

Chapter 2

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

Throughout human history, people have refused to accept the finality that death brings to life. They have tried to deny the reality of death by teaching various forms of life after death. A key component of this teaching has been the belief in the survival of the soul apart from the body at the moment of death.

In spite of scientific breakthroughs in our understanding of the nature of life, the popularity of the belief in the immortality of the soul has not subsided. On the contrary, it is spreading today like wildfire. According to a recent Gallup Poll, 71 percent of Americans believe in some form of conscious life after death.¹ The popularity of this belief can be attributed not only to the traditional teachings of Catholic and Protestant churches, but also to such factors as the polished image of mediums and psychics, the sophisticated “scientific” research into near-death experiences, and the popular New Age channeling with the alleged spirits of the past.

As a result few beliefs are more widely held in common today than that of the “immortal soul.” Virtually everyone is familiar with this belief. If questioned, the average religious person would define the belief something like this: A human being is composed of both body and soul. The body is the temporary, physical, flesh-and-blood “shell” that houses the soul. The soul is the nonmaterial, immortal component that leaves the body at death and lives on consciously forever in heaven or hell (or purgatory for the Catholics).

Is this popular belief taught in the Bible? Does the Bible teach that we have an immortal soul that leaves the body at death and heads on for heaven or hell, or purgatory? Average religious persons will answer “YES”! They simply assume that the Bible teaches the immortality of the soul. Is this true? Absolutely NOT! This chapter shows that the notion of an immortal soul co-existing with a mortal body is foreign to the Bible. It derives mostly from Greek pagan philosophies that gradually entered into the Christian church.

We shall see that the biblical view of human nature is holistic, not dualistic, that is to say, body and soul are not two distinct components but an indissoluble unity. The soul is simply the animating principle of the body. So prepare yourself for what could be one of the big surprises of your life!

Objectives of this Chapter

This chapter pursues three major objectives. First we will briefly trace the history of the belief in the immortality of the soul by focusing first on the impact of the Greek philosophers Socrates (470-399 B. C.), Plato (427-347 B. C.), and Aristotle (384-322 B. C.) on the development of the Christian understanding of human nature. Then, we will briefly consider the key role played by Tertullian (155-240), Origen (ca. 185-254), Augustine (354-430) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) in leading the church to adopt the Platonic dualistic view of human nature.

Our second objective is to define the biblical view of the soul. Our study of the “soul texts” found both in the Old and New Testaments shows that contrary to popular beliefs, the soul is not an immaterial, immortal part of human nature that survives the body at death, but the animating, life principle of the body. It is often used as a synonym for the whole person.

Our third objective is to compare and contrast the doctrinal and practical implications biblical holistic view of human nature with the Platonic dualistic view embraced by Catholics and most Protestants. We shall see that the two views impact directly or indirectly on a host of Christian beliefs and practices. The ultimate goal of this study is to lead truth-seekers to understand and accept the biblical view of our nature and destiny.

The material contained in this chapter is largely excerpted from my book *Immortality or Resurrection?* Interested readers may find a fuller treatment of the subject in this book. For brevity’s sake, important topics like the biblical view of the human “spirit,” have been left out in this chapter.

PART 1 A HISTORICAL GLIMPSE OF THE BELIEF IN THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

The serpent’s lie, “You will not die” (Gen 3:4), has lived on throughout human history to our time. Practically every society holds a belief in some form of life after death. The need for reassurance and certainty in

the light of the challenge that death poses to human life has led people in every culture to formulate beliefs in some form of afterlife. Such beliefs, as we shall see, reflect human attempts to achieve immortal life through human speculations rather than divine revelation.

Egyptians' Belief in the Immortality of the Soul

Pinpointing the historical origin of the belief in the immortality of the soul is difficult since all ancient civilizations held to some form of conscious life after death. The Greek historian Herodotus, who lived in the fifth century before Christ, tells us in his *History* that the ancient Egyptians were the first to teach that the soul of man is immortal and separable from the body. At death the soul passes through various animals before being reborn in human form. The cycle was supposed to take three thousand years.²

Nowhere in the ancient world was the concern for the afterlife felt so deeply as in Egypt. The countless tombs unearthed by archaeologists along the Nile offer an eloquent testimony to the Egyptian belief in conscious life after death. Egyptians spent a significant amount of time and money preparing for life after death. They practiced elaborate ceremonies to prepare the pharaohs for their next life, constructing massive pyramids and other elaborate tombs filled with luxuries the deceased were supposed to need in the hereafter. The famous *Book of the Dead*, a collection of ancient Egyptian funerary and ritual texts, describes in great detail how to meet the challenges of the afterlife.

Greek Philosophers Promoted Immortality of the Soul

The Egyptian belief in the immortality of the soul existed centuries before Judaism, Hellenism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. According to Herodotus, eventually the Greeks adopted from the Egyptians the belief in the immortality of the soul. He wrote: "The Egyptians also were the first who asserted the doctrine that the soul of man is immortal . . . This opinion, some among the Greeks have at different periods of time adopted as their own."³

The Greek philosopher Socrates (470-399 B. C.) traveled to Egypt to consult the Egyptians on their teachings on the immortality of the soul. Upon his return to Greece, he imparted this teaching to his most famous pupil, Plato (428-348 B. C.). In his book, *The Phaedo*, Plato recounts Socrates' final conversation with his friends on the last day of his life. He was condemned to die by drinking hemlock for corrupting the youths of Athens by teaching them "atheism," that is, the rejection of the gods.

The setting was an Athenian prison and the time the summer of 399 B. C. Socrates spent his last day discussing the origin, nature, and destiny of the human soul with his closest friends.

In the dialogue Socrates repeatedly declares death to be “the separation of the soul from the body” in which it is encased. His language is strikingly similar to that of many Christian churches today. “The soul whose inseparable attribute is life, will never admit of life’s opposite, death. Thus the soul is shown to be immortal, and since immortal, indestructible. . . . Do we believe there is such a thing as death? To be sure. And is this anything but the separation of the soul and body? And being dead is the attainment of this separation, when the soul exists in herself and separate from the body, and the body is parted from the soul. That is death. . . . Death is merely the separation of soul and body.”⁴ In *Phaedo*, Plato explains that there is a judgment after death for all souls according to the deeds done in the body. The righteous souls go to heaven and the wicked to hell.⁵

This teaching found its way first into Hellenistic Judaism especially through the influence of Philo Judaeus (ca. 20 B.C. A. D. 47) and later into Christianity especially through the influence of Tertullian (ca. 155-230), Origen (ca. 185-254), Augustine (354-430), and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). These writers attempted to blend the Platonic view of the immortality of the soul with the biblical teachings on the resurrection of the body.

Two Groups of Jewish Writers during the Inter-Testament Period

During the inter-Testament period, that is, the four centuries that separate the end of the Old Testament from the beginning of the New Testament, two groups of Jewish Apocryphal writers appeared. The earlier writers maintained the Old Testament holistic view of human nature in which immortality is not an innate human possession, but a conditional gift of eternal life given to believers at the resurrection. This view, known as “Conditional Immortality,” culminated in the Conditionalist witness of the *Dead Sea Scroll*.⁶

A later group of Jewish writers were influenced by the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul, prayer for the dead, and denial of the resurrection. These teachings, found in what was known as the Apocrypha of the Old Testament, are included in the Catholic Bible but omitted in the Protestant Bible and in the Hebrew Old Testament. They include 1 and 2 Esdra, 1, 2, 3, 4 Maccabees, Baruch, additions to Daniel, Judith, The Prayer of Manasseh, Sirach, Tobit, and the Wisdom of Solomon.

The most influential Hellenistic Jewish writer Philo Judaeus (ca. 20 B.C. A. D. 47) systematically attempted to prove the existence of an inner harmony between Plato and Moses, that is, between Jewish religious thought and Greek philosophy. He taught that man has an irrational soul in common with all living creatures and a rational soul in common with the unbodied souls in the heavens. At the death of the body, the rational souls of the righteous return to the realm of the unbodied heavenly beings which are souls. By contrast the souls of the wicked will suffer endless punishment.⁷ Gradually this teaching infiltrated into the Christian Church which was already influenced by a modified form of Platonism called Neo-platonism.

Early Christian Church: Immortality is a Gift Received at the Resurrection

Christ and the apostles confirmed and clarified the Old Testament holistic view of human nature by teaching that immortality is not an innate human possession, but a gift reserved for the righteous and bestowed at the resurrection. Unrepentant sinners will be ultimately destroyed.

This view continued intact throughout the writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers (Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, the Didache, Barnabas of Alexandria, Hermas of Rome, Polycarp of Smyrna) and in a conspicuous line of later writers such as Justin, Irenaeus, Novatian, Arnobius, Lactantius.

Le Roy Froom concludes his 100-page survey of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers (writers who lived closest to the Apostles) by quoting from a similar exhaustive survey done by Henry Constable, an Anglican Irish Priest, who wrote: "From beginning to end of them [the Apostolic Fathers] there is not a word said of that immortality of the soul which is so prominent in the writings of later fathers. Immortality is by them asserted to be peculiar to the redeemed. . . . Not one stray expression of theirs can be interpreted as giving any countenance to the theory of restoration after purgatorial suffering."⁸ The same conclusion applies to several later writers mentioned earlier.

Innate Immortality Belately Infiltrates the Church

Christian writers adopted a modified form of the Platonic view of the immortality of the soul beginning from the latter part of the second century. The most influential promoters were Tertullian (155-240), Origen (ca. 185-254), Augustine (354-430) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). We shall say a few words about each of them.

Tertullian: Eternal Torment

Tertullian is rightly regarded as the founder of Latin theology. Born in a heathen home in Cathage, North Africa, he received legal training in Rome. At the age of forty, he returned to Carthage where he embraced the Christian faith after witnessing the courage of martyrs and the holy lives of Christians. His numerous apologetic, theological, and ascetic works in Latin, have influenced Latin Christianity.

Tertullian was the first to formulate the teachings of endless torment for the wicked by applying the notion of the immortality of the soul to the saved and unsaved. He expressly taught that “the torments of the lost will be co-eternal with the happiness of the saved.”⁹

Tertullian rejected Plato’s teaching of the pre-existence of the souls, but he embraced his teaching that “every soul is immortal.” He wrote: “For some things are known even by nature: the immortality of the soul, for instance, is held by many . . . I may use therefore, *the opinion of Plato*, when he declares: ‘*Every soul is immortal*’”¹⁰ Note that the opinion of Plato is cited to support the belief in the immortality of the soul. No attempt is made to validate such doctrine by the authority of Scripture obviously because, as we shall see, in the Bible the soul does not exist apart from the body.

Origen: Universal Restoration

The influence of Platonic dualism is particularly evident in the writings of Origen (ca. 185-254), a man who came to be acknowledged as the most accomplished scholar of his generation. He rejected Tertullian’s teaching of eternal torment, promoting instead the universal restoration of even the most incorrigible sinners, including the demons and Satan himself. He maintained that after a period of corrective punishment, all of them will be brought again into ultimate subjection to Christ.

Origen’s teaching largely derives from Plato’s notion that the soul is an immaterial and immortal substance. In his *De Principiis* (On the Principle), Origen repeatedly refers to the “soul” as a “substance” which partakes of the “eternal nature” and “lasts for ever.” “Every substance which partakes of that eternal nature should last for ever, and be incorruptible and eternal.”¹¹

Since the soul partakes of the divine nature and cannot be destroyed, Origen reasoned that the only way moral evil can ultimately be eliminated is for God to restore even the incorrigibly wicked after His “consuming fire . . .thoroughly cleanses away the evil.”¹²

Both Tertullian's eternal torment of sinners and Origen's cleansing of the wicked by fire are *unbiblical* teachings which are fatal to true Christian faith, though in opposite ways. One threatened an eternal punishment that God never decreed and the other promised a universal salvation that God never authorized. In Scripture evil is a reality of this present time, not an inevitable part of eternity. By allowing their minds to be guided by pagan philosophies rather than Scriptural teachings, brilliant men like Tertullian and Origen developed heresies that have undermined Christian beliefs and practices during the course of Christian history.

Augustine Sets the Immortal Soul Teaching for the Middle Ages

Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo, North Africa, is rightly regarded as the most influential Latin Father. His influence on theology was immense, particularly up to the thirteenth century when Thomas Aquinas appeared.

Augustine's influence was so powerful that his theories regarding the natural immortality of the soul and the eternal torment of the wicked dominated for centuries. Once he asked: "What simple and illiterate man or obscured woman that does not believe the immortality of the soul and a future life?"¹³ It is evident that by that time this belief had become widely accepted. But the validity of a teaching is determined not by its popularity, but by its conformity to biblical witness.

For Augustine death meant the destruction of the body, which enabled the immortal soul to continue to live in either the beatitude of Paradise or in the eternal torment of Hell. In *The City of God* he wrote that the soul "is therefore called immortal, because in a sense, it does not cease to live and to feel; while the body is called mortal because it can be forsaken of all life, and cannot by itself live at all."¹⁴

Augustine modified the Platonic conception of the soul by teaching that a human being is a rational soul that *uses* a mortal, material body, but the soul is not *imprisoned* in the body. Furthermore, he taught that the soul does not pre-exist eternally, as maintained by Plato, but comes into existence when incarnated in a body.

Augustine's modified form of Platonism dominated much of medieval Catholic thought until the appearance of Thomas Aquinas. During this time the teachings of Socrates and Plato became so widely accepted that the two men were frequently regarded as divinely inspired pre-Christian saints.

Thomas Aquinas Defines the Traditional Catholic Teaching of the Immortality of the Soul.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) is rightly considered by most Roman Catholics as their greatest theologian. His definition of Catholic teaching has been largely unsurpassed. With regard to the nature of man, he developed a less radical dualism by emphasizing the unity that exists between the body and the soul.

Contrary to the Platonic-Agustinian view in which the soul dwells in the body for a time without forming one substantial being, Thomas Aquinas considers the soul as *the form of the body*. His thinking was influenced by Aristotle who viewed the soul primarily as a life principle. But Aquinas departed from Aristotle by claiming independent existence for the soul.

According to Aquinas, a substantial unity exists between the soul and the body, or more exactly, between the spiritual principle and the material principle, which are united as “form” and “matter” in order to form one complete being. “It is clear that the soul is united to the body by nature: because by its essence it is the form of the body. Therefore it is contrary to the nature of the soul to be deprived of the body.”¹⁵

Aquinas defended the immortality of the soul by arguing that it is a “substantial form” that exists independently of the body, but desires to be joined together again to its own body at the Resurrection. He strongly opposed those who held to the biblical view that the soul is the animating principle of the body which is mortal until God confers upon it the gift of immortality at the Resurrection.

Aquinas’ definition of the immortal soul as the *form* of the body has become the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church that is still current today. In fact, Aquinas’ language is reflected in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which states: “The unity of the soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the ‘*form*’ of the body. . . . The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God—it is not ‘produced’ by the parents—and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection.”¹⁶

This definition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* rightly represents what the Catholic Church teaches, but not what the Bible teaches. Shortly we shall see that the teaching of the immortal soul that separates from the body at death is foreign to the teachings of the Bible.

It is derived, as our survey has shown, from Greek dualistic speculations that have perverted the teachings of the Word of God.

The belief in the survival of the soul contributed to the development of the doctrine of Purgatory, a place where the souls of the dead are purified by suffering the temporal punishment of their sins before ascending to Paradise. This widely believed doctrine burdened the living with emotional and financial stress. As Ray Anderson puts it, “Not only did one have to earn enough to live, but also to pay off the ‘spiritual mortgage’ for the dead as well.”¹⁷

Reformers’ Rejection of Purgatory

The Protestant Reformation started largely as a reaction against the medieval superstitious beliefs about the afterlife in Purgatory. The Reformers rejected as unbiblical and unreasonable the practice of buying and selling indulgences to reduce the stay of the souls of departed relatives in Purgatory. However, they continued to believe in the conscious existence of souls either in Paradise or Hell.

Calvin expressed this belief far more aggressively than Luther.¹⁸ In his treatise *Psychopannychia*,¹⁹ which he wrote against the Anabaptists who taught that souls simply sleep between death and resurrection, Calvin argues that between death and resurrection—known as the intermediate state—the souls of the believers enjoy the bliss of heaven; those of the unbelievers suffer the torments of hell. At the resurrection, the body is reunited with the soul, thus intensifying the pleasure of paradise or the pain of hell. Since that time, this doctrine of the intermediate state has been accepted by most Protestant churches and is reflected in various Confessions.²⁰

For example, the Westminster Confession (1646), regarded as the definitive statement of (Calvinistic) Presbyterian beliefs in the English-speaking world, states: “The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep) having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received unto the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies: and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day.”²¹ The confession continues declaring as unbiblical the belief in purgatory.

Revival of the Belief in the Immortality of the Soul

Public interest in the life of the soul after death has been revived in our times not only by the teachings of Catholic and Protestant churches, but also through various attempts to communicate with the spirits of the dead through mediums, psychics, “scientific” research into near-death experiences, and New Age channeling with the spirits of the past.

In the 1960s, the late Episcopal bishop James A. Pike gave new and widespread attention to the idea of communicating with the spirits of the dead by claiming to converse on a regular basis with his deceased son. Today our society is flooded with mediums and psychics who advertise their services nationwide through TV, magazines, radio, and newspapers.

In their book *At the Hour of Death*, K. Osis and E. Haraldson write: “Spontaneous experiences of contact with the dead are surprisingly widespread. In a national opinion poll . . . 27 per cent of the American population said they had encounters with dead relatives, . . . widows and widowers . . . reported encounters with their dead spouses twice as often 51 per-cent.”²² Communication with the spirits of the dead is not just an American phenomenon. Surveys conducted in other countries reveal a similarly high percentage of people who engage the services of mediums to communicate with the spirits of their deceased loved ones.²³

Conclusion

The preceding survey has shown that Satan’s lie, “You shall not die” (Gen 3:4), has lived on in different forms throughout human history, especially through the belief in the immortality of the soul and its separation from the body at death. The popularity of this belief stems from the desire to disarm death by giving people the false assurance that they possess a divine element that lives on after the death of their body. Ultimately such a belief does away with the need for Christ’s Return to bestow the gift of immortality on believers at the Final Resurrection.

Our only protection against the deceptive teaching of the immortality of the soul, is through a clear understanding of what the Bible teaches about the make-up of human nature, especially the relationship between the body and the soul. It is to this subject that we now turn our attention.

PART 2
THE OLD TESTAMENT VIEW
OF HUMAN NATURE

The logical starting point for the study of the Biblical view of human nature is the account of the creation of man. We use here the term “man” in the inclusive biblical meaning of man and woman.

Genesis 2:7: “A Living Soul”

The most important Biblical statement for understanding human nature is found in Genesis 2:7. Not surprisingly, this text forms the basis of much of the discussion regarding human nature since it provides the only Biblical account of how God created man. The text reads: “Then God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

Historically, this text has been read through the lenses of classical dualism. It has been assumed that the breath of life God breathed into man’s nostrils was simply an immaterial, immortal soul implanted into the material body. And just as earthly life began with the implantation of an immortal soul into a physical body, so it ends when the soul departs from the body. Thus Genesis 2:7 has been historically interpreted on the basis of the traditional body-soul dualism.

People who read the Old Testament references to *nephesh* (which in the King James version are translated 472 times as “soul”) with a dualistic mind-set will have great difficulty in understanding the Biblical view of the body and the soul as being the same person seen from different perspectives. They will experience problems with accepting the Biblical meaning of the “soul” as the animating principle of both human and animal life. Furthermore, they will be at a loss to explain those passages that speak of a *dead person* as a *dead soul–nephesh* (Lev 19:28; 21:1, 11; 22:4; Num 5:2; 6:6,11; 9:6, 7, 10; 19:11, 13; Hag 2:13). For them it is inconceivable that an immortal soul dies with the body.

The Meaning of “Living Soul”

The prevailing assumption that the human soul is immortal has led many to interpret the phrase “man *became* a living soul” (Gen 2:7 KJV) to mean that “man *obtained* a living soul.” This interpretation has been

challenged by numerous scholars who are aware of the difference between the Greek-dualistic and the Biblical-holistic conception of human nature.

For example, in his classic study *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, Hans Walter Wolff comments on Genesis 2:7 saying: “What does *nephesh* [soul] mean here? Certainly not soul [in the traditional dualistic sense]. *Nephesh* [soul] was designed to be seen together with the whole form of man, and especially with his breath; moreover man does not *have nephesh* [soul], he *is nephesh* [soul], he lives as *nephesh* [soul].”²⁴

The fact that the soul in the Bible stands for the whole living person is recognized even by Catholic scholar Dom Wulstan Mork. In his book, *The Biblical Meaning of Man*, published with the official Catholic *imprimatur*-approval, surprisingly Mork writes: “It is *nephesh* [soul] that gives life to the *bashar* [body], but not as a distinct substance. Adam doesn’t have *nephesh* [soul]; he is *nephesh* [soul], just as he is *bashar* [body]. The body, far from being divided from its animating principle, is the visible *nephesh* [soul].”²⁵ Such a clear definition of the biblical view of human nature in a Catholic book published with the official *imprimatur* is encouraging. The problem is that Mork’s scholarly study, though published with the *imprimatur*, does not affect the traditional dualistic Catholic view which is based on *traditio*, not on biblical research.

From a Biblical perspective, the body and the soul are not two different substances (one mortal and the other immortal) abiding together within one human being, but two characteristics of the same person. Johannes Pedersen admirably sums up this point by this proverbial statement: “The body is the soul in its outward form.”²⁶ The same view is expressed by H. Wheeler Robinson in an equally famous statement: “The Hebrew idea of personality is that of an animated body, not (like the Greek) that of an incarnate soul.”²⁷

Summing up, we can say that the expression, “man became a living soul—*nephesh hayyah*,” does not mean that at creation his body was endowed with an immortal soul as a separate entity distinct from the body. Rather, it means that as a result of the divine inbreathing of the “breath of life” into the lifeless body, man became a living, breathing being, no more, no less. The heart began to beat, the blood to circulate, the brain to think, and all the vital signs of life were activated. Simply stated, “a living soul” means “a living being.”

The practical implications of this definition are brought out in a suggestive way by Dom Mork: “Man as *nephesh* [soul] means that it is his *nephesh* [soul] that goes to dinner, tackling a steak and eating it. When I see another person, what I see is not merely his body, but his

visible *nephesh* [soul] because, in the terms of Genesis 2:7, that is what man is—a living *nephesh*. The eyes have been called ‘the window of the soul.’ This is actually dichotomy. The eyes, as long as they belong to the living person, are *in themselves* the revelation of the soul.”²⁸

Animals as “Living Souls

The meaning of “living soul” as simply “living being” is supported by the use of the same phrase “living soul–*nephesh hayyah*” for animals. In our KJV Bible, this phrase appears for the first time in Genesis 2:7 when the creation of Adam is described. But in the Hebrew Bible we find the same phrase already in Genesis 1:20, 21, 24, and 30. In all four of these verses “living soul–*nephesh hayyah*” refers to animals, but translators of most English versions have chosen to translate it “living creature” rather than “living soul.” Why? Simply because they are conditioned by the belief that animals do not have a soul—only human beings have an immaterial, immortal soul.

Norman Snaith finds this deceptive translation “most reprehensible” and says . . . “it is a grave reflection on the Revisers [translators of the Authorized version] that they retained this misleading difference in translation. . . . The Hebrew phrase should be translated exactly the same way in both cases. To do otherwise is to mislead all those who do not read Hebrew. There is no excuse and no proper defense. The tendency to read ‘immortal soul’ into Hebrew *nephesh* and to translate accordingly is very ancient, and can be seen in the Septuagint . . .”²⁹

Basil Atkinson, a former Librarian at Cambridge University, offers the same explanation. “Our translators [of the Authorized Version] have concealed this fact from us, presumably because they were so bound by current theological notions of the meaning of the word ‘soul,’ that they dared not translate by it a Hebrew word that referred to animals, although they have used it in the margin [of the Authorized Version] at verses 20 and 30. In these verses we find ‘the moving creature, even living soul’ (Heb.) (ver. 20); ‘every living soul (Heb. *nephesh*) that moveth’ (ver. 21); ‘Let the earth bring forth the living soul (Heb. *nephesh*) after his kind’ (ver. 24); ‘and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is living soul’ (Heb. *nephesh*) (ver. 30).”³⁰

The use of *nephesh*—soul in these verses to refer to all sorts of animals clearly shows that *nephesh* is not an immortal soul given to man, but the animating principle of life or “the life-breath” which is present in

both humans and animals. What distinguishes the human soul from that of animals is the fact that humans were created in God's image, that is, with godlike possibilities unavailable to animals. The important point to note at this juncture is that both man and animal *are* souls because they both share the same animating life-principle or "life-breath."

Summing up, in the context of creation the word "*nephesh*-soul" is used to designate the animating principle of life which is present in both human beings and animals. At this point, we wish to explore the broader use of *nephesh* in the Old Testament. Since *nephesh* occurs in the Old Testament 754 times and is rendered in 45 different ways,³¹ our focus is on three main usages of the word that relate directly to the object of our investigation.

Soul as a Needy Person

In his state-of-the-art book *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, acknowledged as a classic study by scholars of different religious persuasions, Hans Walter Wolff entitles the chapter on the soul as "*Nephesh*-Needy Man."³² The reason for this characterization of *nephesh* as "needy man" becomes evident when one reads the many texts which picture *nephesh*-soul in dangerous life and death situations.

Since it is God who made man "a living soul" and who sustains the human soul, the Hebrews when in danger appealed to God to deliver their soul, that is, their life. David prayed: "Deliver my soul [*nephesh*] from the wicked" (Ps 17:13, KJV): "For thy righteousness sake, O Lord, bring my soul [*nephesh*] out of trouble" (Ps. 143:11, KJV). The Lord deserves to be praised, "for he has delivered the soul [*nephesh*] of the poor from the hand of the evildoers" (Jer 20:13).

People greatly feared for their souls [*nephesh*] (Jos 9:24) when others were seeking their souls [*nephesh*] (Ex 4:19; 1 Sam 23:15). They had to flee for their souls [*nephesh*] (2 Kings 7:7) or defend their souls [*nephesh*] (Esther 8:11); if they did not, their souls [*nephesh*] would be utterly destroyed (Jos 10:28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39). "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ez 18:4, 20). Rahab asked the two Israelite spies to save her family, saying: "Deliver our souls [*nephesh*] from death" (Jos 2:13). In these instances, it is evident that the soul that was in danger and needed to be delivered was the life of the individual.

The soul experienced danger not only from enemies but also from lack of food. In lamenting the state of Jerusalem, Jeremiah says: "All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul [*nephesh*]" (Lam 1:11). The Israelites grumbled

in the wilderness because they no longer had meat as they had in Egypt. “But now our soul [*nephesh*] is dried away: there is nothing at all, besides this manna, before our eyes” (Num 11:6).

The theme of danger and deliverance associated with the soul [*nephesh*] allows us to see that the soul in the Old Testament was viewed, not as an immortal component of human nature, but as the uncertain, insecure condition of life which sometimes was threatened unto death. Those situations which involved intense danger and deliverance reminded the Israelites that they were needy souls [*nephesh*], living persons whose life depended constantly upon God for protection and deliverance.

Soul as Seat of Emotions

Being the animating principle of human life, the soul functioned also as the center of emotional activities. In speaking of the Shunammite, 2 Kings 4:27 says: “Her soul [*nephesh*] is vexed within her” (KJV). David cried to the Lord, seeking deliverance from his enemies, saying: “My soul [*nephesh*] is also sore vexed. . . . Return, O Lord, deliver my soul [*nephesh*]” (Ps 6:3-4).

While the people were waiting for God’s deliverance, their soul was losing vitality. Tory Hoff notes that “because the Psalmist often wrote from within this experience [of danger], the Psalms include phrases such as ‘their soul fainted in them’ (Ps 107:5), ‘my soul melts for sorrow’ (Ps 119:28), ‘my soul languishes for salvation’ (Ps 119:81), ‘my soul longs, yea, faints for thy courts’ (Ps 84:2), and ‘their soul melted away in their evil plight’ (Ps 107:26). Job asked, ‘How long will you torment my soul’ (Job 19:2). It was also the soul that would wait for deliverance. ‘For God does my soul wait in silence’ (Ps 62:1). ‘I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and in his word I hope’ (Ps 130:5).

“Since the Hebrew knew all deliverance came from God, his soul would ‘take refuge’ in God (Ps 57:1) and ‘thirst for him’ (Ps 42:2; 63:1). Once the danger had passed and the intense, precarious nature of the situation was over, the soul would praise God for deliverance received. ‘My soul makes its boast in the Lord, let the afflicted hear and be glad’ (Ps 34:2). ‘Then my soul shall rejoice in the Lord, exulting in his deliverance’ (Ps 35:9).”³³

Hans Walter Wolff rightly observes that the emotional content of the soul is equated with the self or the person and is not an independent entity. He cites, as an example, Psalms 42:5, 11, and 43:5 in which the same song of lament and of self-exhortation is found: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God,

for I shall again praise him.” “Here,” Wolff writes, “*nephesh* [soul] is the self of the needy life, thirsting with desire.”³⁴ Nothing in these passages suggests that the soul is an immaterial part of human nature equipped with personality and consciousness and able to survive death. We shall note that the soul dies when the body dies.

The Soul as the Seat of Personality

The soul [*nephesh*] is seen in the Old Testament not only as the seat of emotions but also as the seat of personality. The soul is the person as a responsible individual. In Micah 6:7 we read: “Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, and the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul [*nephesh*]?” The contrast here is not between body and soul. In commenting on this text, Catholic scholar Dom Wulstan Mork writes: “The meaning is not that the soul is the human cause of sin, with the body as the soul’s instrument. Rather, the *nephesh*, the whole living person, is the cause of sin. Therefore, in this verse, responsibility for sin is attributed to the *nephesh* as the person.”³⁵

We find the same idea in several texts that discuss sin and guilt. “If a soul [*nephesh*] shall sin through ignorance . . .”(Lev 4:2, KJV); “And if a soul [*nephesh*] sins . . . he shall bear his iniquity” (Lev 5:1, KJV); “But the soul [*nephesh*] that doeth ought presumptuously . . . that soul [*nephesh*] shall be cut off from among his people” (Num 15:30, KJV). “Behold all souls [*nephesh*] are mine; . . . the soul [*nephesh*] that sinneth, it shall die” (Ez 18:4). Texts such as these clearly indicate that the soul is the responsible person who thinks, wills, and sins, and consequently is subject to the death punishment.

Any physical or psychical activity was performed by the soul because such activity presumed a living, thinking, and acting person. In the Old Testament no division of activity between the soul and the body exists because both two manifestations of the same person. The soul includes and presumes the body. “In fact,” writes Mork, “the ancient Hebrews could not conceive of one without the other. There is no Greek dichotomy of soul and body, of two opposing substances, but a unity, man, who is *bashar* [body] from one aspect and *nephesh* [soul] from another. *Bashar*, then, is the *concrete reality* of human existence, *nephesh* is the *personality* of human existence.”³⁶

The Soul and Death

The survival of the soul in the Old Testament is linked to the survival of the body since the body is an outward manifestation of the soul. This explains why the death of a person is often described as the death of the soul. “When death occurs,” writes Johannes Pedersen, “then it is the soul that is deprived of life. Death cannot strike the body or any other parts of the soul without striking the entirety of the soul. Therefore it is also said to ‘kill a soul’ or ‘smite a soul’ (Num 31:19; 35:15,30; Jos 20:3, 9); it may also be called to ‘smite one as regards the soul,’ i.e. to smite one so that the soul is killed (Gen 37:21; Deut 19:6, 11; Jer 40:14, 15). There can be no doubt that it is the soul which dies, and all theories attempting to deny this fact are false. It is deliberately said both that the soul dies (Judg 16:30; Num 23:10 et al.), that it is destroyed or consumed (Ez 22:25, 27), and that it is extinguished (Job 11:20).”³⁷

Readers of the English Bible may question Pedersen’s statement that the soul dies because the word “soul” does not occur in the texts which he cites. For example, speaking of the cities of refuge, Numbers 35:15 says: “Anyone who kills any person [*nephesh*] without intent may flee there.” Since the word “soul–*nephesh*” does not occur in most English translations, some may argue that the text is speaking of the killing of the body and not of the soul. The truth of the matter is that *nephesh* is found in the Hebrew text, but translators usually chose to render it with “person,” presumably because of their belief that the soul is immortal and cannot be killed. Their unbiblical, deceptive assumption is discredited by those texts which even in the English version clearly speak of the death of the soul. For example, Ezekiel 18:20 reads: “The soul that sins shall die” (See also Ex 18:4).

The fate of the soul is linked to the fate of the body. As Joshua conquered the various cities beyond the Jordan, we are told repeatedly “he utterly destroyed every soul [*nephesh*]” (Jos 10:28, 30, 31, 34, 36, 38). The destruction of the body is seen as the destruction of the soul. “In the Bible,” writes Edmund Jacob, “*nephesh* [soul] refers only to the corpse prior to its final dissolution and while it has distinguishable features.”³⁸ When the body is destroyed and consumed so that its features are no longer recognizable, then the soul no longer exists, because “the body is the soul in its outward form.”³⁹ On the other hand, when the body is laid to rest in the grave with the fathers, the soul is also at rest and lies undisturbed (Gen 15:15; 25:8; Jud 8:32; 1 Chron 29:28).

Conclusion

The various usages of “*nephesh*–soul” in the Old Testament never convey the idea of an immaterial, immortal entity capable of existing apart from the body. On the contrary, we have found that the soul–*nephesh* is the animating principle of life, the life-breath which is present in both human beings and animals. At death, the soul ceases to function as the animating life-principle of the body because the fate of the soul is connected inextricably with the fate of the body which is the outward manifestation of the soul.

PART 3 THE NEW TESTAMENT VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

The New Testament shows a definite continuity with the Old Testament holistic view of human nature. The notion of the immortality of the soul, though popularly believed at that time, is completely absent from the writings of the New Testament because its writers were faithful to the teachings of the Old Testament.

The New Testament reveals not only continuity with the Old Testament in the understanding of human nature and destiny, but also an expanded understanding in the light of the incarnation and teachings of Christ. After all, Christ is the real head of the human race since Adam “was a type of the one who was to come” (Rom 5:14). While in the Old Testament human nature is related primarily to Adam by virtue of creation and the Fall, in the New Testament human nature is related to Christ by virtue of His incarnation and redemption. Christ is the fullness of revelation about human nature, meaning, and destiny.

The Greek word *psyche*–soul is used in the New Testament in accordance with the basic meanings of the Hebrew *nephesh*–soul that we found in the Old Testament. We briefly review the basic meaning of *psyche*–soul, giving special attention to the expanded meaning of the word in the light of Christ’s teachings and redemptive ministry.

“Soul” as Person

The word “soul–*psyche*” in the New Testament denotes the whole person in the same sense as *nephesh* in the Old Testament. For example, in his defense before the Sanhedrin, Stephen mentions that “seventy-five

souls–[*psyche*]” of Jacob’s family went down to Egypt, a figure and usage found in the Old Testament (Gen 46:26-27; Ex 1:5; Deut 10:22). On the day of Pentecost, “three thousand souls–[*psyche*]” (Acts 2:41) were baptized and “fear came upon every soul–[*psyche*]” (Acts 2:43). Speaking of Noah’s family, Peter says that “eight souls–[*psyche*] were saved by water” (1 Pet 3:20). It is evident that in texts such as these the “soul–*psyche*” is used as a synonym for person.

Within this context, we mention Christ’s famous promise of rest to the “souls–[*psyche*]” of those who accept His yoke (Matt 11:28). The expression “rest for your souls–[*psyche*]” comes from Jeremiah 6:16, where rest for the soul is promised to people who walk according to God’s commandments. The rest which Christ gives to the soul is achieved, not when the soul is liberated from the body according to the Platonic dualistic sense, but when a believer accepts His gracious provision of salvation (“Come to *me*”) and live in accordance to the principles of life He taught and exemplified (“learn of me”).

“Soul” as Life

The most frequent meaning of the word soul–*psyche* in the New Testament is “life.” According to one reckoning, 46 times *psyche* is translated “life.”⁴⁰ In these instances, “life” provides a fitting translation of the Greek *psyche* because it is used in reference to physical life. To facilitate the identification of the word soul–*psyche* found in the Greek text, *psyche* will be translated literally as “soul” in places where the RSV renders it as “life.”

At the height of the storm, Paul reassured the members of the ship that “there will be no loss of souls [*psyche*] among you, but only of the ship” (Acts 27:22; cf. 27:10). In this context, the Greek *psyche* is correctly translated “life” because Paul is talking about the loss of lives. An angel told Joseph: “Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s soul [*psyche*] are dead” (Matt 2:20). This is one of the many references to the seeking, killing, and saving of the soul–*psyche*, all of which suggest that the soul is not an immortal part of human nature, but the physical life itself which can be in danger. In accordance with the Old Testament, the soul–*psyche* is put to death when the body dies.

Jesus associated the soul with food and drink. He said: “Do not be anxious about your soul [*psyche*], what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not the soul [*psyche*]

more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matt 6:25). Here the soul–*psyche* is associated with food and drink and the body (the visible exterior) with clothing.

By associating the soul with food and drink, Jesus shows that the soul is the physical aspect of life, though He explains that there is more to life than food and drink. Believers can raise their desires and thoughts to heavenly things and live for Christ and eternity. Thus, Christ expanded the meaning of the “soul” by including the higher life or eternal life He came to offer mankind. The fact remains, however, that by associating the soul with food and drink, Christ shows that the soul is the physical aspect of our existence and not an immaterial component of our nature.

Saving the Soul by Losing It

In the Old Testament, we found that the soul–*nephesh* is used frequently to denote the uncertainty of life, constantly facing the possibility of harm or even destruction. Consequently, the ancient Israelites were concerned about saving their souls, delivering their souls, restoring their souls to safety, and sustaining their souls through provisions, especially food. In this context, it must have been perplexing for the Jews to hear Christ saying: “Whoever would save his soul [*psyche*] will lose it; and whoever loses his soul [*psyche*] for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35; cf. Matt 16:25; 10:39; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25).

The impact of Christ’s statement upon the Jews must have been dramatic, because He had the audacity to proclaim that their souls could be saved only by losing them for His sake. The notion of saving the soul through losing it was unknown to the Jews because the concept is not found in the Old Testament. Christ demonstrated His teaching by acting in a way that culminated in His own crucifixion.

He came “to give his soul [*psyche*] as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). As the Good Shepherd, He “laid down his soul [*psyche*] for the sheep” (John 10:11). By teaching that in order to save one’s soul, it is necessary for one to lose it, to give it up, and to lay it down, Christ expanded the Old Testament meaning of *nephesh*–soul as physical life by making it inclusive of the eternal life received by those willing to sacrifice their present life (soul) for His sake.

The Apostolic Church grasped this expanded meaning of the soul as denoting a life of total commitment to the Savior. Judas and Silas became men who “risked their soul [*psyche*] for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:26). Epaphroditus risked “his soul [*psyche*]” for the work of

Christ (Phil 2:30). The Apostle Paul himself testified: “I do not account my soul [*psyche*] of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20: 24).

If Paul believed that the soul is immortal, it is unlikely that he would have viewed it of no value and worth losing for the sake of the gospel. These texts show that the Apostolic Church lived out the new expanded meaning of the soul by living a life of total, sacrificial commitment to Christ. Believers understood that their soul as physical life could be saved only by consecrating it to the service of Christ.

The most foolish mistake anyone can make is “to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul [*psyche*]” (Mark 8:36). It is this soul–*psyche*, the life that transcends death, that is the primary object of redemption (Heb 10:39; 13:17; James 1:21; 1 Pet 1:9, 22). While the term “soul” is used considerably less frequently in the New Testament than in the Old Testament, these key passages indicate a significant expansion of its meaning. The term came to include the gift of eternal life received by those who are willing to sacrifice their present life for Christ’s sake.

The Death of the Soul Is Eternal Death

This expanded meaning of the term soul–*psyche* helps us understand a well-known, but much misunderstood saying of Christ: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul [*psyche*]; rather fear him who can destroy both the soul [*psyche*] and the body in hell” (Matt 10:28; cf. Luke 12:4). Dualists find in this text support for the concept that the soul is an immaterial substance that is kept safe and survives the death of the body.

This interpretation reflects the Greek dualistic understanding of human nature and not the Biblical holistic view. The reference to God’s power to destroy the soul [*psyche*] and the body in hell negates the notion of an immaterial, immortal soul. How can the soul be immortal if God destroys it with the body in the case of impenitent sinners? Oscar Cullmann notes that “we hear in Jesus’ saying in Matthew 10:28 that the soul can be killed. The soul is not immortal.”⁴¹

In the preceding discussion, we have seen that Christ expanded the meaning of the soul–*psyche* to denote not only physical life but also eternal life received by those who are willing to make a sacrificial commitment to Him. If this text is read in the light of the expanded meaning given by Christ to the soul, the meaning of the saying is: “Do not fear

those who can bring your earthly existence (body–*soma*) to an end, but cannot annihilate your eternal life in God; but fear God who is able to destroy your whole being eternally.” Christ’s warning hardly teaches the immortality of the soul. Rather it teaches that God can destroy the soul as well as the body.

Paul and the Soul

In comparison with the Old Testament, or even the Gospels, the use of the term soul–*psyche* in Paul’s writings is rare. He uses the term only 13 times⁴² (including quotations from the Old Testament) to refer to physical life (Rom 11:3; Phil 2:30; 1 Thes 2:8), a person (Rom 2:9; 13:1), and the seat of emotional life (Phil 1:27; Col 3:23; Eph 6:6). It is noteworthy that Paul never uses *psyche*–soul to denote the life that survives death. The reason could be Paul’s fear that the term *psyche*–soul might be understood by his Gentile converts according to the Greek view of innate immortality.

To ensure that the new life in Christ would be viewed wholly as a divine gift and not as an innate possession, Paul uses the term *pneuma*–spirit, instead of *psyche*–soul. The Apostle certainly acknowledges a continuity between the present life and the resurrected life, but since he sees it as God’s gift and not something found in human nature, he uses *pneuma*–spirit instead.⁴³

In his famous passage on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul shows that he uses soul–*psyche* in accordance with the Old Testament meaning of physical life. He explains the difference between the present body and the resurrection body, saying: “It is sown a physical [*psychikon*] body, it is raised a spiritual [*pneumatikon*] body” (1 Cor 15:44). The present body is *psychikon*, literally “soulish” from *psyche*–soul, denoting a physical organism subject to the law of sin and death. The future, resurrected body is *pneumatikon*, literally “spiritual” from *pneuma*–spirit, meaning an organism controlled by God’s Spirit.

The resurrected body is called “spiritual,” not because it is nonphysical but because it is ruled by the Holy Spirit, instead of carnal impulses. This becomes evident when we note that Paul applies the same distinction between the natural–*psychikos* and the spiritual–*pneumaticos* to the present life in 1 Corinthians 2:14–15. Here Paul distinguishes between the natural man–*psychikos* who is not guided by God’s Spirit and the spiritual man–*pneumaticos* who is guided by God’s Spirit.

No Natural Immortality

For Paul the continuity between the present and the future body is to be found not in the expanded meaning of the soul that we have found in the Gospels, but in the role of the Spirit of God that renews us in newness of life both now and at the resurrection. By focusing on the role of the Spirit, Paul negates the immortality of the soul. For him it is very important to clarify that the new life of the believer both in the present and the future is wholly a gift of God's Spirit. There is nothing inherently immortal in human nature.

The expression "immortality of the soul" does not occur in Scripture. The Greek word commonly translated "immortality" in our English versions of the Bible is *athanasia*. This term occurs only twice in the New Testament, the first time in connection with God "who alone has immortality [*athanasia*] and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see" (1Tim 6:16). Obviously, immortality here means more than endless existence. It means that God is the source of life (John 5:26) and all other beings receive eternal life from Him.

The second time the word "immortality-*athanasia*" occurs in 1 Corinthians 15:53-54 in relation to mortal nature which puts on immortality at the resurrection: "For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality [*athanasia*]. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality [*athanasia*], then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"

The Christian Hope is based not on the immortality of the soul but on the resurrection of the body. If we want to use the word "immortality" with reference to human nature, let us speak not of the immortality of the soul, but rather of the immortality of the body (whole person) by means of the Resurrection. It is the resurrection that bestows the gift of immortality on the body, that is, on the whole person of the believer.

Conclusion

Our survey of the New Testament use of the term "soul-*psyche*" indicates that there is no support for the notion of the soul as an immaterial and immortal entity that survives the death of the body. Nothing in the word *psyche*-soul even remotely implies a conscious entity able to survive the death of the body. Not only does the New Testament fail to endorse the notion of the immortality of the soul, but it also clearly shows

that the soul–*psyche* denotes the physical, emotional, and spiritual life. The soul is the person as a living being with its personality, appetites, emotions, and thinking abilities. The soul describes the whole person as alive and thus inseparable from the body.

Christ expanded the meaning of soul–*psyche* to include the gift of eternal life received by those who are willing to sacrifice their earthly life for Him, but He never suggested that the soul is an immaterial, immortal entity. On the contrary, Jesus taught that God can destroy the souls of impenitent sinners as well as their bodies (Matt 10:28).

Paul never uses the term “soul–*psyche*” to denote the life that survives death. On the contrary, he identifies the soul with our physical organism (*psychikon*) which is subject to the law of sin and death (1 Cor 15:44). To ensure that his Gentile converts understood that there is nothing inherently immortal in human nature, Paul uses the term “spirit–*pneuma*” to describe the new life in Christ which the believer receives wholly as a gift of God’s Spirit both now and at the resurrection.

Summing up our survey of the Old and New Testament views of human nature, we can say that the Bible is consistent in teaching that human nature is an indissoluble unity where the body, soul, and spirit represent different aspects of the same person, and not different substances or entities functioning independently. This holistic view of human nature removes the basis for the belief in the survival of the soul at the death of the body.

Seventh-day Adventists uphold this biblical holistic view of human nature, though it is largely rejected by most Christian churches. For them it is more important to be true to Scripture, than to adhere to popular beliefs. Consequently, as stated in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, they believe that in the Bible “The body and soul exists together; together they form an indivisible union. The soul has no conscious existence apart from the body. There is a text that indicates that the soul survives the body as a conscious entity.”⁴⁴

PART 4

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE DUALISTIC VERSUS THE WHOLISTIC VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

Someone may ask: What difference does it make whether a person holds to a dualistic or holistic view of human nature? Is not this a purely academic question? These important questions are briefly addressed in the last part of this chapter. We shall see that what Christians believe about the make-up of their human nature largely determines what they believe about their present life and ultimate destiny.

Implications of the Dualistic View of Human Nature

We noted earlier that historically popular Christian thought has been deeply influenced by the dualistic teachings of Socrates and Plato, which were promoted in modified forms by Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. The far-reaching implications of the dualistic view of human nature for Christian beliefs and practices are inestimable. Only a brief mention can be made in this chapter.

Doctrinal Implications of the Dualistic View of Human Nature

Doctrinally, a host of beliefs derive from or are dependent upon the dualistic view of human nature. For example, the belief in the transition of the soul at the moment of death to paradise, hell, or purgatory rests on the belief that the soul is immortal by nature and survives the body at death. This means that if the inherent immortality of the soul is an unbiblical concept, then popular beliefs about paradise, purgatory, and hell have to be radically modified or even rejected.

The belief that at death the souls of the saints ascend to the beatitude of Paradise has fostered the Catholic and Orthodox belief in the intercessory role of Mary and of the saints. If the souls of the saints are in heaven, it is feasible to assume that they can intercede on behalf of needy sinners on this earth. Thus, devout Christians pray to Mary and the saints to intercede on their behalf. Such a practice runs contrary to the Biblical teaching that the saints are not in heaven, but in their graves awaiting their resurrection at the Coming of Christ. Furthermore, the Bible clearly teaches that “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1Tim 2:5).

If the conclusion of our study is correct that the soul does not survive and cannot function apart from the body, then the whole teaching of the intercessory role of Mary and the saints must be rejected as an ecclesiastical fabrication. Truly, the acceptance of the Biblical holistic view of human nature can have frightening consequences for long-cherished Christian beliefs.

Similarly, the belief that at death the souls of those who are pardonable transit to purgatory has led to the teaching that the church on earth has the power to apply the merits of Christ and of the saints to souls suffering in purgatory. Historically, this has been accomplished by granting indulgences, that is, the remission of the temporal punishment due to forgiven sin. Such a belief led to the scandalous sale of indulgences which sparked the Protestant Reformation.

The Reformers eliminated the doctrine of purgatory as unbiblical, but they retained the doctrine of the immediate transit after the death of individual souls to a state of perfect blessedness (*heaven*) or to a state of continuous punishment (*hell*). We have found the latter teaching to be clearly negated by Scripture. Consequently, it is imperative to continue to the work of the Reformers by rejecting as ecclesiastical fabrications the popular beliefs about purgatory, indulgences, and the transit of the souls to heaven or to hell.

Immortality of the Soul Weakens Second Advent

Traditional dualism weakens the Advent Hope and obscures and eclipses the expectation of the Second Advent. The reason is obvious. If at death the soul of the believer *goes up* immediately to the beatitude of Paradise to be with the Lord, there can hardly be any real sense of expectation for Christ to *come down* to resurrect the sleeping saints. The primary concern of these Christians is to reach paradise immediately, albeit as disembodied souls. This concern leaves barely any interest in the coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the body.

To believe in the immortality of the soul means to regard oneself at least partly immortal in the sense of being incapable of passing out of existence. Such a belief encourages confidence in oneself and in the possibility of one's soul going up to the Lord. On the other hand, to believe in the resurrection of the body means to acknowledge that both our present life and future eternal life are a gift from God in Christ who will return to raise the dead and transform the living. It means to believe in the *coming down* of the Lord to this earth to meet embodied believers, and not in the *going up* of disembodied souls to heaven to meet the Lord.

In the New Testament the Parousia guarantees a final consummation realized by a movement of Christ's *coming down* to mankind rather than individual souls *going up* to Him. The Advent Hope is not "a pie in the sky when you die," but a real meeting upon this earth between embodied believers and Christ on the glorious day of His return. Out of that real meeting will come a transformation affecting humanity and nature. This great expectation is obscured and erased by the belief in individual immortality and heavenly bliss immediately after death.

Another significant implication of the individualistic hope for immediate immortality is that it overrides the Biblical corporate hope for an ultimate restoration of this creation and its creatures (Rom 8:19-23; 1 Cor 15:24-28). When the only future that really counts is the individual soul's survival after death, the anguish of mankind can have only

a peripheral interest and the value of God's redemption for this whole world is largely ignored. The ultimate result of this belief is, as noted by Abraham Kuyper, that "by far the majority of Christians do not think much beyond their own death."⁴⁵

Misconceptions about the World to Come

The belief in the immortal and spiritual soul has also fostered wrong ideas about the world to come. The popular concept of paradise as a spiritual retreat center somewhere up in space where glorified souls will spend eternity in everlasting contemplation and meditation has been inspired more by Platonic dualism than by Biblical realism. For Plato, the material components of this world were evil and, consequently, not worthy of survival. The aim was to reach the spiritual realm where souls liberated from the prison-house of a material body enjoy eternal bliss.

Our study shows that both the Old and New Testaments reject the dualism between the material world below and the spiritual realm above. The final salvation inaugurated by the coming of the Lord is regarded in Scripture not as an *escape from*, but a *transformation of* this earth. The Biblical view of the world to come is not a *spiritual heavenly retreat* inhabited by glorified souls, but this *physical earthly planet* populated by resurrected saints (Is 66:22; Rev 21:1).

Practical Implications of the Dualistic View of Human Nature

On a more practical level, the dualistic view of human nature has cultivated a detachment of the soul from the body and the suppression of physical appetites and healthy natural impulses. Contrary to the Biblical view of the goodness of God's creation, including the physical pleasures of the body, medieval spirituality promoted the mortification of the flesh as a way to achieve the divine goal of holiness.

The saints were ascetic persons who devoted themselves primarily to *vita contemplativa*, detaching themselves from the *vita activa*. Since the salvation of the soul was seen as being more important than the preservation of the body, the physical needs of the body were often intentionally neglected or even suppressed.

The dichotomy between body and soul, the physical and the spiritual, is still present in the thinking of many Christians today. Many still associate redemption with the human soul rather than the human body. We describe the missionary work of the church as that of "saving souls." The implication seems to be that the souls are more important than the bodies.

Conrad Bergendoff notes that “The Gospels give no basis for a theory of redemption which saves souls apart from the bodies to which they belong. What God has joined together, philosophers and theologians should not put apart. But they have been guilty of divorcing the bodies and souls of men which God made one at creation, and their guilt is not diminished by their plea that thus salvation would be facilitated. Until we have a theory of redemption which meets the whole need of man we have failed to understand the purpose of Him who became incarnate that He might be able to save humanity.”⁴⁶

Dualism in Liturgy

The influence of dualism can be seen even more often in many Christian hymns, prayers, and poems. The opening sentence of the burial prayer found in *The Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England is starkly dualistic: “Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of His great mercy to take unto Himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground.”⁴⁷ A phrase in another prayer in the same Office betrays a clear dualistic contempt for physical existence: “With whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity.”

The Platonic notion of the release of the soul from the prison-house of the body is clearly set forth in the lines of the Christian poet, John Donne: “When bodies to their grave, souls from the graves remove.”⁴⁸ Many of our hymns are thinly disguised dualistic poems. They speak of this earth as “a desert drear” and invite believers to look “up above the sky.” “I want to live above the world . . . on heaven’s tableland.”

Christians who believe the words of such hymns may be disappointed one day to discover that their eternal home is not “above the world . . . on heaven’s tableland,” but down here on this earth. This is the planet that God has created, redeemed, and ultimately will restore for our eternal habitation.

The far-reaching doctrinal and practical implications of the dualistic view of human nature that we have just considered should serve to impress the reader with the importance of the subject under consideration. This is not a mere academic question but a fundamental Biblical teaching that impacts directly or indirectly on a host of Christian beliefs and practices.

Implications of Biblical Holistic View of Human Nature

The Biblical holistic view of human nature, according to which our body and soul are an indissoluble unit, created and redeemed by God, challenges us to view positively both the physical and spiritual aspects of life. We honor God not only with our mind but also with our body, because our body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19).

Scripture admonishes us to present our “bodies as a living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1). This means that the way we treat our bodies reflects the spiritual condition of our souls. If we pollute our bodies with tobacco, drugs, or unhealthy food, we cause not only the *physical pollution* of our bodies, but also the *spiritual pollution* of our souls.

Henlee H. Barnette notes that “what people do to, for, and with others and their environment depends largely upon what they think of God, nature, themselves, and their destiny.”⁴⁹ When Christians view themselves and the present world holistically as the object of God’s good creation and redemption, they will be both convinced and compelled to act as God’s stewards of their bodies as well as of the created order.

Concern for the Whole Person

Biblical holism challenges us to be concerned about the whole person. In its preaching and teaching, the church must meet not only the spiritual needs of the soul but also the physical needs of the body. This means teaching people how to maintain emotional and physical health. It means that church programs should not neglect the needs of the body. Proper diet, exercise, and outdoor activities should be encouraged as an important part of Christian living.

Accepting the Biblical holistic view of human nature means opting for a *holistic* approach in our evangelistic and missionary endeavors. This approach consists not only in saving the “souls” of people, but also in improving their living conditions by working in such areas as health, diet, and education. The aim should be to serve the world and not to avoid it. The issues of social justice, war, racism, poverty, and economic imbalance should be of concern to those who believe that God is working to restore the whole person and the whole world.

Christian education should promote the development of the whole person. This means that school programs should aim at the development of the mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of life. A good physical-

education program should be considered as important as other academic and religious programs. Parents and teachers should be concerned about teaching good eating habits, the proper care of the body, and the importance of regular physical exercise.

The Biblical concept of the whole person also has implications for medicine. Medical science recently has developed what is known as *holistic medicine*. Holistic health practitioners “emphasize the necessity for looking at the whole person, including physical condition, nutrition, emotional make up, spiritual state, life-style values, and environment.”⁵⁰ At the 1975 graduating exercise of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Dr. Jerome D. Frank told the graduates: “Any treatment of an illness that does not also minister to the human spirit is grossly deficient.”⁵¹ Healing and the maintenance of physical health must always involve the total person.

Cosmic Redemption

The Biblical holistic view of human nature presupposes also a cosmic view of redemption that encompasses the body and the soul, the material and the spiritual world. The separation between body and soul or spirit has often paralleled the division between the realm of creation and the realm of redemption. The latter has been associated to a large extent in both Catholicism and Protestantism with the salvation of individual souls at the expense of the *physical* and *cosmic* dimensions of redemption. The saints often are portrayed as pilgrims who live on earth but are detached from the world and whose souls at death immediately leave their material bodies to ascend to an abstract place called “heaven.”

Dualism has produced an attitude of contempt toward the body and the natural world. Such an attitude of disdain toward our planet is absent from the Psalms where the central theme is the praise of God for His magnificent works. In Psalm 139:14, David says: “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth very well.” Here the Psalmist praises God for his wonderful body, a fact well known to his soul (mind). This is a good example of holistic thinking where body and soul are part of God’s marvelous creation.

In Psalm 92, the Psalmist urges one to praise God with musical instruments because, he says, “Thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by thy work; at the work of thy hands I sing for joy. How great are thy works, O Lord!” (Ps 92:4-5). The Psalmist’s rejoicing over his wonderful body

and marvelous creation is based upon his holistic conception of the created world as an integral part of the whole drama of creation and redemption.

Biblical Realism

The Biblical holistic view of human nature also impacts on our view of the world to come. The Bible does not envision the world to come as an ethereal paradise where glorified souls will spend eternity wearing white robes, singing, plucking harps, praying, chasing clouds, and drinking the milk of ambrosia. Instead the Bible speaks of the resurrected saints inhabiting this planet earth, which will be purified, transformed, and perfected at and through the coming of the Lord (2 Pet 3:11-13; Rom 8:19-25; Rev 21:1). The “new heavens and a new earth” (Is 65:17) are not a remote and inconsequential spiritual retreat somewhere off in space; rather, they are the present heaven and earth renewed to their original perfection.

Believers enter the new earth not as disembodied souls but as resurrected bodily persons (Rev 20:4; John 5:28-29; 1 Thess 4:14-17). Though nothing unclean shall enter the New Jerusalem, we are told that “the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it; . . . they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations” (Rev 21:24, 26). These verses suggest that everything of real value in the old heaven and earth, including the achievements of man’s inventive, artistic, and intellectual prowess, will find a place in the eternal order. The very image of “the city” conveys the idea of activity, vitality, creativity, and real relationships.

Regrettably this fundamentally concrete, earthly view of God’s new world portrayed in the Scripture has largely been lost and replaced in popular piety with an ethereal, spiritualized concept of heaven. The latter has been influenced by Platonic dualism rather than by Biblical realism.

CONCLUSION

The serpent’s lie, “You will not die” (Gen 3:4), has lived on throughout human history to our time. Our brief historical survey traced the origin of this belief in life after death to the ancient Egyptians, who invested great amounts of time and money preparing for life after death.

The Greek philosophers Socrates and Philo adopted the Egyptian belief in life after death, but redefined it in terms of an immaterial, immortal soul that leaves the prison house of the mortal body at death. They viewed death as the separation of the soul from the body.

This dualistic teaching found its way into the Christian church toward the end of the second century. It was promoted first by Tertullian, and later by Origen, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. For them death meant the destruction of the body which enables the immortal soul to continue to live in either the beatitude of Paradise or in the eternal torment of Hell.

The belief in the survival of the soul contributed to the development of the doctrine of Purgatory, a place where the souls of the dead are purified by suffering the temporal punishment of their sins before ascending to Paradise.

The Reformers rejected as unbiblical and unreasonable the practice of buying and selling indulgences to reduce the stay of the souls of departed relatives in Purgatory; however, they continued to believe in the conscious existence of souls either in Paradise or Hell.

Today the belief in conscious existence after death is spreading like wildfire due to factors mentioned earlier with the result that most people believe Satan's lie that no matter what they do, they "shall not die" (Gen 3:4) but become like gods by living for ever.

To test the validity of this popular belief, we examined the Old and New Testament views of the "soul." We found that the Bible is consistent in teaching that human nature consists of an indissoluble unity where the body, soul, and spirit represent different aspects of the same person, and not different substances or entities functioning independently. This holistic view of human nature removes the basis for the belief in the survival of the soul at the death of the body.

Christ expanded the meaning of soul-*psyche* to include the gift of eternal life received by those who are willing to sacrifice their earthly life for Him, but He never suggested that the soul is an immaterial, immortal entity. On the contrary, Jesus taught that God can destroy the souls as well as the bodies (Matt 10:28) of impenitent sinners.

We noted that the dualistic view of human nature has far-reaching doctrinal and practical implications. It impacts directly or indirectly on a host of popular beliefs and practices that run contrary to the Bible. Some of these popular unbiblical beliefs are examined in subsequent chapters.

The work that the Reformers began by eliminating purgatory, must now be completed by rejecting popular beliefs that are contrary to Scripture. It is unlikely that such a monumental task can be undertaken by Protestant or Catholic churches today, because any attempt to modify or reject traditional doctrines is interpreted as a betrayal of their traditional faith and can cause division and fragmentation. This is a price that most churches are unwilling to pay; yet it is a price that the faithful remnant

must pay in order to fulfill her mission to call upon sincere believers everywhere to “Come out of her my people, so that you will not share in her sins” (Rev 18:8).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. See Table 2.1 Religious Belief, Europe, and the USA, in Tony Walter, *The Eclipse of Eternity*, 1996, p. 32.
2. James Bonwick, *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*, 1956 reprint, p. 80.
3. Herodotus, *Euterpe*, chapter 123.
4. F. J. Church, translator, *Plato’s Phaedo*, in the Library of Liberal Arts, 1960, No. 30, pp. 7-8.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-69.
6. For an excellent survey, see, Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 1966, vol. 1, pp. 632-755.
7. See, Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 1966, pp. 724-726.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 801.
9. C. F. Hudson, *Debt and Grace as Related to the Doctrine of a Future Life*, 1857, p. 326.
10. Tertullian, *On the Resurrection*, chapter 3, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3, p. 547; Emphasis supplied.
11. Origen, *De Principiis*, Book 4, chapter 1, sec. 36, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 4, p. 381.
12. Origen, *Against Celsus*, book 4, chapter 13, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 4, p. 502.
13. Augustine, *Epistle 137*, chap. 3.
14. Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 2, 1995, p. 245.
15. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, 79.
16. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, p. 93.
17. Ray S. Anderson, *Theology, Death and Dying*, 1986, p. 104.
18. See Hans Schwarz, “Luther’s Understanding of Heaven and Hell,” *Interpreting Luther’s Legacy*, ed. F. W. Meuser and S. D. Schneider, 1969, pp. 83-94.
19. The text of this work is found in Calvin’s *Tracts and Treatises of the Reformed Faith*, trans. H. Beveridge, 1958, vol. 3, pp. 413-490.
20. See, for example, Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1940, Vol. 3, pp. 713-30; W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, n.d., Vol. 2, pp. 591-640. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, 1972, pp. 32-64.

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21. Westminster Confession, chap. 32, as cited by John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches*, 1977, p. 228.
 22. K. Osis and E. Haraldsson, *At the Hour of Death*, 1977, p. 13.
 23. Ibid., pp. 13-14. See also W. D. Rees, "The Hallucinations of Widowhood," *BMJ* 4, 1971, pp. 37-41; G. N. M. Tyrrell, *Apparitions*, 1953, pp. 76-77.
 24. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 1974, p. 10.
 25. Dom Wulstan Mork, *The Biblical Meaning of Man*, 1967, p. 34.
 26. Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 1926, vol. 1, p. 99.
 27. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, 1952, p. 27.
 28. Dom Wulstan Mork (note 25), p. 34.
 29. Norman Snaith, "Justice and Immortality," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17, 3, (September 1964), pp. 312-313.
 30. Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality*, n. d., pp.1-2.
 31. The tabulation is from Basil F. C. Atkinson (note 30), p. 3.
 32. Hans Walter Wolff (note 24), p. 10.
 33. Tory Hoff, "*Nephesh* and the Fulfillment It Receives as *Psyche*," in *Toward a Biblical View of Man: Some Readings*, eds. Arnold H. De Graaff and James H. Olthuis, 1978, p. 98.
 34. Hans Walter Wolff (note 24), p. 25.
 35. Dom Wulstan Mork (note 25), p. 40.
 36. Ibid. p. 41.
 37. Johannes Pedersen (note 26), p. 179.
 38. Edmund Jacob, "*Nephesh*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, 1974, vol. 9, p. 621.
 39. Johannes Pedersen (note 26), p. 171.
 40. The figure is given by Basil F. C. Atkinson (note 29), p. 14.
 41. Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" in *Immortality and Resurrection. Death in the Western World: Two Conflicting Currents of Thought*, ed. Krister Stendahl, 1968, pp. 36-37.
 42. Edward Schweizer, "*Psyche*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed., Gerhard Friedrich, 1974, vol. 9, p. 648, note 188.
 43. This view is expressed by Edward Schweizer (note 42), p. 650. Similarly, Tony Hoff notes that "Paul never used *psyche* for a life that survives death . . . [because] he was aware of the possibility of this very

distortion during this time. He knew the presence of a Platonic tradition would be particularly confusing to the Gentile converts” (“*Nephesh* and the Fulfillment It Receives as *Psyche*” in *Toward a Biblical View of Man: Some Readings*, editors Arnold H. De Graff and James H. Olthuis, 1978, p. 114.

44. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, 1988, p. 83.

45. Cited in G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, 1972, p. 34. The same view is expressed by Russell Foster Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City*, 1972, p. 82.

46. Conrad Bergendoff, “Body and Spirit in Christian Thought,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 6 (August 1954), pp. 188-189.

47. Cited by D. R. G. Owen, *Body and Soul. A Study on the Christian View of Man* 1957, p. 28.

48. From John Donne’s poem, “The Anniversary.”

49. Henlee H. Barnette, *The Church and the Ecological Crisis* 1972, p. 65.

50. *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1983 ed., s. v. “Holistic Medicine,” p. 294.

51. Cited by Norman Cousins, *Anatomy of an Illness*, 1979, p. 133. Among the many books on holistic medicine, the following may be noted: David Allen et al., *Whole Person Medicine*, 1980; Ed Gaedwag, ed., *Inner Balance: The Power of Holistic Healing*, 1979; Morton Walker, *Total Health: The Holistic Alternative to Traditional Medicine*, 1979; Jack La Patra, *Healing the Coming Revolution in Holistic Medicine*, 1978.

