

The Epectasis after the Physical Death in the Light of the Doctrine of St. Gregory of Nyssa

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Abstract

Gregory of Nyssa's theology of the spiritual life has come in for special study in recent years. While many Greek theologians have described the soul's movement toward God, even using the word *ἐπέκτασις* drawing on Paul's participle in Phil. 3, 13, Gregory is original in claiming that man's ultimate end is itself and endless progression. The *τέλος* of life is beatitude, because we are blessed by participation in God, and thus both the definition of human beatitude and the *τέλος* of life according to virtue consists in *assimilation* to Him.

On the one hand, God is satisfying the soul. But Gregory's eschatology is summed up in a paradox, that our satisfaction is never to be satisfied. Such is the dynamic, on-going process of *ἐπέκτασις*, a movement beyond all experience, for the good, as Gregory so often points out, is not circumscribed by death. The summit of religious experience, even after death, is not marked by satisfaction, but by desire. Saint Gregory stands out among Christians theologian for developing an eschatology that denies the soul final knowledge, rest and satisfaction in God.