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Our individual persona isn't terminated on death (Elder Marcel of Karakallou)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



From the time we're created, each individual has a particular mode of existence, which is not extinguished when we die. Saint John the Damascan says that the union of soul and body occurs at the beginning of our formation. 'Body and soul are formed at the same time'. This specific persona of each individual is not dismantled even on our death. The soul may indeed be separated from the body at death, but the personhood remains the same.

Each person is a unique and inimitable personality. This special individuality, this specific persona, never ceases to exist. This is why, in the parable of Dives and

Lazarus, the Lord says that the rich man saw *Lazarus* in the bosom of Abraham, not merely Lazarus' soul.

The aim of the divine incarnation was to bring fallen humankind into their inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is why all the Fathers declare that the Word of God became human in order to deify human nature.

When we talk about the deification (glorification) of human nature, we agree that the righteous become sharers in divine nature, although always with the proviso that their human nature isn't obliterated, but participates in the divine glory of our inapproachable God to the extent that we're able to do so.

In other words, the individuality of each person is retained, elevated through the resurrection, approaches divine glory, but still remains finite.

And all of this depends on the incarnation of the Divine Word. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, took human nature upon Himself and united with it as a Person and a Persona. Both natures remained unconfused. When the flesh was deified, it didn't lose its own nature. This is Jesus, perfect God and perfect human. It was over the dogma of the two natures and one hypostasis of Christ that all the battles with the Monophysites were fought.

By grace, not by essence, the righteous take part in divine glory and communion, but each person continues to retain his or her personality. But this is where God's magnificent and infinite wisdom and loving-kindness come in.

The Word as infinite God 'dwells in inaccessible light' (*1 Tim. 6, 16*) and no-one can approach His divine brilliance, but all of us saved Christians are united to His divine human nature, and, all together constitute His body, 'the fullness of Him who fills all in all' (*Eph. 1, 23*). Since Christ is the Head of the Church and we are the members, then the body becomes perfect when we're all united in Christ. The Church is His body, the fulfilment of Christ as a person.

What has been said so far is enough to prove that the incarnate Word of God is the root cause of the fact that people retain their personalities even after death. This becomes even clearer from the teachings of the holy Fathers.

This indissoluble persona, consisting of the soul and the body, is described for us by Gregory the Theologian in his funeral oration for his brother Kaisarios: 'I await the voice of the Archangel, the last trump, the transformation of the heavens, the alteration of the earth, the liberation of the elements, the renewal of the world. Then I'll see Kaisarios himself, without having died, without us accompanying him

to the tomb, without lamentation, without us feeling sorry for him. He'll be bright, glorious, elevated...'

The notion that the separation of the soul from the body doesn't eradicate a person's individual identity is also accepted by Saint Gregory of Nyssa. In his dialogue with his sister, Saint Makrina, he uses two wonderful examples and with stunning precision demonstrates that the soul always recognizes its own body, both as it was when they were united and after their separation.

He uses an example from painting. In order to paint a subject, the artist mixes a variety of colours, but can still discern the individual colours he's applied in making the mixture.

A second example he uses is from pottery and again demonstrates that the soul has no difficulty in identifying its own body, even when it's mixed with other, foreign elements. Ceramic objects are made from the same clay. The potter creates a variety of objects which don't have the same form or the same use. A pitcher is one thing, a wine-jar another and a plate something else. All of these objects have their own shapes and particular features, by which they're recognized by their owners.

And then again, if they're broken, they can be mended and become recognizable: which bits belongs to the wine-jar, to the pitcher, to the cup. And if the broken pieces get mixed up with unworked clay, then it's even easier for the owner to recognize the baked pieces.

From the above we can understand very clearly that death, that is the separation of the soul from the body, doesn't eradicate a person's individual identity. People stay the same.

The separation of the soul from the body is temporary and lasts as long as they're in what we call the middle situation of the departed. At Christ's second coming, the soul and body will be united. We shall rise, with new bodies, not subject to decay, as Saint Paul teaches us: the Lord 'will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of His glory', (*Phil. 3, 21*).

And Saint Makarios the Egyptian affirms the permanent integrity of human nature with great clarity: 'At the Resurrection, all the members rise and not a single hair is lost, as has been written, "Not a hair of your head shall be lost" (*Luke 21, 18*). And everything will be lambent, bathed in light and fire and transformed, not, as some say, broken up and consumed by the fire so that their nature no longer exists. Because Peter's still Peter, Paul Paul and Philip Philip. People remain in their own

nature and specific identity, filled with the Holy Spirit'.

(†Markellos Karakallinos, *Η φύση του σώματος μετά την Ανάστασιν*, Holy Monastery of Karakallou, pp. 20-24).