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grace (τὴν μέλλουσιν χάριν προσμεπορεύσθαι, 209A) by his good behaviour, relying on his faith in the things hoped for.

At this point we have to call to mind Plato's Nom. 4, 721C, quoted at the beginning of this article. For both Plato and Gregory the human race (and the process of engendering) is commensurate (συμμετρὲς, σύμμετρον) with the whole of time. For both there is a predetermined number of human souls. The pagan philosopher shares with the christian theologian a positive view of time and the realm of the Becoming⁶⁸.

Gregory's answer to his contemporary opponents may also be seen as a well-considered rejection of Encratism. As the repudiation of marriage by the Encratites of EvEg (and to a lesser extent of APTh) is mainly inspired by their eschatology (the victory over death), Gregory's theology of time as commensurate with the procreation of men implies that there can be no point in hastening the moment of this victory by withdrawing from it. For this would mean that marriage is a despicable institution. The end of time (the moment of the resurrection etc.) is not to be brought about by a "collective suicide": it coincides with the end of marriage, and the completion of the number of souls, and as this is only known by God, there is no reason why man should stop the course of time.

This picture of the positive function of marriage in Hom. Opif. has to be completed with ch. 14 of the Treatise on Virginité. Here the author says that Death will cease to exercise its power if marriage no longer provides its victims by the engendering of people who are bound to die. The παιδοποιία is for man more a principle of death than of life, for death starts at birth (ἀπὸ γὰρ γενέσεως ἡ φθορά τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔχει). Death is active (ἀργῆσαι) as long as human begetting is carried on by marriage (ἐνεργουμένης διὰ τοῦ γάμου τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης γενέσεως). Marriage as the instrument that keeps the power of Death alive, is contrasted with virginity as a way of overcoming Death. Those who abstain from the propagation of mankind and practise virginity, have made themselves a borderland (περιγραφὴν, τι μεθόριον) that keeps Death from leaping forward. Death meets in virginity an unsurmountable border, where it finds its end and is dissolved; virginity breaks the power of Death. The body that does not consent to be the instrument of a mortal succession (τῆς θνητῆς διαδοχῆς ὄργανον) is free from corruption (ἀφθόρον), because in it the continuous series of corruption and death (τῆς τοῦ φθείρεσθαι καὶ ἀποθνήσκειν ἀκολουθίας), which covers the period between the first man and him who practises virginity, is interrupted. Similarly, in every soul that transcends life in the flesh by virginity, the power of Death is dissolved, not having where to put its sting. In par. 4 of the same chapter Gregory, wondering what room is left for Death, answers that in the virgin the mortal element has been truly swallowed up by life (2 Cor. 5, 4). Virginity is, in fact, an image (εἰκὼν τις) of the blessedness in the world to come, in two ways: First those who practise virginity, living for God, do not bring forth fruit for Death; as they have put an end to life after the flesh, they henceforth wait for the Parousia "not bringing about by intermediate generations any interval (διάστημα) between the Parousia and themselves". Secondly, by their angelic life, which is the way of life after the resurrection, they have already received in the present life the promised goods.

This chapter reveals some aspects of marriage and time which seem to contrast with the author's view in his later work Hom. Opif. Marriage as the institution of procreation is rather negatively seen as sustaining the power of Death, and even, as it seems, delaying the moment of the Parousia. Virginity is the end not only of marriage, but also of Death and time. Here we seem to be back to the encratite view of EvEg. But how is this to

68. Pushing the comparison somewhat further we could say that the difference consists in that for Plato the circular course of time brings back the same souls and thus safeguards their immortality, whereas for Gregory, time has a beginning and an end, and thus the process of begetting gives only a relative immortality.



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