Musings on the Resurrection*, in DUNNE, MCEVOY (edited by), *History and Eschatology in Eriugena and his Age*, 581-609.

² Following a suggestion from Maximus the Confessor, Eriugena maintained that man never actually existed in paradise, but that paradise remains *in potentia*, as a promise within the hidden nature of man. Cfr. ERIUGENA, *Peri. V*, (CCM 165: 1013C, 215, 6971-6976); MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium una cum latina interpretaione Johannis Scotti Eriugenaie iuxta posita LXI*, (CCL 22: ed. C. Laga, C. Steel, Brepols, Turnholt 1990, 85, 12-16). Also cfr. C. LARCHET, *La divinisation de l’homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1996, 179-180; W. OTTEN, *The Pedagogical Aspect of Eriugena’s Eschatology: Paradise between the Letter and the Spirit*, in DUNNE, MCEVOY (edited by), *History and Eschatology in Eriugena and his Age*, 522.

³ On the misuse of man’s will and the Fall cfr. ERIUGENA, *Peri. V*, (CCM 165: 975B, 160-161, 5231-5235).

⁴ ERIUGENA, *Peri. IV*, (CCM 164: 807D, 94, 2801-2807). On the manner in which Eriugena attempted to harmonize Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa on this point cfr. G. D’ONOFRIO, *The Concordia of Augustine and Dionysius: Toward a Hermeneutic of the Disagreement of Patristic Sources in John the Scot’s Periphyseon*, in B. MCGINN, W. OTTEN (edited by), *Eriugena: East and West. Papers of the Eighth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Chicago and Notre Dame, 18-20 October 1994*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (In) 1994, 123.

Indeed, man does not cease to be man. Man, however, is body and soul. If, however, he is always man, he is therefore always body and soul. And though the parts of man may be separated from one another – for the soul leaves its usual governance of the body it received after generation and, when it leaves, the body dissolves and its parts return to the appropriate places of the elements – nevertheless, by a natural order, the parts do not cease to be related always and inseparably to the whole, and the whole to the parts. Indeed, the order of this relation is never able to perish. Though by corporeal sense they seem to be separated, when we consider this in a deeper sense, we see that it is necessary that they always, at once, and inseparably, subsist together. For the human body, whether it is alive or dead, is the body of a man. In the same way, the human soul, whether it is governing its body in unity, or ceases to rule it, as it appears to the senses, when the body is dissolved into parts, nevertheless it does not cease to be the soul of a man. And thus, it is given to understand by a higher understanding of things that the soul rules the body no less when it is in the dispersed elements, than when it was united to it by the complex of its members.¹

After death the elements of man's material body dissolve and are scattered. This does not mean, however, that the soul has become entirely divorced from them. In fact, the soul – even in its separation from the order of time in the existence of eternity – remains bound with the elements that once constituted its fallen, embodied state. One may not see this bond with the physical senses, yet it nonetheless exists as a continuous link between history and eternity. The souls of the waiting dead are still fully united with their bodies even in the state of dispersion.²

The final state of embodiment is the resurrection, effected and revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. In this state all the dispersed elements of man's material body are rendered spiritual and they return to a more intimate union with the soul.³ This restoration and elevation of the body, however, takes place communally at the end of time: all the dead at once will draw the elements of their

¹ ERIUGENA, *Peri.* III, (CCM 163: 729D-730A, 158-159, 4621-4638). Also cfr. *Peri.* IV, (CCM 164: 802C-803A, 86-87, 2538-2571).

² This position recalls Origen's teaching that the *ratio* of the body, endures after the material body decays and will reconstitute the body in the resurrection. Origen likens the body to a seed that must die and be restored in a newer and higher form. Cfr. ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *De principiis* II, x, iii, (SC 252: ed. H. Crouzel, M. Simonetti, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1978, 381-383, 79-120). Also cfr. C. W. BYNUM, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, Columbia University Press, New York 1995, 142.

³ In fact, Eriugena asserts that man's body is an aggregate of spiritual qualities rendered heavy and material by the fall. Cfr. ERIUGENA, *Peri.* I, (CCM 161: 503B, 84-85, 2612-2614). Eriugena attributes his "bundle theory" of matter – i.e. matter is a bundle of spiritual qualities – primarily to Gregory of Nyssa. Cfr. ERIUGENA *Peri.* I, (CCM 161: 502A, 83, 2564-2566); GREGORY OF NYSSA, *In Hexaemeron explicatio apologetica*, (PG 44, 69B-C); *De anima et resurrectione*, (PG 46, 124B-D). On ancient bundle theories of matter cfr. P. BLOWERS, *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, 180-181; R. SORABJI, *Matter, Space and Motion: Theories in Antiquity and their Sequel*, Duckworth, London 1988, 44-59.

bodies to the higher union of the resurrected state.¹ In fact, the resurrection of humanity will liberate material creation from its bondage to sin: "For although they [the elements] were superadded to human nature because of sin, nevertheless it is not the case that they do not belong to human nature, since they were added and made by the same Creator of the nature. For this reason, they must be recalled to the unity of nature in the restoration of man, when the soul, at the time of the resurrection, receives the whole that had been subject to it".² Each resurrected person will then share in varied states of blessedness or punishment, based upon the manner in which he or she lived her life.³

For Eriugena, then, there is an intermediate state, but there is no such thing as an *anima separata*. The soul is always embodied in one of three states: 1) the material state of fallen existence; 2) the dispersed state of the intermediate period; or 3) the resurrected state at the end of history. Therefore the resurrection is the radical elevation of the soul/body composite to divine union, a state that requires the grace of Christ's Resurrection for its fulfillment.

Yet, can one really call this "dispersed state" a form of embodiment? Perhaps our modern understanding of embodiment can help us to understand this notion. In fact, a person's body is not a fixed quantity of matter, but rather it is constantly in flux: all of the cells in a person's body are replaced on a regular basis and one's physique changes its size and shape over the years. Embodiment therefore cannot be divorced from historical development, since it is constituted by a personal history in union with matter, an individual *story* that draws the material into an unfolding meaning. This personal history does not cease after death, nor does it sever itself from the material creation that still groans for consummation. In a mysterious way a person's story remains ever connected with the matter of this world, and each individual will draw and elevate that material into his participation in the resurrection in Christ. The dead now have, in a sense, an "extended body" that embraces the entirety of the on-going history that incorporates matter.

III. THE UNITY OF STATES IN CHRIST

All the states of embodiment find their ground and unity in the risen Jesus. Eriugena demonstrates this unity through his interpretation of the Transfiguration. In Jesus's appearance on the mount, each figure represents one of man's embodied states in his journey to divine union: "The type of those living in the flesh is Elijah, the type of those freed of the body is Moses, and the type of those rising from the dead is the Lord himself".⁴ Elijah, who had been taken up by the Lord (2Kings 2,1ff), represents the first state of embodiment; Moses symbolizes the intermediate state, since he has been freed from the constraints of the

¹ Those who die before the end of the world "await the common resurrection of bodies during the intervening temporal period." ERIUGENA, *Peri. v.*, (CCM 165: 980A, 167, 5448-5453).

² ERIUGENA, *Peri. iv.*, (CCM 164: 802C, 86, 2542-2547).

³ Cfr. ERIUGENA, *Peri. v.*, (CCM 165: 945C, 119-120, 3839-3852).

⁴ ERIUGENA, *Peri. v.*, (CCM 165: 999C, 194-195, 6315-6318).

fallen material body, but is still one with the elements that constituted it; Jesus himself reveals the glory of the Resurrected state. Yet, all of the states – the material state of the fallen order, the intermediate state, and the resurrection – are contained in the incarnate Word:

And do not think that Elijah, while still living in his body, came from some localized paradise; or that Moses, as if his body were restored, then came to Christ from some realm of the souls; or that they [Elijah and Moses], when the mystery of the Transfiguration was over, returned to those places whence they came. But believe and understand faithfully and without hesitation, that they came from no other place than from him with whom they appeared on the mountain and in whom they were before they appeared, and whom they did not abandon when they appeared, and into whom, when the sacrament of the appearance was over, they returned – not in another direction, but into the very One in whom and with whom they are one. This is clearly shown through the three chosen disciples in the mystery of the Transfiguration, who, “when they raised their eyes, saw no one except Jesus alone” (Mt 17,8).¹

The Word, in becoming incarnate, recapitulated, and thereby perfected, all of the states of human nature. First, he entered the fallen order and took on all its super-added characteristics, with the exception of sin – the first state of embodiment.² In this way he healed man’s broken nature. Next, he died upon the cross and, for three days, shared in the intermediate state of the dead who await the general resurrection.³ In this way he restored hope to the dead and ended the reign of hell. Finally, he rose from the dead and established the first fruits of the resurrection – the last state of embodiment. Eriugena proclaims this truth in one of his Easter poems:

The Lord, the death of death, rose alive into the heights
and bore our nature with him to that place.
Made human in its fullness, he now makes that fullness one.⁴

According to Eriugena, Christ unites and fulfills all the states of man’s embodiment, inclusive of the intermediate state. In Christ the living and deceased yearn as one for the resurrection of the Last Judgment. All share in the one hope of the Risen Lord.

¹ ERIUGENA, *Peri. v.* (CCM 165: 999D-1000A, 195, 6320-6332). Eriugena perhaps finds his inspiration in a passage from Ambrose: “Thus, although there were three, they were made one. Three are seen in the beginning, but one in the end; for by perfect faith they are one. And so the Lord asked the Father for this: that we might be one. Not only Moses and Elijah are one in Christ, but also we are the one body of Christ. Therefore, they also are received into the body of Christ, because we will be one in Christ Jesus. Or, perhaps, because the law and the prophets from the Word – which, however, began from the Word – conclude in the Word: ‘The end of the law is Christ as justice for all who believe’ (Rom 10,4).” AMBROSE OF MILAN, *In Lucam*, VII, XX, (CCL 14: ed. M. Adriaen, P. Balzerini, Brepols, Turnholt 1957, 222, 232-240).

² ERIUGENA, *Comm. I*, xxix, (SC 180: 306C-D, 150-152, 24-36).

³ See in particular his *Carmina* on the harrowing of Hell. ERIUGENA, *Carm. VI*, (SLH 12: 80-82); *Carm. VII*, (SLH 12: 82); *Carm. IX*, (SLH 12: 90-94).

⁴ ERIUGENA, *Carm. IX*, (SLH 12: 90, 25-31).

IV. CONCLUSION

For the Irishman, history and eternity remain mysteriously united and share in a common fulfillment in the resurrection in Christ. The dead, since they live in this relationship with the economy, remain “embodied” through a continuing association with matter. Finally, all states of existence find their resolution in the incarnate Word, who both saves and transforms creation through his own death, resurrection and ascension. As a result, Eriugena’s vision eliminates the division that permits a radical secularism in history, maintains the integrity of the soul/body composite in the human person, and finds the locus of salvation and deification in the person of Christ. Particularly in light of our modern concerns with history and embodiment, his approaches to this mystery are truly worthy of consideration.

ABSTRACT

The doctrine of the “intermediate state” – the state of the disembodied soul after death and prior to the general resurrection – has remained controversial throughout Christian history. In particular, the critics fault the teaching for its suggestion of two problematic dualisms: the division between the soul and the body and the division between history and eternity. The ninth century Irish philosopher, poet and mystic, John Scottus Eriugena, offers an approach to the question of the intermediate state that both overcomes the problematic dualisms and unites all of creation in the person of the Incarnate Word.

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