

"Immortality of the Soul."

BEFORE starting to discuss so important a subject, it would be well to have a clear and thorough understanding of what is meant by the terms "Soul" and "Immortality." According to the enthroned Angelic Doctor, Saint Thomas Aquinas the "Soul" is "The first principle by which we live, think, and understand" and according to the same illustrious Master of Theology and Philosophy "Immortality" means "The indestructibility or the incorruptibility of life." That there is in man a first vital principle by which he lives, thinks and understands is a fact admitted by all men of thought; but that this first principle from which those vital actions flow is imperishable or incorruptible is something not so readily accepted. This is due no doubt to the materialistic viewpoint from which those, who hold the contrary, consider the question.

"Indestructibility or incorruptibility is in itself threefold namely—essential, of privilege, and of nature." Let us pass over the first—as God, Himself, is the only one essentially immortal. To be immortal by privilege depends upon the gratuitous assistance of God and not by one's own natural virtue or energy. And to be immortal by nature is to say that nature in itself does not contain any principles of corruption.

The proposition that we are going to prove is this: that the human soul is immortal by nature. It is true that the human soul is contingent, for the simple reason that all created things are contingent; but, however, having once received its existence from the creative hand of God, it shall continue to exist. By his relative power God will never destroy the soul; but there is no repugnance in the statement that an Omnipotent God who could call the human soul from nothing could by His absolute power reduce it to nothing by annihilation.

Passing over the possibility of the human soul's being swept out of existence by Him who called it into being, we shall now consider in what other way or ways the soul could cease to be. There are only two conceivable ways by which the soul—that vital first principle of man could cease to exist. First that in itself it is subject to corruption, or second, that it has an essential dependence upon some other thing, the destruction of which would destroy the soul.

To concede to the first named assumption or supposition would be to grant that the soul is composed of elements like material substances—which is false, and to admit the second hypothesis would be to say that the soul is not a spiritual substance, that it intrinsically and subjectively depends on matter—which statement is not true. Consequently the human soul is immortal.

Now we know from experience that the soul can conceive ideas absolutely void of all extension of time or of space and completely apart from all sense qualities and a compound substance cannot do this. Therefore the soul is a simple substance,

Neither is the soul dependent on the body for its existence. It is a truth in philosophy that every action or operation manifests the principle from which it proceeds and when we have an action or operation such as volition or thought which is independent of and transcends all time and space, not circumscribed or trammelled by any corporeal substance, we can conclude, and rightly so, that such an action or operation is independent of matter; and as the action so also is the principle of that from which it springs. Hence the soul of man is independent of matter, that is, it is immaterial, it is spiritual.

From the fact that the soul is immortal it follows that after man has thrown off his animality or to use the beautiful Shakespearian expression "Shuffled off this mortal coil" his soul will continue to subsist. God will not annihilate the human soul because it would be contrary to His Divine Attributes namely Justice, Wisdom and Goodness. First, considering God's Wisdom let us keep in mind, "That He hath ordered all things wisely," and when He created the human soul He endowed it with an innate immortality for it was created not for time but for eternity.

In viewing it from God's justice we find that human justice in the vast majority of cases is willing to mete out punishment to the culprit, but alas how often is human justice evaded!. Now if death ended all, it would be indifferent whether a man lived a life compatible or incompatible with the divine decrees. Consequently we can safely deduce that there is a life beyond the grave where everyone is rewarded or punished according to his work.

Thirdly, and lastly, from God's Goodness. The conscience of each and everyone testifies that the heart is always yearning for something better,—for happiness. However, true happiness is not obtained here on earth, as we all know from experience. Now if all ended with death, we could truly say that man was "tortured in life and swallowed up in death." But God did not implant in our souls an innate desire or longing for happiness and then leave us in that despondent and hopeless condition without any hope of its fulfillment. For if nature does nothing in vain, much less so does God the Author of nature. Finally let us quote these beautiful lines from Saint Augustine. "Thou has made us for Thyself O God and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in thee."

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