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RHETORIK, MEDIZIN UND GLAUBEN:

DIE AUFFASSUNG DES MENSCHLICHEN KÖRPERS IN LAKTANZ' *DE OPIFICIO DEI* UND

GREGOR VON NYSSA *περὶ κατασκευῆς ἀνθρώπου*

(Rhetoric, Medicine and Faith: The Human Body in Lactantius' *On the Works of God* and Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Creation of Man*)

In their treatises *On the Works of God* (303/4 AD) and *On the Creation of Man* (ca. 385 AD) both Lactantius and Gregory of Nyssa examine from a physiological, theological and philosophical point of view the human nature as a compound of body and soul. The paper analyzes their descriptions of the human body, explaining on the one hand the rhetorical strategies which underlie them and stressing on the other hand the epistemological premises upon which they are based. For their arguments are rather different, although both aim at educating their audience to specific Christian 'values' and both make use of ideas originating from Pagan philosophy. Thus Lactantius stresses that his words are his own opinion, while Gregory presents his exposition as an authoritative doctrine.

For Lactantius

- 1) the human body is an "earthen vessel" made by a skilled potter, God, and contains the true man (*homo ipse verus*), i.e. the human soul;
- 2) God's workmanship is provident;
- 3) Human knowledge is confined to things we can perceive and observe.

These three aspects are mirrored in the structure of the treatise itself and above all in the description of the inner organs which Lactantius considers "of unknown function" (hearth, liver, spleen and gall bladder).

Gregory on the contrary claims that the individual human being should not be identified with the soul but – since resurrection is not implausible – with the compound of body and soul and emphasizes their mutual interrelation by describing the human being as a musician (soul) who can reach mastery only if he plays the right instrument (body). He tries to demonstrate the plausibility of his views by the use of rhetorical strategies too. In his description of the human body which closes his treatise and is presented as an epitome of medical works, he asserts indeed that personal experience is able both to teach everybody how the human body works and to show that body and soul are intertwined.