

# Speaking Rightly about Christian Hope and the Resurrection of the Body: Popular Religiosity, the Evolution of Church Teachings on the Soul and the Limits of Eschatological Assertions

Author: Cristiano Guilherme Borro Barbosa

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# **Speaking Rightly about Christian Hope and the Resurrection of the Body:**

Popular Religiosity, the Evolution of Church Teachings on the Soul  
and the Limits of Eschatological Assertions

Cristiano Guilherme Borro Barbosa

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## ABSTRACT

### **Speaking Rightly about Christian Hope and the Resurrection of the Body: Popular Religiosity, the Evolution of Church Teachings on the Soul and the Limits of Eschatological Assertions**

By Cristiano Guilherme Borro Barbosa

Director: John Randall Sachs, SJ

Director of Record of Dissertation: Margaret Eletta Guider, OSF

Readers: John F. Baldovin, SJ and Félix Palazzi von Büren

External Examinar: Eduardo C. Fernández, SJ

STD Program Director: Andrea Vicini, SJ

Catholic faith affirms human nature as an intrinsic fundamental unity between body and soul. Nonetheless, because the soul is immortal, Catholic teaching asserts that the soul survives even when it is separated from the body between death and resurrection. This belief in the survival of the separate soul can lead to a misguided understanding of the afterlife. It also has potentially detrimental consequences for the people of God in the *present* life. If the afterlife is conceived as a pure spiritual reality disconnected from the material world, the faith-filled practices of popular religiosity can lose their embodied character and be reduced to nothing more than pious spiritual devotions that are totally disengaged from the responsibilities and realities of Christian life.

Guided by these concerns, this inquiry reflects on the manner in which Church teaching on the human soul is communicated through rites and rituals for the dead, especially in the selection and interpretation of biblical texts and in the choice of liturgical prayers. This study also reviews the historical evolution of Church teaching on the soul as well as the foundations that have contributed to Catholic understandings of theological anthropology and eschatology. Particular attention is given to Thomas Aquinas's understanding of human nature and the human soul as the substantial form of the body. Further attention is given to the inherent difficulties

encountered with regard to the notion of the separated soul after death. Challenged by questions raised in accord with theological reasoning, the separation of body and soul also is contested by contemporary scientific data suggesting that the brain has a central role in the generation of human intellectual functions. As Catholic theology has traditionally attributed these functions to the soul, it becomes evident that theology must be in dialogue with science if Church teaching is to give a more reasonable account of human nature.

The problem of the separated soul is further examined in the light of the post-Vatican II theological debate on the notion of intermediate state. Two distinct views on this subject are presented in the works of Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger. While Rahner considers the intermediate state as an intellectual framework for thinking about the afterlife and not a matter of binding faith, Ratzinger considers the intermediate state as an important belief connected to the doctrine of the immortality and the survival of the soul after death. This study argues that Rahner's view is more appropriate as it leaves the question of the intermediate state open to theological debate while also affirming the symbolic dimension of eschatological language.

In conclusion, this dissertation proposes Rahner's hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of the Church's eschatological assertions as a means to preserve foundational Catholic beliefs while respecting their metaphorical nature. It also proposes that all eschatological assertions of the Church only can be rightly understood and interpreted in light of the resurrection of the body, the central Christian hope and symbol of the permanent and fundamental body-soul unity of human nature.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CCC* - *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- DH* - H. Denzinger and P Hünermann, eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum*
- GS* - *Gaudium et spes* (Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)
- LG* - *Lumen Gentium* (Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)
- MD* - *Mediator Dei* (Encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy)
- NABRE* - New American Bible, Revised Edition
- ND* - J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*
- ST* - Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*,

## INTRODUCTION

With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage.<sup>1</sup>

Belief in the immortal soul as the spiritual element in the makeup of the human being is expressed in several important doctrinal documents of the Church, a number of liturgical texts, and in the diverse ways in which Catholics pray, especially in relation to the deceased. Catholic theological anthropology upholds the belief that the human being is a union of the physical body and the spiritual soul. However, as I observed in my STL thesis:

Developments in biblical studies over the last century and advances in modern science, particularly in the field of neuroscience, have led theologians to raise several questions regarding the makeup of the human being, especially the role of the human soul. These inquiries have posed challenges to longstanding Catholic anthropological understandings of the person.<sup>2</sup>

As a consequence, the traditional Catholic understanding of the duality of body and soul in the human being has become a source of controversy and contention, specifically among Christian theologians who hold a more materialistic view. Advancing the proposal that theology must take into consideration the discoveries of contemporary science, some of these theologians even argue that the traditional notion of the human soul is no longer necessary.<sup>3</sup> But these are not the only questions of concern. Other equally valid and important questions are those raised by

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican Council II. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (December 7, 1965) § 44, at The Holy See [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html). (Henceforth, GS). Accessed on December 12, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Cristiano Guilherme Borro Barbosa, "Contemporary Perspectives on Theological Anthropology: Nancey Murphy's Nonreductive Physicalism and Karl Rahner's Understanding of the Human Makeup," Licentiate in Sacred Theology Thesis, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, Brighton, MA (2011), 3. Available online at <http://hdl.handle.net/2471>.

<sup>3</sup>One of these authors is the theologian and philosopher Nancey Murphy. Her critique of the traditional use of the notion of the soul can be found in her book, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

the People of God and those who minister to them amidst the quotidian pastoral realities of dying and death.

Upon finishing my STL thesis, questions still remained regarding the ways in which traditional Catholic teachings on the makeup of the human being and the body-soul unity are interpreted and communicated to the people of God. Consider for example the *Order of Christian Funerals*.<sup>4</sup> Repeatedly, both in religious discourse and in ritual practice, there is a tendency to identify the person (or the person's mental life or consciousness) with the person's soul. Both in liturgical texts and in prayers for the deceased, ambiguous language is used regarding the status of the separated soul between death and resurrection. As I noted in the conclusion of my thesis, these examples are everyday expressions of

the remaining challenge for Catholic doctrine, which teaches that the human spiritual soul, because it is immortal, survives bodily death. By considering Rahner's understanding of the person as the indissoluble unity of spirit and matter, it is theologically problematic to conceive of a disembodied and separated soul.<sup>5</sup>

My hope in writing this dissertation is to build upon the findings of my STL thesis so as to make accessible much needed Catholic theological resources for better addressing contemporary questions regarding the nature of the soul, its function and role, and the makeup of the human being. In my estimation, the foundational starting point for meeting this need must involve a comprehensive and intelligible exposition of the Church's teachings on the soul in general and specifically the legacy of Aquinas's understanding of the body-soul unity of the human being. Such an exposition demands not only a solid grasp of Aquinas's appropriation of Aristotelian hylomorphism, but also an understanding of his defense of the existence of the separated soul after death.

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<sup>4</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals with Cremation Rite* (Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Barbosa, "Contemporary Perspectives on Theological Anthropology," 105.

Focused research on the thought of Aquinas on these subjects, while central to my theological project, is not sufficient. Theology as a science must be at the service of the pastoral needs of the Church by guiding, illuminating, and informing intelligently the practice of its ministers. However, without the proper guidance of sound and coherent theological thought, the practice of the Church may be misdirected and can mislead the people of God. Due to the importance of theology for ministry in the life of the Church, the first chapter of this dissertation explores two main dimensions of ministerial practice that are extremely important and potentially problematic to the extent that they create and perpetuate confusion among the people of God. The first dimension relates to biblical texts, their selection and their interpretation. The second dimension relates to liturgical rites and rituals. At issue are the ways in which both dimensions enable – or not – the people of God to make meaning of the eschatological themes of human death and the destiny of the human being. It is important to bear in mind that death is always a delicate subject and one that easily can give way to confusion and ambiguities in the minds and hearts of those who bring their questions and concerns to priests and pastoral ministers in the hope of receiving meaningful responses and some measure of consolation and assurance about the afterlife. Unfortunately, in any number of cases confusion is compounded by ambiguity when mixed messages are given by priests and lay ministers, specifically messages that are related in some way to the traditional Catholic understanding of the human being as created in a body-soul unity that is broken when the immortal soul survives bodily death. This understanding is commonly articulated in preaching and expressed in those prayers and gestures that are part of Roman Catholic rites and rituals.

#### **A. The Subject Matter of this Dissertation**

This dissertation examines the adequacy and appropriateness of traditional Catholic

doctrine on the body-soul unity of the human being in the light of critical questions posed by contemporary approaches to theological anthropology and eschatology, recent developments in neuroscience as well as everyday ministerial practices, such as wakes, funerals and burials that commonly serve as occasions of heightened interest in the fate of the deceased. The aim of this dissertation is to provide theologically-trained Catholic ministers, ordained and lay, with the resources needed to interpret rightly and to communicate clearly an intelligible and proper understanding of Catholic teaching regarding the unity of the body and soul that is attentive to the ambiguities, complexities, and uncertainties of theological anthropology and eschatology.

## **B. Methodology**

The theological inquiry developed in this dissertation can be located methodologically in the domain of practical theology. Basically, it consists in drawing theological questions from actual ministerial experience in the practice of the faith in order to illumine theology itself.

Rahner defines it thus:

Practical theology is that theological discipline which is concerned with the Church's self-actualisation here and now – both that which is and that which ought to be. This it does by means of theological illumination of the particular situation in which the Church must realize itself in all its dimensions.<sup>6</sup>

This way of doing theology recognizes the theological nature of the Church's practice. It is a way of doing theology that is responsive, rather than defensive, when confronted by questions that arise from the practice of faith or by challenges posed to theology by contemporary sciences.<sup>7</sup> In this way, theology is able to propose responses that are more adequate and appropriate as Church's teachings are put in dialogue with the actual practices and experiences of faith that take place in the *real* world. This theological method transcends the

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Rahner, "Practical Theology within the Totality of Theological Disciplines," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 9, trans. Graham Harrison (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), 102.

<sup>7</sup> See Alzirinha Rocha de Souza, "Teologia Pastoral e Teologia Prática, Além da Postura Eclesial," *Revista Cultura Teológica* 91 (Jan/Jun 2008): 5-30.

dichotomy between theory and practice. In so doing, it makes the long-established doctrines of the Church reflected in the ‘mirror of the practice’ of the faithful, so that theology may correct possible distortions through more reasonable responses.

It is important to note that “practice is not the criterion of truth”<sup>8</sup> when theological affirmations are evaluated or considered. However, theology can learn from and be informed by practice. Although one of the functions of theology is to be a “critical reflection on praxis,”<sup>9</sup> it also needs to be a critical reflection of its own application in the practice of faith and presence in the world. Theology must be informed by critical consciousness, especially when confronted with the questions that emerge from those contexts and realities where theology is actually applied. The present reality, with all of its historical and cultural dimensions, not only poses challenges to theology, it also informs and influences how theological thinking is received and understood. It is within the interactive dynamic between theology and practice, that practical theology reflects upon the pertinence, adequacy, and efficacy of theology in communicating what is central to faith and providing responses to the questions that ministerial practice raises.

Without abandoning the primacy of the Word of God, Clodovis Boff explains that in *Gaudium et spes*,<sup>10</sup> the Second Vatican Council legitimated practice as part of theological method since it confronts the affirmations that theology makes regarding the faith of the Church.<sup>11</sup> Boff also explains that this encounter between practice and faith requires that the

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<sup>8</sup> Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock: 2009), xv.

<sup>9</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 6 (see also 13-15).

<sup>10</sup> Vatican Council II. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (December 7, 1965)§ 4; 11; 44; 62 at The Holy See [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>11</sup> Clodovis Boff, *Teoria do Método Teológico: (Versão Didática)* (São Paulo: Editora, 1998), 35-6.

theologian be inserted in the concrete reality of the community of faith.<sup>12</sup> In this way, the practice of the faith questions and confronts theology, and at the same time verifies its legitimacy<sup>13</sup> so that it can be illuminated and actualized. Ultimately, this methodological path of practical theology updates the way (or proposes rules of interpretation for how) the fundamental tenets of the Church's faith are communicated, so that these tenets of faith remain meaningful and so that faith can be properly expressed in practice.<sup>14</sup>

### C. What Are the Theological Questions?

Oscar Cullmann began his famous and emblematic essay called "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" with the following striking anecdotal affirmation:

If we were to ask an ordinary Christian today (whether well-read Protestant or Catholic, or not) what he [*sic*] conceived to be the New Testament teaching concerning the fate of man [*sic*] after death, with few exceptions we should get the answer: "The immortality of the soul."<sup>15</sup>

Along with many others, I am inclined to agree with Cullmann based on my ministry and my therapeutic work as a priest and a psychologist in Brazil and in the United States. It is my impression that the majority of Catholics with whom I meet every day in my ministerial practice as a priest have a Platonic and dualistic understanding of the afterlife. In this dualistic framework, it is not uncommon to hear from some Catholics, for instance, that they (mistakenly) believe in the pre-existence of souls, and view the afterlife as the eternal happiness of the

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<sup>12</sup> Boff, *Teoria do Método Teológico*, 36. Although the following works are on liberation theology, they make reference to this idea of the theologian present in the community: See also Clodovis Boff, "Epistemology and Method of the Theology of Liberation," (trans. Robert R. Barr) in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, eds. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis, 1993), 57-85; Agenor Brighenti, "A Epistemologia e o Método da Teologia da Libertação no Pensamento de Clodovis Boff," *Horizonte* 11 no. 32 (2013): 1403-1435.

<sup>13</sup> Boff, *Teoria do Método Teológico*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> Boff, *Teoria do Método Teológico*, 54.

<sup>15</sup> 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 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 9.



immortal souls in the enjoyment of the beatific vision. Therefore, their religious concerns are directed solely to what needs to be done so that their souls may be saved. In these conversations, I have the sense that the majority of the people simply ignore the fact that the Catholic faith has as one of its core beliefs, belief in the resurrection of the body.

I recognize that this way of understanding the human being's destiny (or the destiny of his or her soul) in the afterlife may be influenced by popular religiosity, cultural local beliefs, and by religious and cultural images and representations of the afterlife (e.g. paintings, folk culture myths, folkloric legends, pop culture in music, movies, games, etc.). However, despite all these possible influences, the way Catholic doctrine is transmitted and expressed in the preaching and interpretation of the scriptures (e.g. biblical texts used in funerals), in the language of some of its official Catholic prayers (e.g. prayers used in the funeral liturgy), and in some devotional practices of piety (e.g. novenas for the souls in purgatory) have a paramount importance in shaping people's way of understanding the human being and the afterlife. The way we preach and the prayers we use may be maintaining and reinforcing a dualistic and distorted view of the present, and the way one imagines and what one believes about the afterlife.

This dualistic view of the person that focuses solely on the salvation of the soul may drive people to devalue the embodied present existence while considering that what really matters is the "salvation of the soul." In this mindset, what is considered as spiritual may be easily separable from the material and this perception of separable realities may create personal and communal disengagement of believers with concrete, material human challenges (poverty, oppression, exploitation, etc.), social justice and the transformation of the present world. The bodiliness of existence is often experienced as a burden due to the natural afflictions of life (diseases, pain, suffering, aging, etc.) and also due to the fact that human sinfulness is directly

associated with the body, a material reality considered *lower than* and *inferior to* what is considered a spiritual reality, namely, the soul. What seems to matter most in the ways that people pray and live out their faith is the spiritual salvation of the soul. Our understanding of human existence matters when we think that it influences and even determines our positions, decisions, and actions in life. Therefore, the overemphasis on the importance of a person's soul and its salvation as something that occurs outside of this world can have a negative influence on the way that people live out their faith here and now. Christian life begins to be understood solely as "spiritual" practices of piety disconnected from material reality. When this happens, the concrete, embodied (physical and psychological), familiar, communitarian, social, and environmental (ecological) dimensions of life are relegated to the margins of Christian life and practice.

#### **D. Intention and Audience of this Dissertation**

My intention in writing this dissertation on the theme of the human soul and its destiny can be described as follows.

First, my reason for doing this research is related to my personal questions and concerns as a Catholic priest, theologian, and psychologist, in relation to the Roman Catholic understanding of human nature as bipartite, as a body-soul unity, and the consequences of this two-part understanding and belief about the human person on the way that the people of God live out their present lives.

Second, my goal is to offer reflections to priests, ecclesial lay ministers, chaplains, theological educators, pastoral agents, seminarians and all those who lead or will accompany in their daily life in ministry the people of God, as they endeavor to listen to their questions about the present life in connection with their concerns about the afterlife. It is important for the

pastoral agents who preach to people on issues such as death and the fate of the dead, to be aware of the consequences of their preaching on the ways that people live out their faith. The words, images, and ideas they choose while teaching/preaching to people who are dealing with the death of a loved one, for instance, should strengthen their faith in the foundational tenet of our hope: The resurrection of Jesus which is the guarantee of our resurrection. To this end, words, ideas, and images should reinforce the theological anthropology that the human being, created in a body-soul unity, will rise one day, and not privilege or overemphasize through words, ideas, and images the immortality of the soul as if this notion was the only source of solace. It is my contention that our Catholic understanding and belief on the survival of the separated and immortal soul - in between death and the final resurrection - leads the majority of Catholics to be concerned only with the salvation of their souls. If only the soul survives death and is the object of punishment, purification, or rewards, what matters most is the soul's salvation and whatever needs to be done to achieve this end. The resurrection of the body rarely figures into their system of belief.

Therefore, my audience are those ministers who are dealing with these realities and who are in a position from the pulpit, or as chaplains, or in a hospital/hospice, or in a funeral home, to help people to reorganize their understanding on issues regarding the person in the afterlife. In this sense, this dissertation is not only about theology but also about theological education. My research is intended for anybody who is forming, informing and serving the people of God in the midst of the most delicate moments of their lives, when issues and questions about death, like the destiny of the person or his/her soul, the intermediate state, the role of indulgences offered for the dead, and purgatory, may emerge. These and other themes are all related to the anxiety producing realities that are part of the human condition that is known and unknown. And since

matters concerning the afterlife like the status of the separated soul are a mystery, people need interpretations of these matters which are doctrinally sound and respectful of their experiences and attuned to the spiritual needs. They do not need interpretations that confuse them or lead them down pathways of delusion. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that those who minister, in any capacity, are able to provide the people of God with the best theological interpretations possible, specifically, those interpretations that will help them in their human flourishing and their capacity for making meaning of God's action in their lives.

Consequently, this dissertation proposes to make a contribution to critical reflection on aspects of systematic theology that have an actual and important impact on pastoral practice and on the life experiences of the people of God. To this end, the following three concepts are taken into consideration: the human being as body-soul composition, the role of the human soul as the agent for the higher intellectual functions of the person, and the status of the separated immortal soul (*anima separata*) in the afterlife. These theological matters are complex in terms of how they are presented to the people of God who will, in their lives of faith, either suffer the pastoral consequences of a "bad" theology, or receive the pastoral benefits "good" theology. Here in lies the need for priests, deacons, and ecclesial lay ministers to be aware of these complex and delicate theological issues and of their responsibility in presenting this theological content in meaningful and appropriate ways. Essentially, the aim of this work is to assist ministerial leaders to think theologically about these concepts as they endeavor to communicate them effectively in their practice of ministry.

## **E. Structure and Chapters**

In Chapter One the problem and the aim/rationale for this dissertation is explained. Although traditional Catholic anthropology views the human being as an intrinsic unity of body

and soul, everyday Catholics demonstrate through their practices of faith and piety a view of the afterlife – or beyond death – that is centered on the survival of the dead through their immortal souls. Though the Church’s teaching is quite clear in professing faith in the resurrection of the dead and everlasting life (as the consummation and fulfillment of the whole creation), it is common to encounter faithful people who think/imagine the afterlife as an out-of-this-material-world reality where the souls of the dead live out their eternal destiny. This view is grounded on literal readings of the Church’s two-phased eschatology which holds that the separated souls receive God’s judgment immediately after death in the intermediate state before the resurrection of the dead. As a result, if resurrection is not believed or understood in its full meaning, the present embodied human existence and the reality of the material world may be neglected, devalued, rejected, and even, despised. Literal readings and poor interpretations of scriptural and liturgical texts—Word and Worship—that do not take into account the fundamental unity of the human being in the present life and in the afterlife further contribute to the problem. In order to address this problem, the first part of Chapter One discusses the importance of a proper and non-literal reading in the teaching and preaching of the biblical texts proposed by the Church to be used in funeral celebrations and/or when the dead are remembered in the liturgy. The second part of this chapter reflects on the importance of the liturgy of the dead and on the crucial role of ministers who lead the services as interpreters of the Church’s dual-eschatological view that is present and expressed in the liturgical texts from the *Order of Christian Funerals* and from the *Roman Missal*.<sup>16</sup>

As the existence of the soul and its survival after death are part of Catholic doctrine, it is important to understand what the Church teaches and what the faithful are to believe. To this

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<sup>16</sup> Two appendices present some of the biblical and liturgical texts used in the liturgy of the dead. These appendices provide critical reflections on the significance and pastoral applications of these texts, calling attention to the ambiguities present in some of the biblical and liturgical texts used in the funeral liturgy.

end, Chapter Two provides an overview of the historical evolution of the Church's teaching on the subject of the human soul. Throughout history, in early credal formulations, papal documents, and conciliar declarations, the Magisterium of the Church officially has put forward what Catholic Christians are to believe about the human person and his/her constitution in the body-soul unity. The first statements regarding the human soul that appear in the magisterial documents show the Christological orientation of the statements about human nature. These first texts arose in defense of the true humanity of the Son of God, who assumed the whole human nature, including a human soul. Since the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, the Church's teaching has been informed by a Thomistic theological understanding of human nature as the substantial body-soul unity and, although the Church's teaching emphasizes the unity and wholeness of the human being, it still maintains a belief in the separated soul and its intermediate eschatology after bodily death.

Due to the importance of Thomas Aquinas's understanding of human nature for Catholic doctrine, Chapter Three provides an in-depth examination of Aquinas's understanding of the human constitution in the body-soul unity, especially in what pertains to the nature of the human soul and its powers, in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*, Questions 75 to 89. As Aquinas's philosophical and theological thought was highly adopted and incorporated in the Church's teachings, his account on the human soul is paramount to the understanding of how the Church conceives its belief in the human soul and its existence separated from the body after death. Aquinas argues that human intellect and will are operations of the soul that are not performed by any bodily organ. However, his argument needs to be reexamined since it is called into question by the findings of contemporary neuroscience, which point out that all human mental events have physical correlates in the encephalon and are always accompanied and sustained by brain activity.

Chapter Four presents some thoughts and reflections<sup>17</sup> on the possible consequences of Catholic belief in the separated soul and its intermediate eschatology for a faithful understanding and practice of the faith. Since the soul is the immortal spiritual element in the person's composition that endures after bodily death, what are the consequences of this belief in people's practice of their faith? It is argued that the dual understanding of the human composition/nature (as body and soul) and the belief in the separate immortal soul in the intermediate state, if not correctly taught and understood by the faithful, especially when dealing with the reality of human death, may lead to dualistic understandings of the human being in the present life and to the denial of death. In the second part of Chapter Four, some challenges posed to Church teaching by modern philosophy and science are presented. First, the dualism of substances, as explained by the modern philosopher and mathematician René Descartes, is discussed, as well as the influence his thought has had on the way the soul and (or) the mind can be conceived and understood as independent from the body. Then, specific findings of neuroscience are presented, along with the argument that these findings cannot be ignored and that they need to be taken into account by the Church in terms of its teachings on theological anthropology, specifically with regard to the long-standing belief that the human being is a substantial body-soul unity.

In Chapter Five, the theme of the intermediate state between death and resurrection is presented according to the two different theological approaches taken by Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger. This topic was a matter of controversy and debate in the theological arena in the latter part of the twentieth century, especially after the Second Vatican Council, and it is directly related to the theme of the separated soul. The respective theological stances of Rahner and Ratzinger on the eschatological notion of the intermediate state are examined and compared. For Rahner, the intermediate state is not a matter of obligatory belief for the faithful, but only an

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<sup>17</sup> In part, based upon the experience and interests of the author as priest and psychologist.

intellectual framework for thinking about the afterlife. Viewed from another perspective, Ratzinger considers the intermediate state to be an important part of the Church's belief in the immortality of the soul, which is grounded in the Scriptures and in the tradition, and therefore, cannot be denied. The differing and almost opposed views that these two Catholic theologians hold regarding the intermediate state serve as illustrations of the importance of the continual debate on the theme of the human soul in theology, especially regarding belief in the soul's state of separation from the body after death.

In Chapter Six, it is argued that the Church's eschatological assertions must be understood metaphorically and allegorically as expressions of a reality that cannot be completely known or described objectively, inasmuch as it belongs to mystery. In order to avoid literal readings of eschatological assertions and their consequent problems, Rahner's hermeneutical principles are presented as a guide for understanding such assertions. These principles for interpretation provide theologians, ministers and the people of God with guidelines for making sense of these eschatological assertions, understanding their biblical foundations, and acknowledging their limitations and possibilities. Lastly, along with recognizing the importance of Rahner's hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of the eschatological assertions, a final argument is made that advances the claim that all of the Church's eschatological assertions only can be understood correctly within the context of the central and ultimate hope of the Christian faith which is the resurrection of the body.

In conclusion, this dissertation offers those who stand at the crossroads of theological anthropology, eschatology and the practice of ministry, with a method and a means for being better prepared theologically to respond to the questions raised by the people of God amidst the ambiguities and complexities associated with the mystery of death, the intermediate state and the



resurrection of the dead.

## **Chapter 1. Critical Reflections on the Use and Interpretation of Biblical and Liturgical Texts in Liturgies, Rites and Rituals of the Dead**

A brief homily based on the readings is always given after the gospel reading at the funeral liturgy and may also be given after the readings at the vigil service. . . . Attentive to the grief of those present, the homilist should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord, as proclaimed in the Scripture readings. The Homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God's love and the mystery of Jesus' victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well. Through the homily members of the family and community should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God.<sup>18</sup>

From the practice of Catholic faith in its biblical and liturgical dimensions, Chapter One lays out the problem that is addressed in this dissertation. When the Church celebrates the mystery of human death in its liturgical practices, it uses scriptural readings and prayers to express, in light of the Paschal Mystery, its dogmatic understanding of the human vocation in the present life and its fulfilment in the afterlife. Therefore, in the celebration of its liturgy of the dead the Church finds a special and privileged occasion for the expression of its anthropology and eschatology. The doctrines that lay the foundation for these theological disciplines are grounded in the Scriptures and the Catholic tradition. These doctrines and their biblical foundations are expressed in the language of liturgical prayers. Since biblical language is highly metaphorical and uses images that demand rigorous exegesis, liturgical prayers as the condensation of biblical and doctrinal elements also demand proper interpretation. It is in this superposition of biblical, doctrinal, and liturgical layers of metaphorical language that faith and hope are celebrated. In this celebration, ordained and lay ministers who lead communities of faith in liturgies, rites and rituals have the challenging mission of interpreting and communicating the truths of the Catholic faith and the mysteries of its eschatological hope so that they can be properly understood, professed, and lived. However, especially in the context of

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<sup>18</sup> Order of Christian Funerals, 9 (§27).

death, literal readings of biblical texts, liturgical prayers, and doctrinal anthropological and eschatological assertions, can leave people confused, compromising their understanding of the faith, and as a consequence, even its practice.

Although the human being is considered by Catholic doctrine as an intrinsic unity of spiritual and material principles in the substantial body-soul unity, the same doctrine also asserts that the human spiritual soul survives bodily death and receives God's definitive judgment immediately after death. Literal readings of eschatological assertions made by the Church, especially with regard to belief in the separated soul in the intermediate state, can lead to practices of piety based upon the distorted idea that the separated soul is a complete and permanent state of existence of the human being. This separation may be reflected in a faith that is merely spiritual, socially disengaged with the transformation of the present material world, and inconsequential to the concrete and embodied life.

The immortal, separated soul must be understood in the perspective of the fundamental unity of the human being in the present life and in the afterlife. Immortality and survival of the separated soul after death in the intermediate state cannot be properly understood in its symbolism without the fundamental anthropological affirmation of the human being as the body-soul unity in the present, the eschatological central hope in the resurrection of the body, and the consummation of the whole creation in an embodied way.

In the context of the celebration of human death, as centered on the paschal mystery, the centrality of resurrection as the fulfilment of human beings in the embodied original unity of body and soul must be emphasized. Faith and hope in the resurrection of the body is, essentially, the affirmation of the fundamental unity of the human being. However, a view of the afterlife that overemphasizes the separated soul and overshadows the resurrection of the body becomes

problematic as it does not see the present concrete reality of the human body and of the concrete world as the subjects of God's salvation. Since this problem may be reinforced by problematic interpretations of Scriptures and liturgical prayers, the first part of Chapter One discusses the importance of proper biblical interpretation when preaching on these texts used in the liturgy of the dead in order to avoid a wrong understanding of intermediate eschatology. The second part of this chapter focuses on the liturgical prayers proposed for funeral celebrations and the importance of the understanding of their symbolic and metaphorical dimensions.

### **1.1. The Use of the Bible in Liturgies, Rites and Rituals for the Dead**

This first section takes as its focus the interpretation of selected biblical texts that are used commonly in Catholic rites and rituals for the dead. These texts serve as foundations that give expression to Catholic beliefs regarding human nature, especially in situations where the theme of death is at the center of liturgies and preaching. Liturgical books propose a selection of biblical texts that may be used in celebrations of Christian funerals. These texts can be found in the *Lectionary for Mass* (vol. 4) for the celebration of Masses for the Dead.<sup>19</sup> Some of these readings are also proposed by the *Order of Christian Funerals*<sup>20</sup> and the *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*.<sup>21</sup> Suggested texts may be used for a funeral Mass or a Mass for the Dead on different occasions; for funeral rites, like the Vigil for the Deceased and the Rite of Committal; and at the administration of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (along with Viaticum). They may be used by deacons and, in the absence of an ordained minister, by lay ministers who,<sup>22</sup> as the Church's agents, are prepared to be with the family of the deceased or with a person who is dying (and with his or her family) and to read biblical texts, recite prayers,

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<sup>19</sup> *Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> See part 3 of *Order of Christian Funerals*, "Texts of Sacred Scripture," 205-293.

<sup>21</sup> *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* (Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1983).

<sup>22</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 8.

give Viaticum (Holy Communion) to the dying, and to provide words of faith, hope, and consolation in the delicate moment of death. In places like Brazil, due to the lack of ordained ministers and the high number of people who are sick and in need of funeral vigils and committals, the role of lay ministers is especially important. In some dioceses, these laypeople are called “ministers of hope,”<sup>23</sup> and they receive training to lead funerary vigils for the dead and committals.

These situations of loss and bereavement are delicate moments in everyone’s life, and therefore they require a great deal of sensitivity and discernment on the part of the priest or minister. In these situations, knowledge of the teachings found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>24</sup> regarding the fate of the dead may not be enough. Some level of *counseling wisdom* is necessary from the minister, as well as a sound understanding of the biblical texts that will be read and reflected on. This dissertation offers some ideas to help those who are or will be dealing with death as ministers of hope through a more learned, thoughtful, and informed ministry.

Special attention is given to some of the terms that are used in the Scriptures to describe or to relate to the human person in situations that involve death. Because the central theme of this dissertation is the Catholic doctrinal understanding of human nature as a body-soul unity, particularly with regard to the Church’s notion of the separated soul between death and resurrection, it is especially important to consider those scriptural texts suggested for celebrations for the dead in which the term “soul” appears.

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<sup>23</sup> Many dioceses and parishes in Brazil have groups of laypeople whose mission is to minister during funerals or with mourning families, by presiding at services like the Vigil for the Deceased, Celebrations of the Word, etc. These groups are called Pastoral da Esperança (Pastoral or Ministry of Hope). See Geraldo Lyrio Rocha, Archbishop of Vitória da Conquista, Brazil, Presentation, in *Nossa Páscoa: Subsídios para a Celebração da Esperança*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Paulus, 2003), 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), hereafter CCC. References to the *Catechism* will be with the abbreviation CCC, followed by the number of the paragraph and page number.

Some important questions motivate and guide the present chapter: What was the context of each text, and how is it important for understanding the intention and message that the biblical author wanted to communicate? Did the biblical author(s) have an anthropological claim to communicate about the composite structure of the human being? Is there a univocal anthropological view in the Scriptures, or are there different anthropologies? Do the biblical texts merely support the Church's teachings or are they the foundation of the Catholic doctrinal understanding of the body-soul duality of the human person? Does the term "soul," when it appears in the texts of the Sacred Scriptures, have the same meaning as the doctrinal, philosophical, and theological understandings of that same term? Are we correct to use some specific biblical texts in our preaching and teaching to confirm our doctrinal assertions about the separated soul, the Catholic vision of particular judgment, heaven, purgatory, and hell?

Although these questions cannot be answered thoroughly, they are relevant to this inquiry since they motivate and guide this investigation.

### **1.1.1. Insights from Popular Catholic Imagination in Portuguese and Brazilian Contexts**

Three examples are presented in order to illustrate how people often imagine the afterlife.

Example # 1: Consider the case of a young man, who, in a eulogy, after talking at length about his mother's life, gave a brief but powerful personal theological reflection in which he expressed his view of the afterlife. In his view, after death we go either to hell or to heaven, with no intermediate option. Moreover, we can literally know where each deceased person is now. In this young man's understanding of the afterlife, it is possible to ascertain if the deceased person is either in hell or in heaven by the way he or she is remembered by the living. If the person is remembered mostly by his or her wrongdoings and wicked deeds, this person is in hell; if, however, the deceased person is remembered by his or her goodness and kindness, certainly this

person is in heaven. Simply like that. Therefore, the man concluded, “I know that my mother is in heaven because of those things we all remember about her.” It was a beautiful way of expressing his belief and hope that his mother was well and in heaven. However, his claims are problematic.

This example can serve as a reminder of how firmly held convictions about the fate of deceased relatives are understood by the faithful, even when these beliefs are based on problematic theology. According to the Catholic faith, no one can know where a person who has died is. One can (and must) hope that the deceased are well in heaven, but there are no certainties. Moreover, in his description of the afterlife, the man simply ignored the possibility of purgatory.

Example # 2: Once a woman in her mid-seventies came to talk to her pastor. She was very anxious and distressed. When asked why she was anxious, she said that she was very concerned and overwhelmed because of the suffering of the souls in purgatory, saying that it is extremely difficult for a person’s soul not to be sent there after death. Even the smallest thing, a slightly sinful thought or action, could be an impediment to go to heaven and might be enough to send a soul to purgatory. The priest asked her to explain what made her so concerned about purgatory. She said that she read about it in a book where the author, a Catholic mystic, after experiencing encounters and communicating with the souls in purgatory, described vividly how life is in purgatory. She then explained how important it is to pray for those souls, to offer sacrifices, to offer Masses, and to do everything possible to gain indulgences for these poor souls in order to alleviate their pains and to help them to go to heaven.<sup>25</sup> Again, good intentions and devotions pose problems.

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<sup>25</sup> The book referred to by this woman is Sister Emmanuel of Medjugorje, *The Amazing Secret of the Souls in Purgatory: An Interview with Maria Simma* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 1997).

Example # 3: A message was posted on a social media chat group of priests. It read:

People say that once, Saint Peter was disturbed when he noticed the presence in Heaven of some souls, he did not remember letting in. Then he began to investigate the fact and found out the place through which those souls were entering Heaven. Then he went to talk to the Lord: “Jesus, I have observed that we have here some souls to which I did not open the gates of Heaven so that they could enjoy eternal happiness. After investigating the matter, I found a gap through which these souls are coming in. I would like you to see it.” Jesus agreed to accompany him and saw that in the gap there was a huge Rosary hanging from Heaven to the Earth, through which souls were constantly coming up to Heaven. Disturbed, Saint Peter said: “Should we close that gap?” To which Jesus replied: “No, no, let it be. It is my Mother’s business.”

Even though it is a simple and innocent story that seeks to illustrate the beauty and importance of the belief in the intercession of the Mary, it calls attention to the very common image of heaven as a “place” for souls. In Portuguese and Brazilian contexts, such ideas and images are strongly embedded in the popular Catholic imagination. They are internalized by those who think about the afterlife in this way and who are concerned only with the salvation of spiritual souls. The son, however, who was convinced that his mother was in heaven because of what was remembered about her, displays a faith that realizes that what really matters is how one has lived in the present. In the case of the woman distressed about purgatory, her concern was about *not* going there. Mistakes cannot be made in the present in order to avoid the future suffering (of the soul) in purgatory. There is not much concern about life in the present as an expression of the practice of faith. What matters is the fate of the souls in the afterlife. Practices of popular piety must be done in order to help those souls in purgatory. In the third case, the afterlife is depicted as a heaven of souls that are saved through the prayer of the Rosary. Heaven is depicted as a reality separated from the present world, and connected to the present life of the faithful only through their prayers to help the souls get into heaven. Otherwise, the afterlife of the souls seems to be a reality disconnected from the present world.



These three examples serve as illustrations of just a few of the theological and eschatological misunderstandings, figments of imagination and fantasies that persist among the faithful. Would that they were uncommon, but they are not. They are pervasive and pose significant challenges to the Church, challenges that are simultaneously theological, eschatological and practical. My hope is that this dissertation, by elucidating the issues that emerge in practice, will underscore the need for greater critical theological and eschatological analyses and reflection.

### **1.1.2. Pastoral Problems and Distortions Related to Belief in the Separated Soul**

Catholic doctrine asserts that, when a human being dies, a separation between the material body and the spiritual soul occurs. With bodily death, the Church believes that a spiritual element remains in existence between death and the final resurrection.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the subject of the separated soul belongs to the eschatological theological discourse of the Church, and it is present especially when human death and the fate of the dead are at the center of the discussion.<sup>27</sup>

In an essay about doctrine and the Magisterium entitled “What the Church Officially Teaches and What the People Actually Believe,” Karl Rahner asserts that “nobody can deny that there exists a considerable difference between that which is explicitly and officially taught as part of the content of the faith and that which the average Christian in the Church knows about

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<sup>26</sup> As Ratzinger points out: “The idea of the soul as found in Catholic liturgy and theology up to the Second Vatican Council has as little to do with antiquity as has the idea of the resurrection. It is a strictly Christian idea, and could only be formulated on this basis of Christian faith whose vision of God, the world and human nature it expresses in the realm of anthropology” (Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein, ed. Aidan Nichols, Dogmatic Theology 9 [Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988], 150). This position is affirmed throughout the documents of the Church’s Magisterium, as will be shown in chapter 4.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Peter Phan, “Roman Catholic Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 219.

the faith and believes.”<sup>28</sup> Impressionistic evidence both in Brazil and in the United States<sup>29</sup> suggests that what the people of God believe about the human soul, especially what they believe about the separated soul of the deceased is not what the Catholic Church actually teaches. Many Catholics, in their popular religious practices of piety have limited knowledge or awareness of the correct theological meaning of ‘soul.’ People seek pastoral counseling or spiritual direction because they are concerned about the fate of their own souls when they die or of the soul of a relative or loved one. Their primary concern focuses on the salvation of the soul. They hold on to the hope that they will go to heaven and enjoy God’s presence, with a minimal stay—if it is needed at all—in purgatory. In their efforts to guarantee such an end, they engage in all kinds of religious practices of piety. Some people are concerned with obtaining “plenary” or “partial” indulgences for themselves, “banking” them for the future salvation of their own souls when they die, or for the salvation of the souls of their deceased relatives and/or friends so that they may be delivered from the purifying suffering in purgatory.

As noted in the introductory quotation, these ministers are entrusted with responsibilities for liturgical occasions that deal with eschatological topics and images about our final destiny. Ministers must preach about the resurrection of Jesus as the foundation and center of Christian hope in human final resurrection at the end of time, when all creation will be renewed and brought to its fulfillment.<sup>30</sup> However, when people are asked about their expectations and hopes

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<sup>28</sup> Karl Rahner, “What the Church Officially Teaches and What the People Actually Believe,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22 (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 165.

<sup>29</sup> There are limitations in arguments based on someone’s personal experience, but though these arguments do not have universal validity, they are indications of a reality that may be common in the experience of many priests while dealing with questions and issues that belong to the cross-section of theological anthropology and eschatology.

<sup>30</sup> Luis F. Ladaria, *Introducción a la Antropología Teológica*, Introducción al Estudio de la Teología 8 (Estella, Navarra, España: Verbo Divino, 1992), 167–88; Luis F. Ladaria, *Antropología Teológica*, (Madrid: UPCM—Universit  Gregoriana Editrice, 1983), 418–20; Giovanni Ancona, *Escatologia Crist *, trans. Orlando Soares Moreira (S o Paulo: Edi es Loyola, 2013), 307–18; N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the*

regarding their future after death, rarely does one hear a response that touches on the theme of the resurrection of the dead or the idea of a new Heaven and Earth. For the most part, such themes seem to be (or are) foreign to the popular religious consciousness. More frequently the answers given deal with souls entering paradise / heaven or journeying home to God. When it comes to the separated souls of the dead, the beliefs held by the People of God bear little relationship to what the Church teaches. Overall, people do not have an expectation for the resurrection of the dead/body. Although belief in resurrection of the dead is an article of faith professed in the Creed at every single Sunday Mass, it is not present in the discourse or the concerns that people have about their future after death. As such, belief in “everlasting life” does not seem to carry with it any expectation of an embodied future existence. Everlasting life is the life which the souls of the just/righteous are already enjoying. So, the question arises if the blessed ones, in their separated-soul existence, are already enjoying the beatific vision (which the Church teaches will continue happening in eternal life), why would they need a body for life everlasting? Although as a theological belief, the resurrection of the body is part of true Catholic faith, in practice it is ignored or at least not viewed as something that will add to the enjoyment of the blessed ones. Adding to the complexity is a conviction about being set free from one’s mortal body and liberated from human suffering. Bodily experiences of one’s earthly life are marked by afflictions, suffering, deprivations, abuse, disease, and pain, or witnessing these afflictions in others’ lives. This being said, why would one hope for a body in the afterlife?

The foundation of our Christian faith is Jesus’ resurrection, inescapably connected to our resurrection, as Saint Paul says: “For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised,

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*Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 93–205; Hans Schwarz, *The Human Being: A Theological Anthropology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 286–301, 365–407.

and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:16-17).<sup>31</sup> Resurrection is part of our faith and must be preached as our future and ultimate hope.<sup>32</sup> Human existence as a separated soul is a temporary state of being. It is not a future hope.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the consolation that the first Christians had and that Christians today must have while facing the reality of human death is the certainty of Jesus’ resurrection and of our own resurrection. It is what must be preached as the foundation of our hope. Death is not the end.

### 1.1.3. Doctrinal Formulations and Biblical Texts

The development of doctrine and the Catholic understanding of the human being as a body-soul unity is quite complex and difficult for many Catholics to grasp. Thomas Aquinas’s appropriation of Aristotelian hylomorphism became the traditional anthropological doctrine that describes the human being as the substantial unity of body and soul.<sup>34</sup> Soul, as the substantial form of the human body, is more than a pure spirit detachable from matter. The soul is completely related to its body since both were created in the substantial unity they form. Therefore, following this logic, it is difficult to consider the body and soul as separable realities.<sup>35</sup> And yet in popular religious piety such dualism persists.

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<sup>31</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (*NABRE*), as found at the website of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Available online at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm>.

<sup>32</sup> As Zachary Hayes affirms: “In the destiny of Jesus is anticipated the destiny of humanity and of the world” (Zachary Hayes, *Visions of a Future: A Study of Christian Eschatology*, New Theology Studies 8 [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987], 55).

<sup>33</sup> See G. Greshake and G. Lohfink, *Naherwartung, Auferstehung, Unsterblichkeit: Untersuchungen zur christlichen Eschatologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1975), 82–210; and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Hoffnung auf Vollendung, Aufriss der Eschatologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 142–44.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas’s understanding of the body-soul unity will be described in Chapter Five.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Rahner gave his interpretation of the Catholic Thomistic understanding of the human being as the intrinsic union of body and soul in some of his essays in *Theological Investigations (TI)*, such as: “The Secret of Life,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 141–52; “The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, 153–77; “The Body in the Order of Salvation,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 17, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 71–89. See also John R. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 51–58.

The Thomistic concept of body-soul unity aims to describe in philosophical terms the wholeness of the person in her or his own nature, which is both spiritual and material. Here it is important to distinguish the philosophical from the biblical usage of the same terms. Although Thomistic theology and biblical authors use terms like *body* and *soul* to talk about the human person, these two terms do not signify exactly the same thing in theology and in the Scriptures. Even among different biblical texts, these terms are not used in exactly the same way.

Philosophical method uses some specific terms in order to give reasonable explanations about a specific phenomenon, like, in this case, the use of the concept of soul to describe the spiritual nature of the human being. Biblical assertions, on the other hand, while talking about the human being, may make use of the same terms but not to explain or describe human nature. These biblical texts are only trying to communicate and express something about the human reality in a specific context without necessarily trying to give any precise account of human nature.

This distinction is very important when the use of the same term in biblical texts and in systematic theology, and doctrinal formulations that use philosophical terms with precise meanings. Though the same terms are being used, they have different meanings in both biblical texts and doctrinal formulations. For example, a New Testament text translated in the Vulgate with the Latin *anima*, which originally used the Greek *psyche*, may not be communicating the same reality as the Latin *anima* when used in the Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, which displays his unique Aristotelian understanding of the term.

These differences can be a source of confusion for those who do not know about these distinctions. This is more confusing when doctrinal affirmations that make use of theological-philosophical terms employ biblical texts to support ideas that these affirmations try to

communicate. For example, is the term “soul” conveying the same reality when used in a specific biblical text as the English translation for the Hebrew *nephesh*<sup>36</sup> as it is in the translation from the Latin *anima* in the “Letter on Certain Questions Regarding Eschatology” issued in 1979 from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF)?<sup>37</sup> The letter affirms that “soul” is the word used by the Church to designate the “spiritual element [that] survives and subsists after death, an element endowed with consciousness and will, so that the ‘human self’ subsists.”<sup>38</sup> One could argue that there is an approximate general meaning since both biblical and doctrinal texts are talking about the human being. There are, however, undeniable differences since, in the biblical example, the English word “soul” is a translation of Hebrew *nephesh*, which communicates the idea of the human being’s life in his or her wholeness without separating what is physical from what is spiritual, while the doctrinal letter uses the Latin term *anima* to depict the spiritual element that survives bodily death. There are approximations that easily can be made between both the biblical and the doctrinal uses of the same term that in English are translated as “soul.” While the psalm seeks to express a dimension of the human life and interiority, the doctrinal document describes a fundamental part of the human being that is believed to be a composite reality, the body-soul unity.

Because it is not possible in this life to experience the separated soul and the intermediate state, which belong to the realm of mystery, biblical language is always symbolic and allegorical. When this fact is not taken into consideration, it can lead to misunderstandings and confusion. Some people, for instance, tend to think that the soul is an energy that makes the body function,

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<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Psalm 62:1: “My soul rests in God alone, from whom comes my salvation.”

<sup>37</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), “Letter on Certain Questions Regarding Eschatology” (May 17, 1979), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19790517\\_escatologia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19790517_escatologia_en.html) (Accessed on May 1, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> “Letter on Certain Questions Regarding Eschatology.”

in the same way that electricity makes a machine work. Others, while knowing that Catholic doctrine states that the soul is the form of the body, tend to think that the soul is what gives the body its shape. Additionally, popular imagination about the soul is formed under the influence of multiple factors, such as religious images (teachings, paintings, etc.), folk stories (myths and legends), and popular culture (movies and books). Very often people describe the souls of the departed as some spiritual entity without any materiality, something like a transparent being or a “ghost” in the shape of a human body. It is curious that even while people believe souls to be completely immaterial, they imagine that the dead retain the shape of the body.

#### 1.1.4. Difficulties in Biblical Interpretation

In the Bible, there is not a general and/or univocal anthropology. Scripture scholars tend to agree that biblical authors did not intend to provide a precise anthropological account or a scientific explanation of the human being.<sup>39</sup> Rather, in the majority of Old and New Testament texts, the use of specific terminology, whether Hebrew *nephesh* or Greek *psyche*, that was translated to the Latin *anima* and subsequently the English “soul,” does not intend to make an

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<sup>39</sup> The difference between the Hebrew mind-set and the Greek one is evident here. Biblical texts, while talking about the human person in his or her relationship with God, use terms like *basar* and *nepes* to express the distinct dimensions of the human person, while Greek philosophical thought uses terms such as *soma* and *psyche* to describe and define the person. The Hebrew *basar*, however, was translated with Greek *soma*, and the Hebrew *nepes* with the Greek *psyche*. Both *basar* and *soma* were translated into the English “body,” while *nepes* and *psyche* into the English “soul.” See more on this in Juan L. Ruiz de la Peña, *Imagen de Dios: Antropología Teológica Fundamental*, 3rd ed. (Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1988), 20–26, 63–78, 84–88; Stephen Yates, *Between Death and Resurrection: A Critical Response to Recent Catholic Debate Concerning the Intermediate State* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 31–59; Nancey Murphy, “Human Nature: Historical, Scientific, and Religious Issues,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 2–4, 19–24; Joel B. Green, “Bodies—That Is, Human Lives: A Re-Examination of Human Nature in the Bible,” in Brown, Murphy, and Malony, *Whatever Happened to the Soul?*, 157–63, 172–73; Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster / Baker Academic, 2008), 3–16, 46–46; Hans Schwarz, *The Human Being: A Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 5–29; Edmund Hill, *Being Human: A Biblical Perspective*, Introducing Catholic Theology (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984), 89–107; Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6–22; John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

anthropological statement about the composition of the human person. Even though there are specificities and distinctions that need to be taken into consideration between *nephesh* and *psyche*, biblical dictionaries and commentaries agree that these terms usually describe the totality of the “person,” the “I,” or the self. They are terms with very embodied meanings, not signifying some spiritual element separable or opposed from the physical body. Even though the Greek term *psyche* was used in Platonic philosophy to describe the immaterial spiritual substance in the person, which is in opposition to the material reality and aims to be detached from it, when this term was used in the Old Testament Greek version (Septuagint or LXX) and in the texts of the New Testament, it refers to the wholeness of the person in his or her physical life, or just “life” or “life principle.”<sup>40</sup>

Some consideration must be made, though, regarding the use and meaning of *psyche* in the literature of Second Temple Judaism, especially in the book of Wisdom.<sup>41</sup> Because Greek thought influenced Wisdom, the human soul seems to survive bodily death and to be in opposition to the body.<sup>42</sup> It survives, however, not because it is immortal but because God grants

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. W. R. F. Browning, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 357; William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1978), 406; Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2 (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988), 1987–1988; John E. Steinmueller and Kathryn Sullivan, *Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia: Old Testament* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner Inc., 1955), 1030; Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 2 vols. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 747; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 587–89; Charles F. Pfeiffer, John Rea, and Howard Fredric Vos, eds., *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1975), 1616; J. D. Douglas and Norman Hillyer, eds., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1982), 1135; G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 9, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 497–519; Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged in one volume and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Devon, UK: Paternoster Press, 1985), 1343–53; Elmar Klinger, “Soul,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, vol. 6: *Scandal to Zionism*, ed. Karl Rahner et al. (New York: Herder and Herder; London: Burns and Oates, 1970), 138–39.

<sup>41</sup> One of the most-used readings of the Old Testament in funeral Masses is Wisdom 3:1-6, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 1346.



its survival. Therefore, the book of Wisdom is aligned with Jewish thought since immortality is the fruit of God's action, not a natural feature of the soul as in Platonic Greek thought.<sup>43</sup>

Several different terms are used in both the Old and New Testaments to describe or emphasize different aspects of the whole embodied person. Even terms that are used to describe some kind of opposition inside of the person's life—for example, the Hebrew term *basar* in the Old Testament and its equivalent Greek term *sarx* in the New Testament, both usually translated as “flesh”—are describing, not an opposition between the soul and the physical body, but rather the conflict and opposition that is created inside the person and caused by his or her sinfulness.<sup>44</sup> These terms make reference to some aspect or dimension of the whole person as a bodily existence but do not propose body and soul as two antithetic realities. The Greek term *soma* in the New Testament, which is translated as “body,” is used to describe the human reality that will be transformed.

Jewish biblical scholar Jon Levenson<sup>45</sup> affirms that, although there were several ideas about the soul in ancient Judaism, the texts always emphasize the understanding of the human being as a psychophysical unity. Levenson criticizes Western thought and Reform Judaism, which emphasize the notion of an immortal soul over the notion of resurrection of the dead. For him, the dead remain through their offspring and not through a disembodied immaterial form like an immortal soul.<sup>46</sup> According to Levenson, it is not problematic to think that if there is a spiritual element in the constitution of the person, it also dies with the body. Resurrection is God's gracious act and does not depend on the notion of an immortal soul. For him, even in later

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<sup>43</sup> See the whole discussion about this theme in N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 164–68, 200.

<sup>44</sup> See the discussion on this topic in Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 52–54.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Levenson, *Resurrection and Restoration of Israel*, 80.

and more Hellenistic texts, like the book of Wisdom, the notion of immortality is referring not to an immortal element in the person's constitution but rather to the Jewish concept of resurrection.

In the view of another important biblical scholar, N. T. Wright, although the notion of an immortal soul is clear in the book of Wisdom, it is important to note that the endurance of this soul after death is not a permanent state; rather, it is linked with faith in the resurrection.

Although texts like Wisdom 3:1-4 suggest the survival of something of the person's identity after death, this text cannot be understood apart from the Jewish belief in resurrection, and the notion of immortality cannot be understood as an attribute or feature of the soul but rather as God's gracious act of preserving the person's identity. For Wright, the Greek concept of immortality is used solely to reaffirm the Jewish concept of resurrection and is not linked to the Platonic view of an immortal soul.<sup>47</sup>

From a different perspective, biblical scholar John W. Cooper<sup>48</sup> maintains that Scripture entails what he calls a "holistic dualism."<sup>49</sup> Although the Scriptures consider the human being as an integrated whole, not as a being divided in different components, they also make room for dualism once they affirm that the human being somehow survives death and remains in existence until the resurrection of the dead.<sup>50</sup> Although in the Old and New Testaments, terms like "body," "soul," and "spirit" express different aspects of the whole human being and not independent elements that constitute the person, because of their philosophical neutrality, possibility of a dualistic consideration or interpretation occurs.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, for Cooper, certain texts from the New

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 164–68.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*.

<sup>49</sup> Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, 70, 93.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, 37, 70–71.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, 24.

Testament suggest that, with death, some kind of separation happens to the human being, who endures existence after death in the intermediate state.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, although it seems that there is no univocal understanding among scholars about the notion of soul, it is very important to note that there is agreement that the Hebrew and Greek terms in Scripture (and their English rendering “soul”) do not suggest a spiritual element that is separable from the body in the same way traditional Catholic doctrine does. In Scripture, there is a tendency to understand “soul” as a term that describes a dimension of the whole human being and not a separable part or element in the human nature or constitution.

### **1.1.5. Pastoral Practice and Belief in the Immortal Soul**

In pastoral practice the word “soul” carries the weight of Platonic dualism in large part because of doctrinal belief in the persistence and survival of the separate immortal soul after death in the so-called intermediate state. As Catholic doctrine asserts, immediately after death, the surviving separated human soul—which is in an interim state before the resurrection—undergoes the particular judgment, and then it enjoys God’s presence in heaven, is purified in purgatory, or is punished with the pains of hell.<sup>53</sup> It is not difficult to conclude that the physical body has no great importance, as it does not take part in this whole process of judgment, purification, reward, or punishment. This is a fairly logical conclusion if the body is not needed or affected by what may happen in this intermediate state.<sup>54</sup> With the exception of the sufferings

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, 104–5.

<sup>53</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed. Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 1021-37:266-271. Hereafter the *Catechism* will be quoted as *CCC* followed by the paragraph and page numbers, e.g., *CCC* 1021-37:266-271. When it is a text without a paragraph number, it will be just *CCC* followed by the page number e.g., *CCC* 49-50. For more on the traditional view on the four “last things,” i.e., “death,” “judgment,” “heaven,” and “hell,” see Regis Martin, *The Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998); George William Rutler, *The Four Last Things* (Evanston: Credo House, 1986); Clodovis M. Boff, *Escatologia: Breve Tratado Teológico Pastoral* (São Paulo: Editora Ave-Maria, 2012), 31–106.

<sup>54</sup> When these events of the afterlife have been depicted in works of art throughout history, however, very graphic portrayals are painted of people going to heaven or being gruesomely tortured in hell. Even though the body does

of purgatory, as something that only the separated soul will experience, the final resurrected state of the human being will, according to this conclusion, simply reflect what already took place for the separated soul immediately after death: eternal punishment or reward. Even though the resurrection of the body is (or at least should be) considered the central event of human salvation history, as it developed in 1 Corinthians 15, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that bodily resurrection will be merely an accessory or an “added value” to what already took place after death during the intermediate state of the separated soul.

It seems that, for the majority of the people who come to Church, even though they profess belief in the “resurrection of the dead” or in “the resurrection of the body” every Sunday,<sup>55</sup> they do so as a future event that does not really matter since it will not actually change what is important to them: salvation or damnation. By the time the resurrection of the dead/body takes place, it is reasoned, the separated soul already will have received one of these two decisive and ultimate possibilities. Apparently, in the popular imagination of many Catholics, belief in the immortality of the soul tends to preclude faith in the resurrection of the body.

It is difficult to verify that this dualistic comprehension of the person in the afterlife has some kind of negative consequence on the way people live their present lives. Nevertheless, the witness of the Scriptures is clear about the embodied, historical, and personal engagement that is required for salvation, which in the sacred texts is not described as the salvation of the person’s soul but as the salvation of the whole person, who will be resurrected in the body-soul unity at the end of time. Those who do love God and neighbor in a very concrete and embodied way will

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not participate in the particular judgment, it does seem significant in the final one. Even though “scenes of purgatory, alone, are not very frequent in the history of art,” paintings of disembodied events like Christ’s descent into hell usually display all characters in embodied form (Heidi J. Hornik, “Eschatology in Fine Art,” in Walls, *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, 633). In literature, for instance, when Dante Alighieri describes purgatory in *The Divine Comedy*, the souls are described in an embodied form. Cf. Paul J. Griffiths, “Purgatory,” in Walls, *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, 437–41.

<sup>55</sup> Appearing in the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds, respectively. Cf. CCC 49–50.

be saved, while those who do not act in this loving way will suffer the consequences (Matt 25:31-46).

### **1.1.6. The Importance of Sound Biblical Exegesis and Interpretation in Preaching**

*Hermeneutics and methods of biblical interpretation.* Contemporary biblical scholarship demands and presupposes the use of methods of interpretation (hermeneutics) or efforts to ascertain the meaning of biblical texts. These methods, under the umbrella of criticism (textual, historical, source, form, etc.), understood in the “sense of careful analysis,”<sup>56</sup> help the reader/interpreter of the Scriptures to understand the texts in ways that could be more faithful to what the writers wanted to communicate through them.

The historical-critical method is often used when a preacher or minister interprets a biblical text; this hermeneutic is not, however, exempt from subjectivity. The interpretation of a text or theme depends on the understanding, intentions, and limitations not only of the preacher but also of his or her audience. The content is accepted and understood according to the possibilities and limitations of the listener, who has a previous learned and constructed history that is particular to the person (with his or her worldview). Therefore, when themes related to eschatological realities, such as the present state of the deceased person, are being preached about, the content being preached encounters the ideas and images that form the listener’s own understanding of such themes. The way a listener assimilates what is preached cannot be measured or controlled. Both the preacher and the listener have their own socially and historically constructed horizons within which their understanding of things occur.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 20; for a more accurate survey of Methods of Biblical Interpretation, see pages 20–29.

<sup>57</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer’s concept of “fusion of horizons” at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gadamer/#HapTra> (Accessed on September 16, 2018); also David Vessey, “Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons,” *International*

Theological doctrinal assertions that may appear in preaching and teaching need to be confronted with what biblical texts were meant to express and not only serve as confirmation: “A thorough-going confrontation of Catholic theology with the modern hermeneutics is a task still to be accomplished.”<sup>58</sup> Awareness of and attention to the original content and intention of the scriptural text on the part of the preacher is highly important so that biblical texts are not used or manipulated merely to confirm the message that is desired; rather, the texts must be fairly treated with good exegetical and hermeneutical lenses.<sup>59</sup>

### **1.1.7. On the “Immortality of the Soul” and the “Resurrection of the Body”**

If the immortality of the soul is overemphasized at the expense of belief in the resurrection of the body, it can be the result of a misinterpretation of some particular biblical text and its eschatological language, symbolisms, and images. It may be a consequence of the way preachers and teachers read and interpret the biblical texts, sometimes only in light of doctrinal assertions and many times taking scriptural texts literally without proper hermeneutical lenses. Those who teach the people of God, especially those preaching about death or explaining some biblical texts, have an important role in the formation of the faithful. It is important and necessary for preaching and teaching to be based on sound exegesis, especially with regard to more difficult and complex texts, like those with eschatological and apocalyptic symbolism. Only by seriously considering the historical-critical tools of biblical interpretation will preaching and teaching be more faithful to the truths these texts communicate.

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*Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 4 (2009): 531–42, at

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09672550903164459> (Accessed on August 22, 2018).

<sup>58</sup> Karl Lehmann, “Hermeneutics,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, vol. 3: *Habitus to Materialism* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 26.

<sup>59</sup> “In the discussion of these and other problems the hermeneutical task imposes itself on all theological work with an urgency which it would be hard to overestimate. And the difficulties which it presents by reason of the subjects and the mental processes involved should not be underestimated or evaded by short-sighted ‘solutions’” (Lehmann, “Hermeneutics,” 26–27).

An amplified, elucidated, and comprehensive theological view of biblical texts that use eschatological symbols, figures of speech, allegories, and images can help the faithful grasp and reflect on the deepest meaning of those texts and the messages their authors were trying to communicate when writing them. A shallow, naïve, one-sided, and superficial reading of these texts, however, without the help of proper hermeneutical methods may give ammunition to literal and often mistakenly dualist interpretations and understandings of eschatological texts. We cannot measure how damaging a superficial or literal reading of the Scriptures can be to the faith of the people. Nevertheless, the use of good exegesis and hermeneutical tools is paramount and sets the tone for how the people of God will receive, read, and understand the biblical texts and then act accordingly.

The difficulty of deconstructing images and ideas already built up in people's minds, however, cannot be ignored. As said above, the preconceived ideas that populate people's imagination, especially regarding the eschatological themes of life after death, have multiple and deep roots (anthropological, cultural, social, political, and religious). They cannot simply be erased but may be replaced, corrected, or redirected with a more sound and reasonable teaching.

Some relevant questions need to be considered, even if they cannot be fully addressed here: Does a person's understanding of the afterlife or about the situation of the dead influence the way this person lives his or her present life? Does the way a person believes and thinks about life after death—whether material, physical, and embodied afterlife, or pure, spiritual, and *soulish* afterlife—influence the way a person lives in the present? These are very important questions that need to be considered by those who teach and preach on eschatological matters. Eschatological assertions express the core of the faith and hope of the Church regarding the future and the goal of creation. This eschatological faith directs the way life is lived in the

present and therefore needs to be taught or preached not only in accord with their symbolic significance or in ways that are fundamentalistic, limited, naïve, and reductionistic.

Eschatological assertions are images that show what the future will look like. Eschatological faith and the attempt to express it is important insofar as it reflects back on the present life and our purpose in the world.

### **1.1.8. Preaching on the Occasion of Death**

“The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them”  
(Wis 3:1)

Countless homilists have begun homilies for funeral Masses by reflecting on these words. As a reading that is commonly chosen by families and/or priests it is included from among the seven optional Old Testament texts to be read as the first reading at funeral Masses outside the Season of Easter. Why is this reading chosen? One popular explanation is because this passage from Wisdom brings comfort and peace as it says that the person or at least the soul of the person who died is somewhere, with someone; because this someone is God, the deceased person who was righteous during his or her life is now somehow safe because he or she is in God’s hands.

Although death is an unavoidable part in the life cycle of all beings, it remains one of the most difficult and delicate realities to deal with for the majority of priests. Even with theological and doctrinal explanations, death, especially the fate of the dead, remains a mystery. There is no certainty about the afterlife, and appropriate biblical texts are relied on to provide a message of peace and solace and to strengthen the hope that, because of the resurrection of Jesus, death is no longer the end of human life. It remains a difficult challenge, however, to preach on the subject of death, not only during funeral Masses and other funeral services (vigils and committals), but also throughout the daily routine of daily Masses that are celebrated with the intention of



contributing to the salvation of the souls of the dead while giving council or support to bereaved people. **For further discussion of Scriptural readings see Appendix I.**

In the next section, liturgical practices will be treated.

## **1.2. Liturgical Practice: Ambiguities and Paradoxes in the Language about Death**

“What happens when I die?” is a question which the funeral ought to address. Indeed, it is central to the rites of death. The answer of earliest Christian Church was that the resurrection of the body was guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ. To lose sight of this is to lose sight of the gospel. ... The funeral service is at heart an encounter not simply with death as an end of earthly life, but with God.<sup>60</sup>

In the first part of this chapter, after a brief consideration of three examples that highlight aspects of the theological and eschatological ambiguities and confusions which inform and influence the beliefs of the Catholic faithful, the role of the Bible was explored as a contributing factor. The use of selected biblical texts proposed as lectionary readings for Masses for the Dead was examined as well as the interpretations given to these scriptural passages, and the influence that such interpretations have on the ways in which people believe and practice their faith, particularly with regard to their understanding of the composition (body-soul unity) of the human person and of the separated soul after death. The purpose of doing so was to draw attention to some of the specific ways that biblical anthropology informs and influences the Judeo-Christian understanding of the soul.

In this second part of Chapter One, the liturgical texts and prayer forms, specifically those used in the *Order of Christian Funeral Rites*<sup>61</sup> and the Masses for the Dead included in the

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<sup>60</sup> Paul P. J. Sheppy, *Death Liturgy and Ritual*, vol. 1: *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology*, Liturgy, Worship and Society (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003), 98.

<sup>61</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*. Richard Rutherford and Tony Barr describe the process from the post-Vatican II publication of the *Ordo Exsequiarum* in 1969 by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship to the actual English rendering of the liturgical funeral rites used in the United States; see *The Death of a Christian: The Order of Christian Funerals*, rev. ed., Studies in the Reformed Rites of the Catholic Church, vol. 7 (Collegeville,

*Roman Missal*<sup>62</sup> are examined along with the ways they inform and influence the faith and beliefs of individuals and communities. These selected liturgical texts often contain ambiguous elements can create confusion in the minds and hearts of people with regard to eschatological themes, especially the fate or the immediate situation of the dead. These ambiguities may be both the result of and a reflection of the tension inherent in the competing claims of Catholic eschatology that include a belief in an immediate judgment of the separated souls of the dead (individual eschatology or eschatology of the soul) and at the same time a belief and hope of the resurrection of the dead as a future event. Some liturgical texts in their form and manner give expression to the Catholic belief that the human being continues in existence through the survival of the immortal separated soul, while others give expression to elements of final hope in the resurrection.

In the following section, some of the liturgical texts that address the theme of human death are analyzed to illustrate the potential confusion they can cause. These texts (scripturally based antiphons, petitions, invocations, and prayers) are used in liturgical settings to express the most important tenets of the Christian faith and Catholic doctrine. When liturgical celebrations prayerfully give expression to the mystery of human salvation, they present, explicitly and implicitly, the Church's understanding of the mystery of the nature of the human person. Mindful of the ancient maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi*, "the law of praying is the law of believing,"<sup>63</sup> the

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MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 115–21, 269–72. As they say, "Almost two decades of experience rendered the 1989 Order of Christian Funerals a more satisfactory pastoral manual and collection of funeral rites" (121).

<sup>62</sup> *The Roman Missal*, English Translation According to the Third Typical Edition (Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 2011), 121.

<sup>63</sup> The old Latin axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi* is a derivation of the Latin expression *legem credenda lex statuat supplicandi*, which can be translated as "the rule of prayer determines the rule of belief." (See Henry Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum; Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals; Latin–English*, ed. Peter Hünermann (for the original bilingual edition), ed. Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash (for the English edition), 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 91 [DH 246:91]. From here on, references to this work will be presented with the abbreviation "DH" (Denzinger–Hünermann), followed by the paragraph and page numbers, e.g., DH 246:91.

fact remains that today the reverse is also true: the way the Church prays is a reflection of the Church's doctrine. This reordering of prayer and belief was explained by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Mediator Dei*:

The sacred liturgy, consequently, does not decide or determine independently and of itself what is of Catholic faith. More properly, since the liturgy is also a profession of eternal truths, and subject, as such, to the supreme teaching authority of the Church, it can supply proofs and testimony, quite clearly, of no little value, towards the determination of a particular point of Christian doctrine. But if one desires to differentiate and describe the relationship between faith and the sacred liturgy in absolute and general terms, it is perfectly correct to say, "*Lex credendi legem statuat supplicandi*"—let the rule of belief determine the rule of prayer.<sup>64</sup>

Although there exists a dynamic of mutual determinism between the way the Church prays and its doctrinal beliefs, liturgical prayer needs to be in conformity with the faith of the Church:

Additional proof of this indefeasible right of the ecclesiastical hierarchy lies in the circumstances that the sacred liturgy is intimately bound up with doctrinal propositions which the Church proposes to be perfectly true and certain, and must as a consequence conform to the decrees respecting Catholic faith issued by the supreme teaching authority of the Church with a view to safeguarding the integrity of the religion revealed by God. (MD 45)

Therefore, in analyzing the construction of liturgical texts and the use that is made of certain terms and expressions with regard to the human person, it is possible to learn something about the Church's doctrine and anthropology. Although, historically speaking, it may be said that since the origins of the Church liturgical texts were defined, shaped, and determined by the

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If it is a reference to a historical commentary of Denzinger–Hünemann, the abbreviation (*DH*) will be followed by only the page number, e.g., *DH* 30. It is found in the Pseudo-Celestine Chapters, or *Indiculus*, once attributed to Pope Celestine I (September 10, 422–July 27, 432), but it is known to have been authored by Prosper of Aquitaine. For more information, see Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 218–83; Francisco Taborda, "Lex Orandi—Lex Credendi. Origem, Sentido e Implicações de um Axioma Teológico," *Perspectiva Teológica* 35 (2003): 71–86; Cesare Giraudo, *Num Só Corpo. Tratado Mistagórico Sobre a Eucaristia* (Coleção Theologica), trans. F. Taborda (São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2003), 22–27.

<sup>64</sup> Pope Pius XII, Encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy *Mediator Dei*, (November 20, 1947), §48, at The Holy See [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_20111947\\_mediator-dei.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20111947_mediator-dei.html) (Accessed on August 10, 2018); hereafter MD.

way the Church prayed and worshiped, current liturgical texts in their contemporary configuration serve also to reinforce doctrinal definitions of the way the people of God pray. As noted above, these liturgical texts, which are based on Church doctrine, serve to inform and influence the beliefs of the faithful.<sup>65</sup>

Without the findings of qualitative research data, it is not possible to assess with precision the extent to which liturgical texts included in the *Order of Christian Funerals* and Masses for the Dead from the *Roman Missal* matter for the people of God and/or inform their way of living out their faith. Are these texts truly helping to form and shape the faith of the people in matters related to death and the final destiny of the human person in a way that is consistent with Catholic doctrine? Since no human being is a *tabula rasa*, it is important for priests and ecclesial ministers to recognize and be attentive to the fact that *what the faithful believe* and *how people imagine* the afterlife is a mixture of the learned tenets of the faith as well as other influential factors such as cultural traditions, formal and informal education, familial customs, the religious practices of popular piety, the arts, and even elements of popular culture.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> An insightful reflection on this subject is found in Kenneth W. Stevenson, “Lex Orandi and Lex Credendi—Strange Bed-Fellows? Some Reflections on Worship and Doctrine,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39, no. 2 (1986): 225–41. Stevenson presents briefly the thought of four theologians who contribute to the relationship and dialogue between liturgical practice or worship and theology, especially with regard to “(a) what is going on among ordinary church-folk, and (b) how the tension that many of us feel about what we have been ‘taught’ and what we ‘practice’ is (or is not) expressed in worship” (Stevenson, “Lex Orandi and Lex Credendi,” 230–31). The theologians cited are Alexander Schmemmann, Geoffrey Wainwright, Stephen Sykes, and Aidan Kavanagh. For the purposes of this chapter, Kavanagh’s theological thought as presented by Stevenson is quite interesting: besides giving worship (or liturgical acts) centrality and priority over theology (and its contents), Kavanagh also states that “an overwhelming feature of liturgy [, therefore,] is its ambiguity” (Stevenson, “Lex Orandi and Lex Credendi,” 236).

<sup>66</sup> This is especially true when the subject is death and the continuing existence (or not) of the human being after death. Books, movies, television shows, video games, and other forms of media play an undeniable role in shaping the way people think about the afterlife (e.g., zombies, ghosts, the transmigration of souls, and other images about life after death). See more on this topic in Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, “Eschatology in Pop Culture,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 655–70; Richard Bauckham, “Conclusion: Emerging Issues in Eschatology in the Twenty-First Century,” in Walls, *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, 671–89; Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

As the North American Jesuit theologian Bruce Morrill has noted, the *Order of Christian Funerals* offers liturgical texts that respect and reflect the theological insights of the Second Vatican Council:

The Order of Christian Funerals carries out the Second Vatican Council's mandate that all rites be revised on the basis of sound tradition so that the church's liturgy might function as a renewed source for the faith lives of its members, in this case as they confront the hard reality of death.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, although the prayers of the post-conciliar *Order of Christian Funerals* express a more comprehensive view of the mysteries related to human salvation and the final destiny of the human person, Morrill warns against the dangers of continuing to focus and rely on a negative theological approach regarding human death when he states:

While the post-Vatican II Order of Christian Funerals recovered the sound tradition of a paschal, ecclesial, eschatological hope, still it could not instantly erase the popular perception of the church's funeral rites as pessimistically focused on sin and fearful judgment. An often poor clerical comprehension and weak pastoral execution of the reformed Order of Christian Funerals, compounded by an individualistic and consumerist anthropology operative in society, leave open a ritual-symbolic void for other types of memorial to fill.<sup>68</sup>

Though post-Vatican II texts may offer some guarantee that the mysteries of human salvation taught by the Catholic Church are being expressed in the liturgical rites and rituals, the extent to which these mysteries are understood by the faithful in their fullness and broadness remains an open question that is difficult to measure. The centrality of Jesus' own life, death, and resurrection, so fundamental in the lives of the faithful as they come face-to-face with the mystery of human death, and their eschatological hope in the future resurrection of the body may have their importance diminished or even blurred by other factors. Some of these factors may be an overemphasis on other theological claims regarding human mortality, such as the affirmation

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<sup>67</sup> Bruce T. Morrill, *Divine Worship and Human Healing: Liturgical Theology at the Margins of Life and Death* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 232.

<sup>68</sup> Morrill, *Divine Worship*, 233.

of death as a consequence of human sin, or on elements, themes, or images related to notions of an intermediate eschatology, such as God's immediate judgment of the separated soul after death, or the existence and sufferings of the deceased soul in the purgatory.<sup>69</sup>

Although Morrill gives special attention to the influence of individualism and consumerism in the way that American society deals with death in contemporary funeral celebrations,<sup>70</sup> it is worth noting another observation that is of critical importance for this dissertation. Namely, the deviation from the centrality of the paschal mystery in the celebration of the reformed *Order of Christian Funerals* also may be due to unfortunate choices that priests often make when selecting themes to preach about on the occasion of a funeral. It is precisely such deviations that inspired in me the twofold commitment to address this issue by providing an assessment of what is often lacking and an exposition of what is needed in the theological formation of Catholic priests, deacons, seminarians, and lay ministers. Most specifically, when such people are responsible for liturgical celebrations in these important moments related to dying, death, and remembrance, their awareness must be raised regarding the importance of their role as interpreters of the Christian faith in these celebrations.

As it is also the intent of this research to reflect on Catholic belief in the human soul and the confusions and paradoxes that may emerge from this belief in the survival of the separated immortal soul after death, along with concerns and questions about the status and location of the separated soul, **Appendix II** provides an analysis of the prayers and texts from the liturgies

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<sup>69</sup> Not included or analyzed here, due to the length of the present work, are other important issues about people's need and desire to make of the funeral celebrations, as a human rite of passage, a moment to remember and honor the dead and also the opportunity for the consolation of the mourners. For more on this theme, see volume 32 of the liturgical journal *Studia Liturgia* (2002): John F. Baldwin, "The Varieties of Liturgical Experience: Presidential Address," 1–14 (esp. 9–14); Catherine Bell, "Ritual Tensions: Tribal and Catholic," 15–28; Ansgar Franz, "'Everything Is Worthwhile at the End?' Christian Funeral Liturgy amidst Ecclesial Tradition and Secular Rites," 48–68; Hans H. Krech, "Funerals—Dealing with the End in the Middle of Life? Consequences for the Ritual in View of A Publicly Tabooed Dead," 69–88; and Andreas Redtenbacher, "Theological and Pastoral Foundations of the 1999 Study Edition of the Funeral Rite in the Archdiocese of Vienna," 144–55.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Morrill, *Divine Worship*, 233–39.

provided by the *Order of Christian Funerals*: namely, the Vigil for the Deceased and related rites and prayers, the funeral liturgy (Mass and Final Commendation),<sup>71</sup> and the Rite of Committal as well as some prayers and prefaces from the Masses for the Dead in the *Roman Missal, Third Typical Edition*. These are the official texts that must be used by priests in the Mass and, in the absence of a priest, by extraordinary ministers in other celebrations when ministering to the family and friends of a person who has died. In these distinct liturgical moments, priests and ministers make use of specific invitations to prayer, prayers, invocations, petitions, and blessings that address God and the people who are mourning on the occasion of a person's death from a Catholic Christian perspective.

These texts contain some ambiguities and paradoxes, especially in the way they express the reality and situation of the person who has died, which can lead to confusion, for instance, about the "location" of the deceased. These ambiguities and paradoxes are due to the use in these texts of metaphorical and symbolic language to describe what belongs to the realm of mystery, especially those eschatological assertions about what happens (or what the petitioners want to believe is happening) to the person after death. Because there are two "realities" at play in the Catholic understanding of what happens to the person after death, the apparent ambiguity in language is inevitable.<sup>72</sup> These two realities<sup>73</sup> are (1) the resurrection of the dead/body and (2) the Catholic belief, by following biblical texts, elements of tradition, and official doctrinal affirmations,<sup>74</sup> that at the moment of death the soul of the person, because of its spiritual-immortal-subsistent nature, survives bodily death and undergoes God's judgment, receiving

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<sup>71</sup> But also, as Rutherford affirms, "because of traditional usage, the funeral liturgy with Mass has been termed simply funeral liturgy" (Rutherford and Barr, *The Death of a Christian*, 180).

<sup>72</sup> Or, as Stevenson shows in Aidan Kavanagh's thinking, ambiguity is a very strong feature of liturgy (Stevenson, "Lex Orandi and Lex Credendi," 237).

<sup>73</sup> These realities are not presented in the order of occurrence, as if they were events in the present "temporal" dimension, but, in my view, in the order of theological importance due to the definitive and absolute character of the final resurrection of the body/dead.

<sup>74</sup> See Wainwright, *Doxology*, 444ff.

while in this separated state the punishment of hell, the reward of heaven, or purification in purgatory. Elements of these two eschatological “realities” are present in some of the prayers and may be the source of the ambiguities and paradoxes. These ambiguities and paradoxes may be amplified by the fact that the final resurrection of the dead is somehow lived or experienced already—although not completely yet—by the Christian while she or he participates, through baptism and consequently an ethical way of living, in the death and resurrection of Jesus, as it is emblematically affirmed in the Letter to the Colossians 3:1-4.<sup>75</sup> This eschatological tension of the present in the “already but not yet” appears in the liturgical texts.

Nonetheless, it is important to address these potentially problematic issues since they appear in pastoral practice (e.g., practices of popular piety with prayers concerned with the souls in purgatory, or practical cases of people who neglect their own health and corporeal needs because they consider the body to be unimportant) and may reveal inconsistencies and even errors regarding what we really believe or should believe (e.g., the resurrection of the dead/body, which should be at the center of our faith).

### **1.2.1. The Reality of Human Death and Liturgical Prayers on the Theme**

The undeniable reality of human death is present in the core of Christian liturgical practice and faith, not only because death affects all of us, as it is the fate of all living beings, but mostly because death is at the center of the mystery of human salvation. Through his incarnation and life, through his dying and death, Jesus assumed and therefore redeemed the whole of our human existence. Jesus’ death along with his resurrection became the signature of God’s

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<sup>75</sup> “If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.” Many other passages affirm this mystical participation of the faithful still in the present in the mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection: Colossians 2:12 (“You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead”); Romans 6:3-11; Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:6.



gracious salvific action toward human redemption. The liturgical prayers present in some of the prefaces for Mass express quite clearly this belief:

***[B]y dying [Jesus] has destroyed our death***, and by rising, restored our life.<sup>76</sup>

***[F]or his Death is our ransom from death***, and in his rising the life of all has risen.<sup>77</sup>

***For as one alone he accepted death, so that we might all escape from dying***; as one man ***he chose to die***, so that in your sight we all might live forever.<sup>78</sup>

***[W]e who have been redeemed by the Death of your Son***.<sup>79</sup>

For ***through his Paschal Mystery***, he accomplished the marvelous deed, ***by which he has freed us from the yoke of sin and death***.<sup>80</sup>

***[B]y the passion of the Cross he freed us from unending death, and by rising from the dead he gave us life eternal***.<sup>81</sup>

Many other prefaces of the *Roman Missal* express the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection at the center of Christian faith.<sup>82</sup>

In its symbolic language, the Church proclaims that from the pierced side of the dead body of Christ on the cross, the sacraments of the Church (and the Church itself) have their source.<sup>83</sup> The liturgy of the Church in the celebration of the sacrament of Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations on the occasion of a person's death makes reference to God's mysterious salvific plan of human redemption accomplished by Jesus through his death and resurrection:

In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity. Christ "achieved his task of redeeming

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<sup>76</sup> Preface I of Easter, *Roman Missal*, 410. The emphasis in this and following quotations is mine.

<sup>77</sup> Preface II of Easter, *Roman Missal*, 412.

<sup>78</sup> Preface II for the Dead, *Roman Missal*, 476.

<sup>79</sup> Preface IV for the Dead, *Roman Missal*, 480.

<sup>80</sup> Preface I of the Sundays in Ordinary Time, *Roman Missal*, 424.

<sup>81</sup> Preface II of the Sundays in Ordinary Time, *Roman Missal*, 426 (emphases mine).

<sup>82</sup> Preface IV of the Sundays in Ordinary Time, for instance, has as its title "The history of salvation" and depicts the reality and mystery of Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven and the "consequences" of each of these events for human salvation: "For by ***his birth*** he brought ***renewal to humanity's fallen state***, and by ***his suffering, canceled out our sins***; by ***his rising from the dead*** he ***has opened the way to eternal life***, and by ***ascending to you***, O Father, he has ***unlocked the gates of heaven***" (*Roman Missal*, 430).

<sup>83</sup> Blessing of the Water on Easter Vigil: "as he hung upon the Cross, gave forth water from his side along with blood" (*Roman Missal*, 229).

humanity and giving perfect glory to God, principally by the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension.”<sup>84</sup>

Therefore, if human death was the greatest source of human anxiety, in Jesus’ death and resurrection, human death is no longer the end of our life but becomes part of the mystery of our lives and union with God. Jesus died our death and, by doing so, destroyed our death and gained for us eternal life.

Funeral rites have a twofold purpose: praying for the deceased and consoling the living:

At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting word of God and the sacrament of the eucharist.<sup>85</sup>

The funeral rites become a special time to pray to God in intercession for the person who died and in thanksgiving for his or her life. It is also a privileged moment to recall our faith in Jesus’ resurrection, which strengthens our hope in the resurrection of all those who have died, therefore bringing comfort and consolation to those who mourn.

Nevertheless, death still remains a mystery and a territory of the unknown. One question that arises while we are facing the death of someone is this: where are those who have died? This is where language meets its limitations and where some ambiguities appear, especially in the way we pray to God on behalf of the dead.

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<sup>84</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 2 (General Introduction).

<sup>85</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 2.

## 1.2.2. Liturgical Prayers and Eschatological Tensions: The Ambiguities of the Faith and the Limitations of Liturgical Language

### 1.2.2.1. Prayers for the Dead in the Roman Missal

Though human language is used in worship, Christians believe that this language becomes the sign and medium of a reality which goes beyond the purely human, viz. the encounter between man and God. In worship we have the peculiar situation that one partner in the conversation, though in some sense he hears and speaks, is the transcendent God.<sup>86</sup>

This section addresses some of the ambiguities that are present in selected texts used in Masses for the Dead in the *Roman Missal*.<sup>87</sup>

For the first example of ambiguity, see the set of prayers for the Mass for the Dead Outside Easter Time. In the Collect Prayer, Form B, it says:

O God, who are mercy for sinners and the happiness of your Saints, **give**, we pray, **to your servant N.**, for whom (today) we perform the fraternal offices of burial, **a share with your chosen ones in the blessedness** you give, so that **on the day of resurrection, freed from the bonds of mortality, he (she) may come before your face**.<sup>88</sup>

Although this prayer asks that the deceased person may receive something from God's "blessedness" now, only on the day of resurrection will the person be free from mortality and be present before God's face. This seems to be a very balanced and fair prayer that takes into consideration the two eschatological realities discussed above and the tension between them: (1) the intermediate eschatology with the survival of the person through his or her immortal soul and the reception of a participation ("a share," as asked by the living ones who pray) in God's presence/beatitude, and (2) the final eschatological hope when on the "day of resurrection" the deceased will fully participate in God's presence/beatitude. The prayer expresses the provisional consequence of the Catholic belief in the immortality of the soul and the desired recompense

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<sup>86</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Language of Worship," in *The Study of Liturgy*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 466.

<sup>87</sup> A more detailed presentation and analysis of the liturgical prayers proposed in the *Order of Christian Funerals* is given in **Appendix II**.

<sup>88</sup> *Roman Missal*, 1219.

given to it after its judgment: a “share” in what is still to come. But the final, definitive, and foremost consequence, which is to be before God’s face, will happen only in the resurrection.

The Prayer after Communion in the same set of prayers for the Mass for the Dead Outside Easter Time asks that “your servant N., who (today) *has journeyed* from this world, *may* by this sacrifice *be cleansed and freed* from sin and *so receive the everlasting joys of the resurrection.*”<sup>89</sup> Will these everlasting joys be received now or in the future at the resurrection? Is the prayer talking about the present state of the separated soul receiving already the “everlasting joys” (or a share) of the resurrection? It seems that this prayer is open to interpretation and also carries the tension of both the intermediate and the final eschatological realities. Perhaps this kind of liturgical text is the best way to relate to the things that are unknown and/or unknowable, as it is the case of the “temporality” after death.

The ambiguity remains about what the deceased is receiving now (in his or her immortal soul “present” state) and what he or she will receive in the resurrection. Would this kind of liturgical prayer be a source of confusion for the faithful? Maybe it is the way a liturgical prayer should be in order to contain the intermediate and final eschatological doctrinal affirmations. In its liturgical wisdom, the Church affirms both the belief in the immortal separated soul in the intermediate state (already enjoying to some extent its eternal fate/destiny—heaven or hell—or being purified in purgatory to get into heaven) and the belief in the fulfillment of human happiness (“everlasting joys”) in the resurrection of the dead.

Nonetheless, although some of the prayers of the *Missal* contain this tension between both eschatological realities believed by the Catholic faith, judgment/intermediate state and the general resurrection/final judgment (which can be present in some prayers in an ambiguous language), other prayers clearly privilege one *or* the other. While the affirmation of only the

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<sup>89</sup> *Roman Missal*, 1220.

definitive eschatological reality, that is, Christian hope in the resurrection of the dead, does not seem to be problematic because of its absolute and ultimate meaning (as the very final reality and object of Christian hope), it does seem to be problematic when only the reality of the immortal soul is affirmed in the prayer without any mention of the hope in the resurrection. This is especially problematic when what is asked for the soul of the deceased has tones or airs of finality. These prayers that do not mention hope in the resurrection may leave the impression for those who are listening and/or praying, that what really matters for the dead (and for those who are alive and praying) is what is happening to and/or the destiny of the separated soul. And if the prayer asks God only to grant an eternal inheritance or redemption of the soul of the deceased without mentioning hope in the future resurrection of the dead, it seems that this resurrection, which is the future definitive, final, and glorified state of the person who died, does not have much importance.

This can be exemplified in one of the prayers of the Masses for the Dead During Easter Time, Form C.<sup>90</sup> The tension between both aspects of the Catholic eschatological hope (the *intermediate* for the separated immortal soul and the *definitive* for the body-soul risen person in the resurrection of the dead) is present, and some ambiguity is shown in what is asked for the deceased if we compare, for instance, the different prayers proposed for the Collect. In the first of the two offered options for the Collect, the priest asks God to fortify the assembly's hope in the resurrection of the person who died:

Listen kindly to our prayers, O Lord: as our faith in your Son, raised from the dead, is deepened, ***may our hope of resurrection for your departed servant N., also find new strength.***<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *Roman Missal*, 1220–21.

<sup>91</sup> *Roman Missal*, 1200.

In the other option for the Collect Prayer, the priest asks something only for the soul of the person:

O God, who through the ending of present things open up the beginning of things to come, grant, we pray, that the soul of your servant N. may be led by you to attain the inheritance of eternal redemption.<sup>92</sup>

This beautiful optional prayer states that, with death, God launches the beginnings of the future and not the fulfillment of the definitive future, which we believe will be achieved only with the resurrection of the dead/body. The prayer asks, however, solely that “the soul” of the deceased person “may be led by God” to receive the effects of “eternal redemption.” Although this is a prayer to be prayed in the Mass for the Dead during Easter Time, it does not mention either Jesus’ resurrection or the final resurrection of the dead. This prayer is a petition only for the soul of the person who died and therefore overemphasizes just one aspect of the Catholic eschatological hope, that is, the destiny of the soul, setting aside the important and definitive aspect of its eschatology, the future resurrection of the dead. What seems more problematic is that both of the following prayers in this set of prayers for this same Mass do the same:

**Prayer over the Offerings:** Look favorably on our offerings, O Lord, so that *your departed servant N. may be taken up into glory with your Son*, in whose great mystery of love we are all united. Through Christ our Lord.

**Prayer after Communion:** Grant, we pray, O Lord, that *your servant N.*, for whom we have celebrated this paschal Sacrament, *may pass over to a dwelling place of light and peace*. Through Christ our Lord.<sup>93</sup>

Not only is hope in the resurrection not mentioned in the three prayers of this Mass, but what is asked for the deceased has a character of definitiveness: to “be taken up into glory” and to “pass over to a dwelling place of light and peace.” One could argue that the prayer is not explicitly saying that these definitive realities asked on behalf of the person who died are for

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<sup>92</sup> *Roman Missal*, 1221.

<sup>93</sup> *Roman Missal*, 1221.

now. It is not explicitly stated, however, that they are not for now, and the wording can lead people who are listening to this prayer to think that these definitive realities are what is happening to the soul of the deceased now. Again, there is no mention of faith or hope in the resurrection.

Although these prayers do not mention the term “soul,” as the deceased is referred to by his or her name, they are open to interpretation since Catholic faith professes that the separated soul, after death and particular judgment, may already be enjoying God’s presence even before the resurrection. And this enjoyment that the separated soul may have (if judged worthy of it) of the beatific vision in the intermediate state could well be depicted by the expressions used in this prayer: “glory with your Son” and “dwelling place of light and peace.” Therefore, a set of prayers like this can be problematic if the present state of the human being who died—or of what remains alive, namely, the separated soul—is considered the definitive state and fate of the deceased. And if the hope in the resurrection is not affirmed, for instance, in any of the readings of the Mass and/or in the homily by the priest, people can be left with the impression that the liturgical celebration is affirming that the present state of deceased—who is believed to have survived through his or her separated immortal soul—is his or her final one. It is important to remember that many of the people who attend funeral services, like the funeral Mass, are not practicing Catholics and will not have much chance to hear or to understand what is the Catholic eschatological hope for all: the resurrection of the dead.

As in the aforementioned set of prayers, some other prayers in the *Missal* also do not mention belief and hope in the resurrection. Therefore, these prayers may leave the members of the assembly who are listening and participating in the celebration with the impression that the

actual, present state of the immortal soul is the definitive one. One example of this is in Preface I for the Dead, which says:

In him [Jesus] the *hope of blessed resurrection has dawned*, that those saddened by the certainty of dying might *be consoled by the promise of immortality to come*. Indeed, for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this *earthly dwelling turns to dust*, an *eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven*.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the ambiguity of this prayer, it has beautiful words expressing the future Christian hope by using expressions like “*hope of blessed resurrection*” and “the promise of immortality *to come*.” Even the notion of immortality, which is believed and affirmed by Catholic doctrine as an attribute of the human soul, is expressed as a reality yet to be attained. Bruce Morrill, in commenting on this Preface, raises several questions:

The content of Christian hope is in question: Do the lines of the preface (Christian Death I) proclaim Jesus’ resurrection as the source of all others, an unprecedented change in the human condition offered in hope to believers? Or might these words be heard to say that Jesus’ resurrection gives hope by revealing to humans the sure destiny of their true nature? Put another way, does Christian hope in resurrection stand on God having done to Jesus something radically new for all humanity, namely, giving life after death? Or on the contrary, does Jesus’ resurrection give hope by confirming humanity’s innate capacity for immortality? And what of the timing in all this? Do the dead enter into the risen condition immediately?<sup>95</sup>

While agreeing with Morrill that a preface like this leaves open several questions, it also must be said that it is due to its ambiguous content. This kind of prayer is, however, in tune with the belief that the immortal souls of the righteous will go, immediately after death and particular judgment, to the “eternal dwelling [that is] made ready for them in heaven.” Also, in this prayer, hope in the resurrection of the dead and in the immortality of the soul are associated as realities that are hoped for and will be achieved in the future. When the prayer continues, nonetheless, its content makes the idea of future resurrection and immortality appear as unnecessary. It seems

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<sup>94</sup> *Roman Missal*, 474.

<sup>95</sup> Morrill, *Divine Worship*, 242.



that there is no need to hope for a resurrection or for immortality if it is affirmed that after the body (“earthly dwelling”) disintegrates, there is another “eternal dwelling” already prepared in heaven, unless this expression should be considered a metaphor for the resurrected body. It seems, however, that it is not the case since this new and eternal dwelling is something “ready” for the faithful ones. This Preface may be making reference to the Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 5:1: “For we know that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in heaven.”<sup>96</sup> Is the “earthly dwelling” in this Preface a metaphor for the physical body? The reference to a biblical text in a liturgical prayer like this may not be the best way to communicate the whole eschatological hope that is being celebrated, unless it is accompanied by a sound interpretation of the expressions contained in it. In the context of the pericope that this text is part of, this “earthly dwelling” should be interpreted not simply as the physical body in contrast with the soul but as the earthly life with its sufferings at the present.<sup>97</sup> Morrill also criticizes the use of this biblical reference in Preface I for the dead:

While perhaps acceptable in the function of consoling the liturgically assembled faithful, who in the preface dialogue would have just lifted up their hearts to the Lord, the statement is biblically and theologically problematic. Biblical faith recognizes not the moment of one’s bodily death but rather one’s sacramental dying with Christ in baptism as establishing one’s everlasting dwelling place. Baptism places all believers, living *and* dead, in the eschatological tension, waiting for Christ’s coming again in glory *and* judgment. The words of the preface, on the other hand, could imply that death causes an immediate passage from earth (and the body) to heaven.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> In entire pericope from which this text is taken, 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10, Paul is expressing the difference between the present earthly mortal existence, with its burdens and sufferings, and the eschatological existence. Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 552; and Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 821.

<sup>97</sup> Raymond E. Brown affirms that, although it is a difficult text to decipher, Paul is contrasting not body and soul but “human existence in the world as one lives by the life that one got from one’s parents, vs. living by the life that one receives through faith from the risen Jesus Christ” (Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 552).

<sup>98</sup> Morrill, *Divine Worship*, 241.

A biblical reference out of its context, as it is in this Preface, also may mislead the faithful to think that the present situation or state of the deceased, as a separated immortal soul, is a definitive one. What more could happen to the person if he or she is already dwelling in heaven? The affirmation of the hope in the resurrection of the dead must be emphasized so that the faithful are not left with the impression that the separated soul of the deceased person is already in the “eternal dwelling” and nothing more is necessary for him or her. The use of metaphorical biblical language out of its original context in prayers like this may lead people to confusion because of its ambiguity.

#### **1.2.2.2. The Return of the Soul in the 2011 English Translation of the Roman Missal**

Some considerations are to be made about the use of the term “soul” in the liturgy. Joseph Ratzinger criticizes the almost complete absence of the term *anima* (with the English rendering “soul”) in the liturgy for the dead in the Roman Missal of Paul VI and its suppression in the ritual for burial.<sup>99</sup> He argues that the term *anima* has a fundamental importance for Christian thought, since it expresses ideas that belong to the tradition of the Church since its beginning, such as the idea that the person continues to exist after death even though the body decays.<sup>100</sup> For Ratzinger, therefore, the term “soul” cannot be simply erased or suppressed. It is not a term that is interchangeable with the ideas of personhood, the “I,” or the human self; rather, it has and expresses particular ideas that the Church earlier defined in its doctrine. Ratzinger insists that the belief in the immortal soul forms a unity with the belief in the resurrection of the body, which is not diminished in its value.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 105, 248.

<sup>100</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 246–47.

<sup>101</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 254–55. In scanning the original Latin text of the *Missale Romanum* from Paul VI, however, the Latin term *anima* (and its proper declensions) appears at least 127 times in the prayers and in the antiphons taken from the Scriptures. It seems that it appears more than “here and there.” Cf. *Missale Romanum*,

On the First Sunday of Advent in 2011, all English-speaking countries began to use the new English translation of the Third Typical Edition of the *Roman Missal* for use in the dioceses of the United States of America. In order to be more faithful to the language (words and meanings) of the “original” amended *Third Latin Typical Edition of the Roman Missal* from 2008, this new English translation made substantial changes in the language of several parts of the Mass. The word “soul” reappeared as the English rendering for the Latin *anima* in several prayers. As Ratzinger rightly points out, the term *anima* had almost disappeared from the *Roman Missal* promulgated by Paul VI after the Second Vatican Council. Although the term *anima* appeared “here and there, and that in timorous fashion,”<sup>102</sup> in the official English translation of the *Roman Missal* used until recently, the English rendering of “soul” was completely absent. Not once did the word appear, for instance, in the Mass for the Dead.<sup>103</sup> It was only in the new English translation from 2011, that the English rendering of “soul” reappeared. In the prayers proposed for Masses for the Dead, for instance, the term “soul” (or “souls”) appears thirty-one times.<sup>104</sup>

Now, since the new translation was promulgated, in every Mass that is celebrated, at least once the term “soul” appears. If not in the prayers or antiphons, it is said out loud in the prayer that all the assembly proclaim when the priest, right before the distribution of Holy Communion, takes the host and slightly raises it while facing the people and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God,” to which the people respond: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but

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Editio Typica Tertia Typis Vaticanis (2002), [https://media.musicasacra.com/books/latin\\_missal2002.pdf](https://media.musicasacra.com/books/latin_missal2002.pdf) (Accessed on April 30, 2018).

<sup>102</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 248.

<sup>103</sup> *The Sacramentary*, English Translation Prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1985), 952–87.

<sup>104</sup> *Roman Missal*, 1217–57.

only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”<sup>105</sup> Prior to the 2011 *Missal*, the people responded: “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.”<sup>106</sup> The Latin *anima* appears in the original text of the *Missale Romanum* of Paul VI, which reads: “Dómine, non sum dignus, ut intres sub tectum meum, sed tantum dic verbo, et sanábitur ánima mea.”<sup>107</sup> Therefore, the word “soul” was re-introduced in the English Mass.

Why was this reintroduction of the term “soul” in the liturgy of such great importance? Was it necessary to express some kind of right or correct idea that the liturgy of the Church is trying to communicate? As demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, if the biblical meaning of the Hebrew term *nephesh*—translated with the Greek *psyche*, the Latin *anima*, and the English “soul”—has more to do with the contemporary ideas of human “life” and with the ideas of “I” or “self” than it has to do with the contemporary idea communicated by the word “soul,” was it of such great importance to change the “I” of the previous English translation for “my soul” in the new one in order to be faithful to the original Latin *anima*?

In the specific case of this prayer, it would be important to note that this phrase is almost completely derived from a biblical text, Matthew 8:8, when the centurion of Capernaum expresses his humility and confidence. As the Jesuit priest Joseph Jungmann asserts in his massive work *Missarum Solemnia*,<sup>108</sup> the insertion of *anima mea* in the second part of the centurion’s phrase in place of “my servant” goes back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in a sacramentary from lower Italy,<sup>109</sup> but it was “introduced into the order of Communion in the

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<sup>105</sup> *Roman Missal*, 521.

<sup>106</sup> *The Sacramentary*, 565.

<sup>107</sup> *Missale Romanum*.

<sup>108</sup> Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development (Missarum Sollemnia)*, 2 vols., trans. Francis A. Brunner (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1959).

<sup>109</sup> Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, 2:356n40.

Roman Ritual of 1614,”<sup>110</sup> when the official Latin version took the place of the vernacular diocesan rituals then in use. But the original intention of the use of the phrase was to manifest the humility and confidence of the centurion from Matthew 8:8, so was the change from “I” to “my soul” in the new English translation from 2011 necessary? Was it just an attempt to be literal and faithful to the Latin *anima mea*? What about the meaning or idea that the phrase is trying to communicate? What will be healed or saved: the soul or the whole human being who is praying? One could argue that the expression “my soul” communicates the idea of the whole human being. But does it? Again, it seems that, for contemporary ears, the “I” communicates better the idea of the whole human being than the expression “my soul.” And if the official authority of the Church approved for so long the use of the “I” in the previous translation, it seems that the term was expressing and communicating an idea that should be communicated until 2011. It is interesting to note that the equivalent to the English “I” is still in place in the vernacular translations in many other languages, like Portuguese, French, Italian, and Spanish. It seems that the use of the term “soul” in this case, and maybe in many other places in the new translation of the *Roman Missal*, reinforces the salvation of the soul over the salvation of the whole human being in the body-soul unity. After all, is not the salvation of the whole human being what is to be communicated in the liturgy?<sup>111</sup>

### **1.2.2.3. Reflections on the Order of Christian Funerals**

The texts of the *Order of Christian Funerals* were composed based on the Catholic eschatological faith regarding what happens to a person who has died. Therefore, with the use of metaphorical language, the prayers describe belief in the survival of the immortal separated soul

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<sup>110</sup> Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, 2:372.

<sup>111</sup> For a more complete presentation and discussion of selected liturgical texts offered by the *Order of Christian Funerals*, see **Appendix II**.

that will join its body again in the resurrection of the dead. Language, especially while relating to unknown realities, may not be adequate and may present ambiguities like the affirmation of the person being in heaven and in the grave at the same time. The reality believed is this: the soul of the deceased person is with God while his or her body is in the grave until the resurrection. Even though none of the separated realities, the corpse and the separated soul, are or can be considered the whole person who died, both are used to describe the situation, state, and location of the person. And as the majority of the texts do not refer to the person with the terms “soul” or “body” but instead use his or her name, this can lead to additional ambiguities and paradoxes.

The supposition, as already described, is that the majority of Catholics are solely concerned with the salvation of the soul and have a very Platonic view of the afterlife. In this view, since only the soul survives death and is the object of punishment, purification, or reward, what matters is its salvation and what can be done toward this end. And if only the soul is able to undergo what is described, it is considered to be a reality or state identical to the person. The soul then ends up being the person, and the body is considered an instrument or accessory.

Ambiguous language can increase this erroneous view.

On the occasion of someone’s death, even though the liturgical prayers may express hope in the resurrection of the dead/body, the majority of people are concerned with the fate of the person’s soul after death and with what can be done to help the person’s soul to be with God (that is, to be released from purgatory as soon as possible). It is understandable that believing a deceased loved one who died is alive through his or her soul may bring comfort to a person who has lost someone to death. And if the only thing alive with the passing of a person is his or her soul, it is understandable that what matters in people’s minds is the present state or situation of the immortal, separated, spiritual soul. As nothing more can be done to the person’s body beyond

a dignified burial or cremation and demonstrations of respect, the main concern becomes: What can be done to guarantee the salvation of the deceased person's soul?

Even though ministers can try to affirm that true Catholic faith believes in the salvation of the whole person (body-soul unity), that Catholic eschatological hope is in the final resurrection of the dead and in the renewal of all things in Christ, not in our disembodied existence with God in a spiritual and materially detached way, it seems that the only concern of people when thinking about their dead is if their souls are saved or not. It is understandable, therefore, that people want to make all possible efforts for the salvation of a deceased relative's soul: usually offering Masses, rosaries, novenas, and sacrifices for the salvation of the souls that may be in the purgatory.

It is important to remember that, even though there may be ambiguities in some of the official liturgical prayers used in Masses for the Dead, those faithful who are just concerned with the salvation of the souls of their loved ones are not confused because of these prayers. For them, the future resurrection is not a question, and it does not seem to be important. What matters is the location of the souls of the dead and what can be done to help them to reach heaven. And if what really matters is the person's soul, the question remains if the faith and hope in the resurrection of the dead/body is at least present among Catholics as an expectation regarding their future. If not, or if the resurrection of the body really does not matter in people's minds, I wonder about their consideration, appreciation, engagement, caring, and concerns about their own and others' present embodied physical conditions or situations.

As an illustration in this regard, in the article “Remembrance and Hope in Roman Catholic Funeral Rites: Attitudes of Participants Towards Past and Future of the Deceased,”<sup>112</sup> the authors pose important questions about the relationship between the experience that participants at Catholic funerals have and the images that these funerals use from the Christian tradition, especially of the paschal mystery and the future resurrection of the dead. The authors developed a questionnaire and sent it to people who participated in funerals in parishes throughout the Netherlands. The questions were focused on finding out how much people think about the themes of salvation and resurrection, especially regarding the person who died. A total of 229 people responded to these questionnaires. The results that provide insights for this dissertation are those about the “resurrection of the deceased with Jesus Christ in the future.”<sup>113</sup> While more than 50% of the respondents agreed with phrases relating to what the researchers called topics of salvation (e.g., “The deceased will live on with Christ,” 60.4% agreed; “God will not abandon the deceased after his death,” 79.8% agreed; “God will take the deceased home after his death,” 70.2% agree; “God will be with the deceased after his death,” 54.7% agreed),<sup>114</sup> less than 50% of the people agreed with phrases concerning the topic of resurrection (e.g., “The deceased will rise from death with Christ,” 45.7% agreed; “The deceased will resurrect with Jesus,” 45.2% agree).<sup>115</sup> These responses show that people are not really thinking about or agreeing with the idea of future hope in the resurrection of the dead. One of the researchers, Thomas Quartier, in comments on the results of this same research in another article,<sup>116</sup> also provides important information and insights about the need for preaching at funerals that make

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<sup>112</sup> Thomas Quartier, Chris A. M. Hermans, Anton H. M. Scheer, “Remembrance and Hope in Roman Catholic Funeral Rites: Attitudes of Participants Towards Past and Future of the Deceased,” *Journal of Empirical Theology* 17, no. 2 (2004): 252–80.

<sup>113</sup> Quartier, Hermans, and Scheer, “Remembrance and Hope,” 263.

<sup>114</sup> Quartier, Hermans, and Scheer, “Remembrance and Hope,” 267.

<sup>115</sup> Quartier, Hermans, and Scheer, “Remembrance and Hope,” 267.

<sup>116</sup> Thomas Quartier, “Liturgy Participant’s Perspective: Exploring the Attitudes of Participants at Roman Catholic Funerals with Empirical Methods,” *Liturgy* 21, no. 3 (September 2006): 21–29.



better connections between the memories of the life of the deceased and the contents of the faith that are celebrated. He says that the research shows a disconnect between what the people were thinking and the elements of the paschal mystery that were being celebrated and preached; therefore, there is a need for balance in the content of the preaching between the memories of the life of the deceased and the elements of the paschal mystery and the centrality of Jesus' resurrection.<sup>117</sup> For him, it is not enough that the funeral service be centered on the paschal mystery of Christ if it is not also connected somehow with the life of the person who died, through preaching and through the way the funeral is celebrated (music, symbols, etc.). Of course, the content of the preaching cannot be only about the life of the deceased; both are necessary. Only in this way will hope in the resurrection remain at the center of the liturgical celebration.

### **1.2.3. Reflections on the Way These Themes about Death Are Communicated**

Priests and other pastoral ministers have an important role in communicating the truths of faith in a way that does not overemphasize one or the other—most important, the belief in the immortality of the soul over the belief in the resurrection of the dead/body. It is up to the minister to give a good balance and to express the faith of the Church at the appropriate occasions.

Regarding the theme of human death, faith in the survival of the immortal soul and its salvation should always be considered in relation to the mystery of the salvation of the whole person and of the resurrection of the dead. People must not be left with the impression that the resurrection of the dead/body is just an accessory to the belief in the immortality of the soul. Instead, it is a central tenet of the Catholic faith, as expressed in the Nicene -Constantinopolitan

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. Quartier, "Liturgy Participant's Perspective," 27–28.

Creed, which professes faith in the resurrection of the dead,<sup>118</sup> and in the “baptismal Symbol of the Roman Church known as the Apostle’s Creed,” which professes faith in the resurrection of the body.<sup>119</sup> However, one of the difficulties often encountered by ministers is that of communicating, through homilies, teachings, and reflections in all formative occasions, the centrality of our belief in the resurrection of the dead/body. Yet, as part of the true expression of the Church’s eschatological hope in God’s victorious act and intervention in the end of times, it is precisely this belief in the resurrection of the dead/body that will bring about the renewal, the fulfillment, the reconciliation of the whole creation (all things) in Christ.<sup>120</sup> The resurrection of the dead/body (which means the resurrection of the whole person in the body-soul unity) along with the restoration of all things in Christ (cf. Acts 3:21) is at the center of Church’s expectation for the future and therefore must be part of the people’s faith and hope.

When people are asked about their view of the future, however, rarely, if ever, does someone mention the resurrection of the body or even some image about “heaven” or the “presence of God” or “the beatific vision” connected with the idea that this present world will be transformed, restored, and renewed. How can a person think about the transformation of the present world if it is experienced as something horrible and evil? What is the point of thinking about the resurrection of this physical body if it is experienced as a painful reality or as the source of lust, and sin?

What really seems to matter in people’s minds and imaginations about the future is the salvation of souls. The large majority of people the author of this dissertation speaks with in daily practice in ministry think about “heaven” as a reality completely detached from the

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<sup>118</sup> “I look forward to the resurrection of the dead” (*Roman Missal*, 379).

<sup>119</sup> “I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body” (*Roman Missal*, 380).

<sup>120</sup> Cf., Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964) § 48, at The Holy See. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) (Accessed on November 14, 2018) hereafter, *LG*.

material and physical present reality. It is the life of the spirit in the presence of God who is pure spirit. Heaven is a purely spiritual reality. It is not rare to hear from faithful Catholics that they imagine their deceased relatives' souls enjoying the presence of God, and that is all. They have no further expectations; nothing from the present material reality will be in heaven, only the spiritual souls of the dead. Their view on the future of the dead and their own future is some kind of spiritual life free from the "chains" of the present reality, which is fallen and material. There will no longer be need for the present physical reality or for a body and its needs. This way of thinking about the future and life after death, however, is not Christianity but a kind of Platonism.

The problem with this is that nobody can take for granted that his or her soul will go to heaven. Only those who are found worthy and who during life rendered service to the Lord will experience heaven (Mt 25:21; Mt 25:34-36).<sup>121</sup> For the majority of those who are not found to be worthy enough for heaven, but also not so neglectful of their service to the Lord to be consigned to hell, there is a second option, namely, purgatory, a time of purification before the soul enters heaven (1 Cor 3:15; 1 Pt 1:7).<sup>122</sup> At this stage, in purgatory, the soul of the person might benefit from the prayers, sacrifices, and good deeds that the living make in favor of those souls and that will gain for them indulgences that may help them go to heaven. Again, what seems to be at the stake and what really matters in this mind-set is the salvation of souls.

And if the salvation of the soul is what matters, what is left when it comes to believing in the resurrection of the body? Not that people disagree with the centrality of hope in the resurrection of the dead, but if the immortal soul is saved in heaven (or on its way to and from purgatory), it seems that resurrection will not really add some qualitative change to the state of

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. CCC 1023-1029:267-268.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. CCC 1030-1032:268-269.

this human being who will rise. Can something else be added to the reality of a soul that is already enjoying the beatific vision? Resurrection seems to be an accessory to the beatitude of heaven. Besides, one could quote Saint Paul's affirmation that the resurrected body is a "spiritual body" (see 1 Cor 15:44-47). Well, truth be told, the resurrected body is as spiritual as it is physical, although no longer corruptible.<sup>123</sup>

It is important to remember that, even theologically, the separated soul is considered an incomplete and partial reality that cannot even be called a person or a human being. Only the body-soul unity is the person or the complete human being. And, after death, the wholeness of the human existence will be achieved, even though in a completely different and transformed way, only in the resurrection of the dead.

It is necessary to keep in mind that the *Order of Christian Funerals* uses symbolic language to express what is believed and hoped for in the mysterious reality of the afterlife. Nonetheless, some of these liturgical texts still can lead the people of God to confusion when they over-emphasize the state of heavenly enjoyment of the person/soul/self in God's presence. As has been shown, in many of the prayers for the dead that were presented, we ask God to receive the person and to give him or her the fullness of happiness and peace. A language that places more emphasis on the deep association between the mysteries of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and human life, death, hope, and resurrection remains the solution and the challenge. The words of Bruce Morrill on this theme are appropriate to end this discussion:

Christianity's healing response to death's bitter sting is faith in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. When we speak of human death as well as the resurrection of the body we are dealing with mystery, indeed two distinct, powerful, yet related mysteries in Christian life. For believers there is both the phenomenon common to all people, the definitive limit-situation that is death, and the call to shape one's entire vision for life around the

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<sup>123</sup> Especially in this scriptural text, where "spiritual" is used in opposition not to the "physical" but to what is "natural" and subject to decay and corruption.

belief that God raised the executed Jesus bodily from the dead, that is, faith in the paschal mystery.<sup>124</sup>

In the next chapter, the subject of the human soul in the present life and in the afterlife as it is affirmed in the Church's magisterial documents throughout history is the focus of inquiry.

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<sup>124</sup> Morrill, *Divine Worship*, 205.

## Chapter 2. The Human Soul and the Development of Doctrine: A Historical Overview of Church Teachings

If we consider the material content of the faith, nobody can deny that there exists a considerable difference between that which is explicitly and officially taught as part of the content of the faith and that which the average Christian in the Church knows about the faith and believes. Most Christians believe explicitly much less than what is explicitly present in the doctrine of the magisterium. This actual faith is to a considerable extent riddled with misunderstandings. Many things are held as belonging to this faith that in reality do not belong to it.<sup>125</sup>

In Chapter One, the complexities and ambiguities that are present in foundational biblical texts used to explain the soul and official prayers of the Roman Catholic Church that are used in liturgical rites for the dying and the dead were examined. Some of the theological problems inherent in these texts and rituals were then identified, along with their potential and actual pastoral consequences in the lives of the faithful, specifically with regard to their beliefs about the soul, its separated state, the afterlife of the dead, and the resurrection of the body. These beliefs inform and influence people's actions and reactions in the face of dying and death, their experiences of grief and loss, and their efforts to make sense of the *quattuor novissima* (the four last things): death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Often this occurs through appeals to popular piety, private devotions and problematic interpretations of what the Church has taught and currently teaches. Mindful of the fact that the human soul has commonly been understood as responsible for the intellectual functions of the mental life of a human being, it is important to consider the interdisciplinary significance of theological and religious discourse on the soul. Given recent advances and findings in the field of neuroscience, what are the implications for the Church's theological claims when neuroscientists can locate and connect in a causal way everything that is considered as *mental* to brain events and neurological processes?

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<sup>125</sup> Karl Rahner, "What the Church Officially Teaches and What the People Actually Believe," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22 trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 165.

With the above background in mind, Chapter Two turns to the critical theological task of providing a clear and coherent understanding of the historical development of Church teachings on the subject at hand. Since the existence of the human soul is a matter of faith, it is of critical importance to the life and ministry of the Church that those entrusted with the ministry of handing on the Tradition fully understand: (a) what the Church has taught, (b) what disputed questions have shaped these teachings, (c) what the church currently teaches, (d) what the faithful are to believe, and (e) how these beliefs can be adequately communicated and appropriated across cultures and contexts.

Throughout history, in papal letters and conciliar declarations, the Magisterium of the Church has officially proclaimed what Catholic Christians are to believe about the human person and his or her constitution. One important aspect of human nature is the human soul. To understand the soul's origins and ends—its unity with the human body, its separation from the mortal body at the time of death, and its immortality—requires considerable exploration into claims made about the soul, beginning with the earliest professions of faith and continuing over time through developments in theological investigations and Church teachings.

### **2.1. The Soul in the Professions of Faith in the Early Creeds<sup>126</sup>**

In following the historical order of documents presented in the *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, one sees that the concept of the human soul first appears in the creeds written at the end of the fourth century. This first section refers to those professions of faith that are “fixed verbal formulas,” are not solemn proclamations of the Magisterium of the Church, and therefore have no dogmatic authority. It is important for

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<sup>126</sup> “Creeds that represent a solemn act of the Church’s Magisterium and can be assigned a doctrinal character equal to other documents of this teaching authority are listed in the second part of the compendium among the ‘Documents of the Church’s Magisterium.’ In addition, the time of their formulation is most often well known: these would be synodal professions of faith and those presented or accepted by popes.” *DH* 17.

this research, however, to include these earlier verbal formulas in order to show the first appearances of the word “soul” in these professions of faith.

The first example in which “soul” appears is the Creed of Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis (374), in its Long Form.<sup>127</sup> The word “soul” appears twice: first, in the article professing the faith in the Son of God, where it says that “he was made man, that is, he assumed the complete man, soul and body and mind and all that is man except sin”,<sup>128</sup> the second appearance refers to all human beings and is related to the belief “in the resurrection of the dead, and the just judgment of souls and bodies, and in the kingdom of heaven and life eternal.”<sup>129</sup>

While the short version of this text says only that the Son “was made man,”<sup>130</sup> the long version affirms that the Son of God “assumed the complete man,” explaining that this “complete man” means a soul (*psyche*) and a body (*soma*) and a mind (*nous*), but it leaves open whatever more the human being is with the exception of sin. At the end of the creed, however, only the terms “soul” and “body” are used to talk about the human being who will be judged after the resurrection. The question arises: why does the text use the term “mind” (*nous*) to describe the humanity assumed by the Son and not only the terms “soul” (*psyche*) and “body” (*soma*), as at the end?

Epiphanius’s text was probably a reaction<sup>131</sup> to Apollinarius of Laodicea’s position that Jesus had neither a human mind (*nous*) nor a soul (*psyche*) but that he was the union between the

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<sup>127</sup> This long form “was intended for catechetical use of as a baptismal formula for heretics and is a form of the Nicene Creed amplified by Epiphanius himself” (*DH* 41); see also in Josef Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 7th rev. enl. ed. (Bangalore: St Paul’s, 2001), 7. This work is abbreviated as “ND” and will follow the same format used for “*DH*.”

<sup>128</sup> *DH* 44:33.

<sup>129</sup> *DH* 44:30.

<sup>130</sup> *DH* 42:29; ND 10:8.

<sup>131</sup> See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 295. It reads, “The brilliance and thoroughgoing logic of Apollinarius’s synthesis are undeniable. Nevertheless certain of its features were bound to arouse disquiet. Opposition first manifested itself at Antioch, where his disciple Vitalis had



*Logos* and a body. In Jesus' body, the *Logos* accomplished the functions of the human soul and mind.<sup>132</sup> This thesis, which was under the umbrella of the *Logos-sarx* Christology, was also supported by Apollinarius's friend Athanasius at least until the Synod of Alexandria (362), when Athanasius as its chairman endorsed its formula that agreed that Jesus "did not have a body lacking soul, sensibility or intelligence."<sup>133</sup> Walter Kasper says that Apollinarius changed his view, but not quite:

In his last writings, however, Apollinarius admitted that the *Logos* had not only assumed human flesh but also a human soul. For this reason, he tried now to solve the problem of unity with the aid of the Platonic trichotomy, distinguishing between flesh (*sarx*), sensual soul (*psyche*) and mind-soul (*nous* or *pneuma*). Apollinarius now taught that the *Logos* had indeed assumed a sensual soul (*psyche*), but not a mind-soul (*pneuma*).<sup>134</sup>

Apollinarius relied on the tripartite division of the human nature as posed in 1 Thessalonians 5:23<sup>135</sup> and used Hellenistic trichotomic anthropology—also relying on 1 Thessalonians 5:23—to affirm that Jesus did not have the rational soul or mind or spirit (represented by the Greek term *nous*), once the *Logos* assumed its place,<sup>136</sup> but only the sensual

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established the heresy. After discussion with him Epiphanius insisted that to achieve man's salvation the Only-begotten must have assumed a complete manhood."

<sup>132</sup> "According to Apollinarius' anthropology, man was 'spirit united with flesh.' So in the God-man as he expressed it, 'the divine energy fulfils the role of the animating spirit (*psyche*) and of the human mind' (*nous*). Linked with this is the problem whether he was a dichotomist (i.e., believed that human nature consists of body and soul) or a trichotomist (i.e., believed it to consist of body, animal soul or *psyche*, and rational soul or *nous*)" (Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 292).

<sup>133</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 288; cf. B. Llorca S. I., R. Garcia-Villoslada S. I., F. J. Montalban S. I., *Historia de la Iglesia Católica. Tomo I—Edad Antigua: La Iglesia en el Mundo Greco-romano*, 3rd ed. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1940), 440–42; also, it is worth noting C. B. Armstrong's explanation on the Synod of Alexandria: "Apollinarius taught that in Christ the Divine Word took the place of the *nous* or reasonable soul. His envoys were present at the Synod. They and their opponents were examined, and both professed to admit that the Incarnate Word, being perfect man, had both a body and a reasonable soul, and that the Incarnation was complete and not a mere indwelling, as the Word had dwelt in the prophets" (C. B. Armstrong, "The Synod of Alexandria and the Schism at Antioch in A.D. 362," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 22, no. 87 [April 1921]: 206–21).

<sup>134</sup> Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (Wellwood, England: Burns and Oates; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 210.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, vol. 1: *History of Doctrines in the Ancient Church*, trans. Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1961), 245.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *Dogmática Católica: Teoría e Prática da Teologia* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2014), 244–45.

or animal or fleshly soul that is the principle of the human life of the body.<sup>137</sup> When the Creed of Epiphanius in its Long Form describes the complete human nature assumed by the Son through the use of terms that infer an anthropological trichotomy (i.e., body, soul, and mind), it safeguards the integrity of Jesus' humanity while rejecting any erroneous views like Apollinarism.

Similar to the affirmations of the Creed of Epiphanius are those of the *Hermeneia*, an interpretation of the creed once attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria (373), which also professes that the Son of God “had truly, and not in appearance, a body and soul and mind and all that is proper to men but without sin.” As in the Creed of Epiphanius, it affirms the faith “in the eternal judgment of the souls and bodies.”<sup>138</sup> In the same way, these affirmations appear in the Great Creed of the Armenian Church at the end of the fourth century.<sup>139</sup> However, in the Great Creed of the Armenian Church there is a peculiar affirmation in which it is stated that the Son of God took from Mary not only the body but also the soul and the mind:

who, for us men and for our salvation, descended from heaven, became incarnate, was made man[, begotten] perfectly through the Holy Spirit from the holy Virgin Mary, *from whom he took flesh, mind, soul* [from her he took body and soul and mind] and all such as is *in man* [man], truly and not only in appearance, suffered, was crucified, was buried, rose on the third day, and ascended into heaven in the same body, sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come in the same body and in the glory of the Father to judge the living and the dead, of whose kingdom there will be no end.<sup>140</sup>

Although similar to the previous two creeds, it says explicitly that the Son took from Mary all that is and constitutes his humanity. As will be discussed later in this chapter, however,

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<sup>137</sup> Cf. “He [Apollinaris] declared that Jesus Christ comprised within himself three elements—human flesh, a fleshly soul, i.e. physical human life, and the divine Word. Christ had no human *nous* or rational soul, and therefore He could not err or sin” (Leighton Pullan, *Early Christian Doctrine* [New York: Edwin S. Gorham, 1905], 101).

<sup>138</sup> *DH* 45:31.

<sup>139</sup> The origin and age of this creed is uncertain: “Some hold that it is older than the long creed of Epiphanius (\*44f.) and that it was introduced into Armenia from Capadocia toward the middle of the fourth century; others, that it is simply a more recent and inferior form of the *Hermeneia* (\*46f.) that came into common use in Armenia from the seventh century” (*DH* 32).

<sup>140</sup> *DH* 48:32.

it was eventually declared that the human soul was created directly by God<sup>141</sup> and not transmitted naturally through human generation,<sup>142</sup> as this creed affirms.

These three creeds have in common the fact that they describe the human nature assumed by the Son, not in the body-soul dyad, but in the trichotomy of body/flesh-soul-mind (*soma*, body; *sarx*, flesh; *psyche*, soul; *nous*, mind).<sup>143</sup> These creeds, all from the same period, used the same trichotomic Hellenistic (Platonic) linguistic schema<sup>144</sup> in order to safeguard the true humanity of Jesus against those like Apollinarius who affirmed that the Logos replaced the human rational soul or mind (*nous*) in Jesus. It seems that this is why the term “mind” (*nous*) appears in the three creeds only in reference to the humanity of Jesus and not in relation to other human beings, as is the case in the affirmations regarding the final judgment. It will be a “judgment of souls and bodies,”<sup>145</sup> and the term “mind” (*nous*) is not mentioned. In the tripartite Platonic and Hellenistic schema, the mind/*nous* (as the human intellect, capacity of reasoning, or spirit) is different from the soul/*psyche* (which is the animal or life force). The reason that the

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<sup>141</sup> As it is affirmed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “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” (CCC 93:366).

<sup>142</sup> Attributed to Tertullian, Traducionism was the theory that affirmed that the human soul or part of it was transmitted by the parents to the son or daughter. (Cf. Müller, *Dogmática Católica*, 99; see also Rev. Bernard J. Otten, *A Manual of the History of Dogmas*, vol. 1, *The Development of Dogmas During the Patristic Age, 100–869* [St. Louis, MO / London: B Herder, 1917], 300–301.) It was condemned by the Magisterium of the Church: “Traducianism is the doctrine which teaches that not only the body but also the soul is generated by the parents. It affords an easy explanation for the inheritance of psychic qualities and defects, and in theology, for the transmission of original sin, one which is not, however, in keeping with the Christian faith. Traducianism is unacceptable as it seems to exclude the spirituality of the human soul. It was condemned by Pope Anastasius II (498) (cf. DS 360). It is rejected again among various errors of the Armenians condemned by Pope Benedict XII” (ND 171).

<sup>143</sup> Cf. *DH* 44:30; *DH* 46:31; *DH* 48:32.

<sup>144</sup> Although these creeds are from the fourth century, they may bear influences of the tripartite way of understanding the human being from earlier fathers like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian, who followed Plato’s tripartite definitions of the human being from the *Republic*. For Clement, for instance, while the soul was the life-force, the mind (*nous*, intellect or rational faculty) was what gives dignity to the human being: “For Clement, it is due to their possession of *nous* that humans are made in the image of God, since mind is an endowment unique to the human species” (Paul S. McDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind: Speculations about Soul, Mind and Spirit from Homer to Hume* [Aldershot: Ashgate: 2003], 129). For a further discussion on this tripartite understanding in the patristic period, see McDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind*, 123–43.

<sup>145</sup> The shorter form of the Creed of Epiphanius has no reference to the “judgment.” Cf. *DH* 42:29; ND 10:8.

term *nous* is not mentioned may be simply that it was implied in the notion of *psyche*, or maybe common knowledge was that whoever has a human *psyche* also has a human *nous*, and if there is no doubt that all humans have a *psyche* and a *nous*, there is no need to mention the *nous* to describe the human being who will be judged.<sup>146</sup> As people like Apollinarius were affirming that the Son did not assume or have a human *nous*, however, it was necessary to affirm it in order to safeguard the full humanity of Jesus (and human salvation).

Besides affirming Jesus' humanity with the three terms of *soma*, *psyche*, and *nous*, it is intriguing that these creeds also assert that the Son assumed or had whatever more a human being can have or be<sup>147</sup> with the exception of sin. This reference to sin is understandable since the human capacity for sin was attributed to the human *nous*,<sup>148</sup> and this is why, in order to guarantee Jesus' sinlessness, Apollinarius asserted that the *Logos* took the place of the mind of Jesus. Although "mind" is the English rendering of the Greek *nous*, in the case of the controversy about Jesus' full humanity, this term also can be translated as "rational soul,"<sup>149</sup> "higher spiritual soul,"<sup>150</sup> "rational faculty" or "intellect,"<sup>151</sup> "intellectual soul" or simply "spirit."<sup>152</sup>

When the creeds state that the Son assumed "all that is a human being," it could be that the three terms mentioned may not be considered the "only" constituent parts of the human being but as human dimensions mentioned in the Scriptures and in the philosophical thought at that time. These terms were used by Greek philosophers to describe the totality of a human being in

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<sup>146</sup> The affirmation of bodies and souls as the object of the judgment seems to be the affirmation of the corporeal material reality of the human being after the resurrection.

<sup>147</sup> Creed of Epiphanius: "and all that is man" (*DH* 44); Athanasian *Hermeneia*: "and all that is proper to men" (*DH* 46); Great Creed of the Armenian Church: "and all such as is *in man*" (*DH* 48).

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Llorca, Garcia-Villoslada, Montalban, *Historia de la Iglesia*, 441; Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 201.

<sup>149</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 292.

<sup>150</sup> Brian O. McDermott, *Word Become Flesh: Dimensions of Christology*, New Theology Studies 9 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 199.

<sup>151</sup> McDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind*, 129.

<sup>152</sup> Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, 245.

all of his or her constitutive “parts” or “components,” but these terms also were used by the biblical authors from both the Old and the New Testaments to describe the dimensions that constitute the whole of a human being. At the time these creeds were formulated, the authors made use of terminologies with both biblical and philosophical connotations. Even though one can argue that these terms describe parts or components in the constitution of the human being, the simple fact that the texts say that human beings can be more than what was described suggests that the tripartite anthropological Hellenistic scheme used is not definitive or absolute. And if “sin” is included in the text as a possible constituent of what the human being is, it seems that all the terms used are referring more to human dimensions or characteristics. The mind or *nous* can be described as one of the three constituents of the human being, as the “higher spiritual soul,” but also as a dimension, a capacity, or a power of the person: “the faculty of reason and choice.”<sup>153</sup> In the New Testament, for instance, the term *nous* appears mostly to describe the ability to understand or the person’s mind-set or mentality.<sup>154</sup>

The whole idea of the human soul, along with derived or associated notions like the mind (*nous*) used to describe the human being, and his or her composition or dimensions were not univocal in the earliest proclamations of the faith. And since the Great Creed of the Armenian Church affirms that Jesus’ human mind and soul were taken (or received) from the Virgin Mary, it seems that it was not yet an established and/or definitive teaching of the Church that the human soul is created directly by God, at least not in Asia Minor in the late fourth century. One may say, however, that the affirmation that the Son took from the Virgin Mary his body, soul, and mind is only a way of affirming Jesus’ full humanity and does not necessarily deny the fact that his soul and mind were created directly by God, as is the case of all human beings.

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<sup>153</sup> McDermott, *Word Become Flesh*, 199.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Rom 7:23; 12:2; 1 Cor 14:14-19; Eph 4:17-23; 2 Thess 2:2; Rev 17:9. The term *nous* could also be implying in these creeds the idea of the more elevated part of the soul or the intellectual soul.

These creeds used the notions of body/flesh, soul, and mind to assert that the Son assumed everything that constitutes a human being in order to guarantee the full, true, and real humanity of Jesus and consequently human salvation. This was the issue at stake. All human beings were redeemed because in Jesus the human nature was united with God.<sup>155</sup> The human being as body and soul is reaffirmed at the end of the creeds in terms of judgment, perhaps to guarantee that the resurrection is a bodily event. The absence of the term “mind” (*nous*) may suggest that it was included in the notion of the soul and therefore was not considered necessary to cite. It was necessary, however, to affirm it with regard to Jesus due to the threats posed by currents of thought that were advancing the claim that he had no human mind.

### **2.1.1. Faith in the Resurrection of the Soul and the Body (Egypt, Mid-Fourth Century)**

In the three creeds mentioned above, the expression “judgment of souls and bodies” appears after the profession of faith in the “resurrection of the dead.” This fact seems to emphasize that the whole person, body and soul, will be judged after the resurrection. In the *Apophthegmata* of St. Macarius the Egyptian or the Great,<sup>156</sup> however, there is a peculiar mention of soul in the profession of faith with regard to the resurrection of the dead: “And *we believe* [!] in the resurrection of *soul and body* [of the dead], as the apostle says: ‘[It is sown in corruption, it rises again in glory,] it is sown a natural body, it rises again a spiritual body’ [*cf. I*

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<sup>155</sup> “In a famous phrase of Gregory Nazianzen, ‘What has not been assumed cannot be restored; it is what is united with God that is saved.’ It was Adam’s *nous*, he recalled, which originally violated the commandment, so that it became imperative that the Redeemer should possess one too. According to Gregory of Nyssa, ‘By becoming exactly what we are, He united the human race through Himself to God’; while according to an unknown critic, He used His incorruptible body to save men’s corruptible bodies, His immortal soul to save souls doomed to death. It was necessary for him to have both, for ‘it was impossible for Him to give one in exchange for the other; and so He gave His body for men’s bodies, and His soul for men’s souls’. As the new Adam enabling us to participate in His divinity, Christ necessarily possessed human nature in its completeness” (Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 297).

<sup>156</sup> This creed is attributed to St. Macarius the Egyptian or the Great who lived in the fourth century (ca. 300–390). Cf. *DH* 34.

*Cor 15:42-44*].”<sup>157</sup> Usually in the creeds, faith is professed in the resurrection of the body, or of the flesh, or of the dead. Although this specific Greek text places in brackets the explanatory expression “[of the dead],” the simple mention of the human soul as being a subject of the resurrection is an interesting fact. It is not clear if mention of the soul implies belief in some notion that the soul also dies, or simply the fact that, even though it is believed to be immortal and survives bodily death, it is also somehow affected by the resurrection. Since 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 is cited in the text as a source of or reference for such an affirmation, the expression “resurrection of soul and body” may need to be understood in reference to St. Paul’s own understanding of these terms. For Paul, the “body” is a synonym for “flesh” and “dead.”<sup>158</sup> Regarding Paul’s use of the term “soul,” it may be understood in reference to his notion of the “natural body” (1 Cor 15) as the English rendering “natural” translates a Greek adjective derived from the term *psyche*, which is translated as “soul.” Therefore, the term “soul” as used in this creed may be signifying “a purely material principle of animation”<sup>159</sup> of the body and not the rational immortal soul. The “spiritual body” that will rise in the resurrection is the whole human being, soul and body, that died as a “natural body.”

It is important not to exclude the possibility that human death would be thought of as affecting the soul as well as the body, since belief in the immortality of the soul was not yet declared as a Magisterial affirmation. Viewed in this light, the soul also would be directly the subject of resurrection, and not indirectly through the resurrection of the body. At the time St. Paul was writing, though, there were those who affirmed that the resurrection was an event

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<sup>157</sup> *DH 55:35*. *DH* explains the meaning of the use of italics and signs: “If in the variant reading, text is omitted, the omitted text is printed in italic in the primary text followed by the sign [-!]” (*DH*, 11).

<sup>158</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 15:39, 40, 42; Cf. Rev. Alfred G. Mortimer, *The Creeds: An Historical and Doctrinal Exposition of the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902), 263.

<sup>159</sup> Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 813.

related to the soul and not to the body.<sup>160</sup> The exposition in the creed that the resurrection of the dead involves “soul and body” may be the affirmation that the human being will rise in his or her wholeness.

### **2.1.2. Body, Soul, and Sensibility: The Complete Human Nature (France, Late Fifth Century)**

The credal formula *Fides Damasi*, attributed to Damasus I (or Jerome), “very probably originated in southern France in the late fifth century.”<sup>161</sup> It presents another peculiar affirmation about the incarnation: “He assumed body, soul, and sensibility, that is, a complete human nature.”<sup>162</sup> The author’s words defining the human nature that the Son assumed in the incarnation was, as in the first three creeds mentioned above, a reaction against Apollinarism and declared in defense of Jesus’ humanity.<sup>163</sup> Since this creed was written in Latin, different words were used to describe human nature in its completeness. The Latin term *carnem* was used to describe what in English translation is rendered “flesh,” which sometimes is used interchangeably with “body.” Regarding the term *sensum*, translated as “sensibility,” it seems to be a reference to the animal soul,<sup>164</sup> as described by the Greek term *psyche*. The term *animam*, translated as “soul,” seems to be a reference to the rational soul or mind as described by the Greek term *nous*. This affirmation about the meaning of the term *animam* is confirmed by a curious exhortation that appears at the end of this creed: “Read these words, keep them, subject your soul to this faith.”<sup>165</sup> The term “soul” (*animam*) describes the human being’s capacity to consent to the truth that is professed, a

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<sup>160</sup> Cf. Mortimer, *The Creeds*, 363–64.

<sup>161</sup> *DH* 72:37; cf. ND 10.

<sup>162</sup> “carnem, animam et sensum, hoc est perfectum suscepit hominem” (*DH* 72:38).

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Llorca, Garcia-Villoslada, Montalban, *Historia de la Iglesia*, 442; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 245ss; Otten, *A Manual*, 1:251.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. MacDonald, *A History of the Concept of Mind*, 142.

<sup>165</sup> “Haec lege, haec retine, huic fidei animam tuam subiuga” (*DH* 72:38; ND 12).



faculty connected to human intelligence and will, powers attributed to what later will be defined as the rational soul.

### 2.1.3. The Rational Soul and Human Flesh: Reaffirming the Incarnation

The use of the expression “rational soul” first appears in the important creed referred to as the Pseudo-Athanasian Profession *Quicumque*.<sup>166</sup> The text of this creed declares that “the correct faith”<sup>167</sup> in the incarnation confesses Jesus as “perfect God and perfect man, subsisting with a rational soul and human flesh. . . . For just as one man is a rational soul and flesh, just so the one Christ is God and man.”<sup>168</sup> This text repeats what was defined at the Council of Chalcedon (451), which also was a rejection of Apollinarism.<sup>169</sup> Although the expression “rational soul” bears some resemblance to the Aristotelian philosophical concept of “intellectual soul,” which was later adopted in its Thomistic usage by the Magisterium of the Church, it is not possible to affirm that the intellectual soul was understood as the “substantial form of the body” in the mid- to late fifth century.<sup>170</sup>

As was shown in the professions of faith (or creeds) discussed above, the term “soul” appears mostly in reference to the Son of God in order to affirm and guarantee the true humanity of Jesus. Therefore, the focus of concern for the authors of these texts was defending the humanity of Jesus, *not* providing authoritative pronouncements regarding the Church’s

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<sup>166</sup> “At present, the dominant opinion is that the creed originated between 430 and 500 in southern France, probably in the region of Arles, through the work of an unknown author. In the course of time, this creed attained, both in the West and in the East, such importance that by the Middle Ages it was equal in stature to the Apostle’s and Nicene creeds and was used in the liturgy” (*DH* 39; cf. ND 12).

<sup>167</sup> “Est ergo fides recta” (*DH* 76:40; ND 13).

<sup>168</sup> “perfectus Deus, perfectus homo ex anima *rationali* [rationabili] et humana carne subsistens; . . . Nam sicut anima *rationalis* [rationabilis] et caro unus est homo, ita Deus et homo unus est Christus” (*DH* 76:40); J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (1991) have a different translation for the Latin *subsistens*: “composed of a rational soul and a human body” (ND 13). This language of “composition,” however, is not accurate to the original text.

<sup>169</sup> Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 211.

<sup>170</sup> Although the Greek text of Chalcedon uses “soul and body” (*psyche* and *soma*), the Latin text of the *Quicumque* profession brings “soul and flesh” (*anima* and *carne*).

understanding of human nature. These texts do show, however, that, since the beginnings of the early Church, human nature was described in different ways using categories that had both scriptural and philosophical roots. The notion of a soul (or some similar notion) was always present and considered part of human nature.

## **2.2. Church Teachings on the *Human* Soul: Doctrinal Developments in Theological Anthropology**

The documents that comprise the Church’s magisterial teachings include a collection of texts that express, with doctrinal character,<sup>171</sup> the teachings of the Church as the authoritative and authentic interpretation of the Word of God.<sup>172</sup> These pronouncements have different degrees of authority and binding force, depending first, among various criteria, on their authorship.<sup>173</sup> Being aware that some theological terms may not have precisely the same meaning in different magisterial texts,<sup>174</sup> this section of the chapter traces the development of Church teachings pertaining to theological anthropology that deal with the notion of the human soul. Key texts of these teaching will be selected and examined in chronological order.

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<sup>171</sup> Cf. *DH* 17.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. *CCC* 86:27; *Lumen Gentium* 10.2; Pius XII Encyclical *Humani Generis* (August 12, 1950): in *DH* 3886:803. See also the works of Richard Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997); Richard Gaillardetz, *By What Authority? A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003); and Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

<sup>173</sup> “A doctrinal pronouncement will carry different weight depending on whether it is made by a single bishop, the community of bishops, an ecumenical council, a particular synod or a bishop’s conference, the pope, or a congregation of the Roman curia. The more comprehensive the governing authority, the more important the doctrinal decision will be. The highest governing authority with respect to the Church as a whole lies with the pope and the community of bishops” (*DH* 8).

<sup>174</sup> Understanding that while the same term may be used in different texts, the meaning of the term may not be the same. This cautionary observation was raised by Yves Congar as one of the dangers of a “superficial, naïve, and thoughtless use of the ‘Denzinger’” (*DH* 9).

### 2.2.1. The Soul and Human Nature: First Appearances of the Language of the Soul in Church Documents

The term “soul” is mentioned for the first time among the magisterial documents of the Church in the “First Profession of Faith of Sirmium (351), Subscribed to by Liberius in 357” from the “Acts of Pope Liberius on the Question of the Seminarians.”<sup>175</sup> It appears in the article of faith related to the Holy Spirit: “through <the same Spirit>, the *souls* of those who sincerely believe in him are made holy.”<sup>176</sup> It seems that “soul” is a synonym for the whole person or the human “I.” It remains open to interpretation, however, whether the human soul is understood as the spiritual part of the human being that is the object of the sanctifying action of the Spirit, or if the term could be omitted, for instance, without prejudice in the interpretation (e.g., “Those who sincerely believe in him are made holy”). It is difficult to ascertain anything about the soul specifically since the subject matter of this profession of faith deals with “faith in the Holy Spirit” and not with human nature per se. Nonetheless, it seems that in the mid-fourth century the faithful were being instructed that some part or component of the human being was being sanctified by the Spirit.

Later, in a fragment of a letter from Pope Damasus I to the Eastern bishops titled “The Incarnation, against Apollinarists” (ca. 374), the concept of soul (Latin *anima*) appears alongside of the concept of mind (Latin *sensu*, from the nominative *sensus*) in the context of the defense of perfect humanity of Jesus.<sup>177</sup> If Jesus did not have a human mind, as the Apollinarists affirmed,

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<sup>175</sup> *DH* 56–57.

<sup>176</sup> *DH* 139:58.

<sup>177</sup> “In fact, it is claimed they say that our Lord and Savior received an imperfect humanity from the Virgin Mary, namely, without the mind. . . . The whole <man> means in soul and in body, in the mind and in the total nature of his substance. So if the total man had perished, it was necessary that what had perished be saved; but if man is saved without the mind, it thus will follow, contrary to the faith of the Gospel. . . . Besides, it is chiefly in the mind of man that the original sin and the totality of perdition are found.”

The Latin version: “Adseruntur enim dicere, Dominum ac Salvatorem nostrum ex Maria virgine imperfectum, id est sine sensu hominem suscepisse. . . . Totus, id est in anima et corpore, in sensu atque in tota substantiae suae natura. Si ergo totus homo perierat, necesse fuit, ut id quod perierat, salvaretur; si autem sine sensu salvatus est,

the salvation of the whole human being would be undermined, especially because human sinfulness was in some way “located” in the mind. It is not clear if the text is based on a trichotomic view of the human being as body, soul, and mind or if soul and mind are considered synonyms. As described earlier in this chapter, at this point in time the use of the Hellenistic trichotomy was common: the human being was considered body (or flesh), soul (the life force of the body), and mind (the intellectual capacities of the person).

This trichotomic view is clear in another document issued by Pope Damasus I during the same period. In the letter *Per filium meum*, addressed to Bishop Paulinus of Antioch (375), Pope Damasus I defends the perfect humanity of the Son by describing the complete human being as “body, soul and mind.”<sup>178</sup> Keeping in mind that the Platonic trichotomy was affirmed in this document of the Church, it is important to trace the change or evolution of the Church’s understanding of human nature as the duality of body and mind emerged. Another interesting shift occurs when the concept of “flesh” (Latin *carne*, from the nominative *caro*) is used to identify the location where the human mind (Latin *sensu*, from the nominative *sensus*) resides. The mind is “in” the flesh, located in the flesh, as if it could be located elsewhere. Thus, these two components of flesh and mind were viewed as separable and independent. Flesh, soul, and

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iam contra evangelii fidem invenietur. . . . Quid quod ipsius principalis delicti et totius perditionis summa in hominis sensu consistit” (DH 146:63).

<sup>178</sup> “We must confess that Wisdom itself, the Word, the Son of God assumed *body, soul, and mind*, that is, the complete Adam, or, to say it more expressly, our complete old man except sin. Just as we confess that he assumed a *human body* (though we do not immediately attribute to him defective human passions), so also by saying that he assumed a *human soul and mind*, we are not thereby saying that he was subject to the sin of *human thoughts*. But if there is anyone who says that the Word [*verbum*] took the place of the *human mind* in the Lord’s flesh, the Catholic Church anathematizes such a person.”

The Latin version: “Confitendus [est] ipse Sapiencia, Sermo Filius Dei humanum suscepisse corpus, animam, sensum, id est integrum Adam, et, ut expressius dicam, totum veterem nostrum sine peccato hominem. Sicut enim confitentes eum humanum corpus suscepisse, non statim ei et humanas vitiorum adiungimus passiones: ita et dicentes eum suscepisse et hominis animam et sensum, non statim dicimus et cogitationum eum humanarum subiacuisse peccato. Si qui autem dixerit, Verbum pro humano sensu in Domini carne versatum, hunc catholica Ecclesia anathematizat” (DH 148:64).

mind were not simply metaphors to describe different dimensions of the totality of a human being but rather composite parts of the human being.

A similar case to that made by Pope Damasus involves the affirmation made by the Synod of Rome (382) in a document titled *Tomus Damasi* or the “Profession of Faith of Bishop Paulinus of Antioch.” Specifically, in the section called “Trinity and Incarnation of the Word” the theme of Jesus’ humanity appears again:

We condemn those who say that the Word of God dwelling in human flesh took the place of the rational and spiritual soul, since the Son and the Word of God did not replace the rational and spiritual soul in his body but rather assumed our soul (i.e., a rational and spiritual one) without sin and saved it.<sup>179</sup>

It is interesting to note that here the trichotomic schema (body-soul-mind) does not appear. Rather, the human nature assumed by Jesus is affirmed using the dyad of body/flesh and soul (rational and spiritual). The concept of soul (*anima*) qualified as rational and spiritual seems to be interchangeable with the notion of mind or *sensum* used in *Per filium meum* by Pope Damasus I. It seems that the previous trichotomic view of the human composition changed to this dual view where human nature is described through the description of Jesus’ humanity in the body/flesh and soul. The unity of these components in terms of nature and means is not clear. What is clear is that the flesh/body is the place where the rational and spiritual soul is located. This dual view of human nature is reinforced in this same document when it goes on to defend that, during his passion, Jesus felt pain in his “flesh and soul.”<sup>180</sup> Flesh seems to be taken as a

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<sup>179</sup> “Anathematizamus eos, qui pro hominis *anima rationabili et intelligibili* dicunt Dei Verbum in humana carne versatum, cum ipse Filius et Verbum Dei non pro *anima rationabili et intelligibili* in suo corpore fuerit, sed nostrum (id est rationabilem et intelligibilem) sine peccato animam susceperit atque salvaverit” (DH 159:67).

<sup>180</sup> “Anyone who says that in the Passion of the Cross it is God himself who felt the pain and not the *flesh and the soul* that Christ, the Son of God, had taken to himself—the form of a servant that he had accepted, as Scripture says [cf. *Phil 2:7*—he is mistaken.”

The Latin text: “Si quis dixerit, quod in passione crucis dolorem sentiebat Deus, et non caro cum anima, quam induerat—forma servi, quam sibi acceperat [cf. *Phil 2:7*], sicut ait Scriptura—Filius Dei Christus: non recte sentit” (DH 166:68).

synonym for the body, and soul seems to be understood as the same intellectual and spiritual soul cited previously.

The letter *Directa ad decessorem* from Pope Siricius to Bishop Himerius of Tarragona (385) mentions that those who deny baptism to those who desire it may risk the loss of the unbaptized souls.<sup>181</sup> This seems to suggest that the expression “to lose one’s soul” has more to do with “losing salvation” or being condemned. At issue is not the spiritual and intellectual principle of human life but rather the damnation of the person.<sup>182</sup> Also of interest in this letter, specifically in the section on clerical celibacy, when asserting how priests and deacons are to commit themselves to temperance and chastity, the expression used to describe the whole person is “our hearts and our bodies.”<sup>183</sup> It is curious that the word “soul” is not mentioned in this description of the whole person’s commitment. Just as the heart was taken as the seat and origin of personal decisions, this may have been the expression chosen to at the time to designate the whole person along with the body.

### **2.2.2. On the Origin and Nature of the Soul: Early Affirmations in Church Documents**

The first appearance of an affirmation explaining the origin of the human soul is found in the First Synod of Toledo (September 400), in the ‘Profession of Faith in Opposition to the Priscillianists’ or *Symbolum Toletanum I*.<sup>184</sup> Right after the profession of faith in the future resurrection of the body, the correct way of believing in the soul, along with its origin and nature,

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<sup>181</sup> “so that it may not redound to the *loss of our soul* if, after those who desired it are denied the font of salvation one {of them}, when he departs this world, loses both his life and the kingdom {of heaven.}.”

Latin Version: “ne ad nostrarum perniciem tendat animarum, si negate desiderantibus fonte salutary . . . exiens unusquisque de saeculo et regnum perdat et vitam” (*DH* 184:72).

<sup>182</sup> Here the “loss of a soul” refers to this soul losing its salvation, not directly to the death of the person. The meaning is different from the colloquial expression “loss of souls” when referring to the death of people in a tragedy, for instance.

<sup>183</sup> “ut a die ordinationis nostrae sobrietati ac pudicitiae et corda nostra mancipemus et corpora” (*DH* 185:73).

<sup>184</sup> This profession of faith is also called “*Libellus in modum symboli*” (cf. *DH* 75).

is expressed in the following way: “the human soul is not divine substance or part of God, but *a creature not fallen from the divine will* [we call it a creature created by the divine will].”<sup>185</sup> The gnostic sect of the Priscillianists believed that souls were made of the same substance of God.<sup>186</sup> This gnostic controversy is addressed in this particular document, which clearly states that the human soul is not an emanation from God but is created by God.<sup>187</sup>

### 2.2.2.1. Original Sin, Death, and the Soul

In the *Epistula tractoria to the Eastern Churches* (418), in the section on original sin, Pope Zosimus declares that human death was introduced to human beings by Adam and “transmitted to every soul.”<sup>188</sup> The document itself does not say anything about the immortality of the soul or how death affects it. In *Cuperemus quidem*, “A Letter to the Bishops of the Provinces of Vienne and Narbonne,” in the section titled “Reconciliation at the Point of Death,” Pope Celestine I asserts that penance cannot be denied to “those who, at the moment of their death, wish this remedy for their souls.”<sup>189</sup> Denying reconciliation means “to add another death to the dying and to kill his soul with one’s own cruelty.”<sup>190</sup> The death of the soul is mentioned as being another kind of death. It could be a symbolic expression or a metaphor for the person’s condemnation without the benefit of the sacrament of reconciliation. This text also uses the term

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<sup>185</sup> “Resurrectionem vero [futuram] humanae credimus *carnis* [carni]. Animam autem hominis non divinam esse substantiam aut Dei partem, sed creaturam [dicimus] divina voluntate *non prolapsam* [?] [creatam]” (*DH* 190:75).

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Müller, *Dogmática Católica*, 125. See also Augustine, “To Orosius in Refutation of the Priscillianists and Origenists,” in *Arianism and Other Heresies: The Works of Saint Augustine; A Translation for the 21st Century*, vol. 18, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland J. Teske (New York: New City Press, 1990), 15–24, 81–114.

<sup>187</sup> In a series of “anathemas,” the issue of the human soul appears in other two different situations: (1) condemning those who affirm that the Son of God assumed human flesh “without a *soul*” (Latin: “sine anima”) (*DH* 195:76); (2) condemning those who believe “that the human soul is a segment of God or is of the substance of God” (Latin: “animam humanam Dei portionem vel Dei esse substantiam”) (*DH* 201:76).

<sup>188</sup> “transmissae universae animae” (*DH* 231: 85).

<sup>189</sup> “qui obitus sui tempore hoc animae suae cupiunt remedio subveniri.” (*DH* 236:87).

<sup>190</sup> “Quid hoc, rogo, aliud est, quam morienti mortem addere, eiusque animam sua crudelitate” (*DH* 236:87).

“heart” as that aspect of the person that will be judged by God.<sup>191</sup> It is not clear if it can be taken as an image or metaphor for the soul or mind. It seems that the heart was understood as the seat of human intentions and decisions, which is a more biblical understanding of the term.<sup>192</sup> It is important to note that at this point in the Church’s history, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul had not yet been proclaimed.

#### **2.2.2.2. Human Being as Composed by a Body and a Rational Soul**

The theme of the human soul first appeared in an ecumenical council at the Council of Ephesus (431). At the first session of this third ecumenical council, in the “Second Letter of Cyril of Alexandria to Nestorius,” while explaining the hypostatic union in Jesus, Cyril says that the Word did not undergo “a transformation and became flesh or that it was changed into a complete man composed of soul and body. Rather, we say that the Word, hypostatically uniting to himself the flesh animated by a rational soul, became man.”<sup>193</sup> Although this claim asserts the humanity of Jesus, this is the first time that the “composite language” appears in relation to a human being in a major Church document. The complete human being is composed of a body or flesh, which is animated by a soul or rational soul. The same document justifies why the Virgin

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<sup>191</sup> Cf. “Since, therefore, God is the judge of the heart” (Latin: “Cum ergo sit Dominus cordis inspector”) (*DH* 236:87).

<sup>192</sup> This same embodied image of the heart as a place associated with human decisions appears also at the section on grace in the Pseudo-Celestine chapters, or *Indiculus*: “God acts in the hearts of men and in free will itself in such a way that holy thoughts, devout plans, and every stirring of good will is from God” (Latin: “Quod it Deus in cordibus hominum atque in ipso libero operetur arbitrio, ut sancta cogitation, pium consilium omnisque motus bonae voluntatis ex Deo sit”) (*DH* 244:90). Here again the term “heart” and not the soul as associated with human free will and the place where God acts.

<sup>193</sup> *DH* 250:94; cf. ND 604:221. Eirini Artemi, “The Virgin Mary, Theotokos, and Christ, True God and True Man: The mystery of Incarnation according to Cyril of Alexandria,” *Mirabilia: Revista Eletrônica de História Antiga e Medieval* 17 (2013).



Mary is affirmed as the Mother of God by asserting that she generated Jesus’ “holy body, animated by a rational soul, a body hypostatically united to the Word.”<sup>194</sup>

This same composite language appears also in the “Formula of Union Between Cyril of Alexandria and the Bishops of the Church of Antioch” (Spring 433), where Pope Xystus (Sixtus) III declares both Jesus’ divinity and his humanity by affirming him as “perfect God and perfect man, composed or constituted of a rational soul and body.”<sup>195</sup> The body and the rational soul are composite parts of human nature.

In the section titled “The Nature of the Human Soul” in the Letter of Pope Leo the Great to Bishop Turibius of Astorga, *Quam laudabiliter* (July 21, 447), there appears once again a condemnation of the Priscillianists who affirm that the human soul is of the same substance and nature of God. In this condemnation, Pope Leo declares, even if indirectly, that the human soul is created by God from nothing: “there is no created being whatsoever that was not in its origin created from nothing.”<sup>196</sup>

In another letter, titled *Lectis dilectionis tuae*, written to Bishop Flavian of Constantinople (June 13, 449), Pope Leo the Great asserts, against Eutyches, that the Word became “the flesh

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<sup>194</sup> *DH* 251:94; cf. *ND* 605:221. It is also noteworthy that in several passages of two other documents of this same Council of Ephesus (“Second Letter of Nestorius to Cyril” and the “Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius” or “Twelve Anathemas of Cyril”) the term “flesh” seems to be used to express not only the human body but the whole humanity that was assumed by the Word/Son of God—probably following the foundational text of John 1:14. Therefore, it is possible to say that at the time of this council, it seems that “flesh” was used as a synonym not only for “body” but also for the total human nature. Cf. *DH* 251d, 251e, 253, 256, 257, 259:96–98. (Cf. *ND* 606/2, 5, 6, 8: 222–23). *DH* 251d cites three passages of the Scripture in which the word “flesh” is used regarding to the humanity of Jesus: Rom 1:3, “the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh”; Rom 8:3, “For what the law, weakened by the flesh, was powerless to do, this God has done: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the sake of sin, he condemned sin in the flesh”; and 1 Pet 4:1, “Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same attitude (for whoever suffers in the flesh has broken with sin).”

<sup>195</sup> *DH* 272:100; cf. *ND* 607:224. See also L. F. Ladaria, “O homem criado à imagem de Deus,” chap. 2, in *O Homem e sua Salvação* (Séculos V–XVII). *Antropologia Cristã: criação, pecado original, justificação e graça, fins últimos. A Ética Cristã: das “autoridades” ao magistério, História dos Dogmas, Tomo 2*, ed. Bernard Sesboüé, trans. Orlando Soares Moreira, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2010), 107.

<sup>196</sup> Latin: “nihil omnino creaturarum est, quod non in exordio sui ex nihilo creatum sit” (*DH* 285:103).

that he took from a human being and which he animated with the spirit of rational life.”<sup>197</sup> Jesus’ body was received from Mary. His soul, however, treated here as “spirit of rational life” that animated his body, was not received from Mary but had its origin in God.

In yet another letter written by Pope Leo to Julianus of Cos, titled *Licet per nostros* (June 13, 449), in the section on “The Incarnation of the Word,” something curious occurs in the English translation. The text explains how the Word assumed human nature. In the English translation of Denzinger, the Latin *anima* is rendered “spirit” three times.<sup>198</sup> In the sentences that follow these uses of “spirit,” however, it is asserted that the soul of Jesus was not preexistent to his body but created in the very act in which the Word assumed human nature (body and soul). Here the term *anima* is rendered in English as “soul” and not as “spirit.”<sup>199</sup> The text is reminiscent of the condemnation of Origen of Alexandria, who affirmed the preexistence of the human soul. In Jesus’ humanity, as in the humanity of all human beings, the soul is not preexistent but created from nothing, while the body is received from the parents; in the specific case of Jesus, his body was received from Mary.<sup>200</sup>

### 2.2.2.3. Specific Claims Regarding the Rational Soul, Its Origin and Existence

*Rational Soul.* During the Council of Chalcedon (Fourth Ecumenical Council, October 8 to early November 451), while asserting Jesus’ perfect divinity and humanity, the composite

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<sup>197</sup> “carne, quam sumpsit ex homine, et quam spiritus vitae rationalis animavit” (*DH* 292:104–5).

<sup>198</sup> Original in Latin: “Nec enim Verbum aut in **carnem** aut in **animam** aliqua sui parte conversum est . . . ut Verbum et *caro* atque *anima* unus Iesus Christus et unus Dei hominisque sit Filius, si *caro* et *anima*, quae dissimilium naturarum sunt.”

English translation: “For the Word was not transformed in some portion of himself either into *flesh* or into a *soul*, . . . that Word and *flesh* and *spirit* should be the one Jesus Christ and the one Son of God and of man, if *flesh* and *spirit*, which are of dissimilar natures” (*DH* 297:106).

<sup>199</sup> Original in Latin: “Nec animam enim quae anterior exstitisset, nec carnem quae non materni corporis esset, accepit.”

English translation: [Jesus had] “neither a soul that had existed previously nor flesh that was not of the body of the Mother” (*DH* 298:107).

<sup>200</sup> Cf. *DH* 299:107.

language is used to describe the humanity of Jesus: “Jesus is “truly God and truly man composed of rational soul and body.”<sup>201</sup> Although not explaining the characteristics of the two components of human nature,<sup>202</sup> the council reaffirms that the human being is composed of a rational soul and a body.<sup>203</sup>

*The Origin of the Soul.* In the letter *Bonum atque iucundum*, written by Pope Anastasius II to the bishops of Gaul (August 23, 498), the pope condemns those who affirm that the human soul is transmitted by the parents to the child as is the body. He goes on to affirm that God is the one who “imparts souls,”<sup>204</sup> which are made in his image. Therefore, souls are transmitted or issued not by the parents but only and directly by God. Similar texts also make a point of condemning errant teachings about the origin of the soul. Pope Felix III (or IV),<sup>205</sup> for example, during the Second Synod of Orange (July 3, 529), while writing on a related topic, condemns the Pelagians by asserting that “the whole person, body and soul”<sup>206</sup> is affected by sin. The purpose of the document was to affirm that sin is the “death of the soul.”<sup>207</sup>

*The Souls Are Not Preexistent.* The “Edict of Emperor Justinian to Patriarch Menas of Constantinople,” which was published at the Synod of Constantinople (543) and later confirmed by Pope Vigilius, contains a series of anathemas against Origen. In point of fact, these anathemas

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<sup>201</sup> *DH* 301:109. Cf. *ND* 614:227.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Ladaria, “O homem criado à imagem de Deus,” 107.

<sup>203</sup> Other documents also make reference to human nature in the binomial body-soul, as in the letter *In prolixitate epistolae* to Bishop Laurence of Lignido (Illyria, 497) from Pope Anastasius II, where Jesus declared “perfect man from his rational soul and his assumption of a body” (Latin: “perfectum hominem ex anima rationali et corporis susceptione”) (*DH* 357:128).

<sup>204</sup> “indat animas” (*DH* 360:129).

<sup>205</sup> As in *DH* 134. This pope was incorrectly named Felix IV instead of Felix III due to “the posthumous inclusion of Antipope Felix in the list of legitimate popes”. In

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095813730> (Accessed on January, 23 2019).

<sup>206</sup> *DH* 371:134.

<sup>207</sup> *DH* 372:135.

actually were directed against the Origenists,<sup>208</sup> a group of monks from Jerusalem that spread the doctrines of Origen, including the belief that human souls preexisted bodily life.<sup>209</sup> The first of these anathemas condemned those who believed in the preexistence of the souls and that embodied existence is a punishment for the previous sins of the soul.<sup>210</sup> The other two anathemas were addressed to those who affirmed that the soul of Jesus preexisted the incarnation<sup>211</sup> and those who affirmed that Jesus' soul along with the Word of God were united to his body only after it was formed.<sup>212</sup>

The Second Council of Constantinople (Fifth Ecumenical, 553) reaffirmed that in Jesus the Word was united with “the flesh animated by a rational and intellectual soul.”<sup>213</sup> Similarly, Pope Pelagius I's letter to King Childebert I, titled *Humani generis* (February 3, 557), states that the Word “united to himself flesh animated by a rational soul and intellect.”<sup>214</sup> Many other important documents that came after this time also affirmed that Jesus was human flesh and

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<sup>208</sup> Cf. *DH* 143. Neuner and Dupuis clarify: “The doctrine condemned is not directly that of Origen, but of a group of monks of Jerusalem who exaggerated and proposed as firm doctrine what Origen had advanced as a hypothesis for theological thinking. Their doctrine is influenced by Platonist philosophy” (ND 167).

<sup>209</sup> Cf. *DH* 403, 404, 405:144; cf. ND 167. See also Ladaria, “O homem criado à imagem de Deus,” 107; Müller, *Dogmática Católica*, 99.

<sup>210</sup> “If anyone says or thinks that human souls had a previous existence, viz., that first they were spirits or blessed powers which, having become tired of the contemplation of God and turned to evil, grew cold (*apopsugeisas*) in the love of God and for this reason came to be called souls (*psuchai*) and so were in punishment sent down into bodies” (ND 401/1:167; cf. *DH* 403:144). See also Ladaria, “O homem criado à imagem de Deus,” 107; Müller, *Dogmática Católica*, 99.

<sup>211</sup> “If anyone says or holds that the soul of the Lord preexisted and was united to God the Word before his Incarnation and birth from the Virgin, let him be anathema” (*DH* 404:144).

<sup>212</sup> “If anyone says or holds that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was first formed in the womb of the holy Virgin and that after this God, the Word, and the soul, since it had preexisted, were united to it, let him be anathema” (*DH* 405:144).

<sup>213</sup> *DH* 424:148.

<sup>214</sup> “carnem anima rationali et intellectuali animatam” (*DH* 442:154). Pope Honorius I in the Fourth Synod of Toledo (633) also affirms the complete humanity of Jesus: “receiving the complete soul and flesh of man but without sin” (*DH* 485:167). In Sixth Synod of Toledo (begun January 9, 638), however, it uses the term “man” instead of “soul” and “body”: “assumed from the holy ever-virgin Mary the man without sin” (*DH* 491:169).

rational or intellectual soul.<sup>215</sup> Those issued by ecumenical councils gave even more authority to the faith claim that human nature is composed of body/flesh and a rational or intellectual soul.<sup>216</sup>

During the First Synod of Braga (561), Pope John III issued “Anathemas against the Priscillianists and Others,” which reaffirms that souls are neither from the same nature of God nor preexistent,<sup>217</sup> rejecting this kind of “radical dualism between matter and spirit.”<sup>218</sup> Although understanding the human being in the duality of body and soul, the Church strongly refused either materialistic or spiritualistic reductionisms regarding its understanding of human nature, especially spiritualized views that considered the human body to be evil.<sup>219</sup>

Moving forward in time and context, the “Synodal Letter of the Bishops of the Kingdom of the Franks to the Bishops of Spain” (Synod of Frankfurt, 794) again refuted Adoptionism and affirmed that “[a] *complete* man does not exist without soul and body; . . . and we do not deny that these three truly are in Christ, namely, divinity, soul, and body.”<sup>220</sup> Following the logic of this declaration, if in some way the human soul can exist without its body, this bodiless soul

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<sup>215</sup> Cf. Eleventh Synod of Toledo (begun November 7, 675) (*DH* 534:185). This same synod defines Christ in two natures but three substances: “Thus, the same Christ in his two natures consists of three substances: that of the Word which must be referred to the essence of God alone, that of the body and of the soul, which belong to the true man” (*DH* 535:186). Synod of Rome: Synodal Letter *Omnium bonorum spes* to the Emperors (March 27, 680): Jesus “having a rational and intellectual soul” (*DH* 537:190). Third Council of Constantinople (Sixth Ecumenical, November 7, 680–September 16, 681), Session 18: Jesus as “truly man, of a rational soul and a body” (*DH* 554:193). Fifteenth Synod of Toledo (688): “For who does not know that every man consists of two substances: namely, the soul and the body? [Reference is made to 2 Cor 4:16 and Ps 63:2.] . . . Contrary to this rule, we likewise find in Scripture that one can understand the total man by what is generally called the flesh or that the perfection of the entire man is acknowledge when sometimes only the soul is named” (*DH* 567:198). Fourth Council of Constantinople (Eighth Ecumenical, Pope Adrian II, October 5, 869–February 28, 870) (*DH* 657:226).

<sup>216</sup> See Pauline Allen, *Crisis Management in Late Antiquity (410–590 CE): A Survey of the Evidence from Episcopal Letters, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 121 (Boston: Brill, 2013), 97–146.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. *DH* 455ss:158; cf. ND 402/5ss:168. See also: Ladaria, “O homem criado à imagem de Deus,” 107; Müller, *Dogmática Católica*, 99.

<sup>218</sup> ND 167. About the magisterial denial of the dualism at that time, see John Randall Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 55; Ladaria, “O homem criado à imagem de Deus,” 108.

<sup>219</sup> See Sachs, *The Christian Vision*, 55. The First Synod of Braga also condemned those who say “that the formation of the human body is the work of the devil”; Latin: “Si quis plasmationem humani corporis diabolic dicit esse figmentum” (*DH* 462:159).

<sup>220</sup> “Perfectus homo non est nisi anima et corpore, . . . nec negamus et nos, Christo haec tria veraciter inesse, divinitatem scilicet, animam et corpus” (*DH* 613:210).

would be an *incomplete* human existence. As Catholic faith asserts that the human soul survives the death of the body<sup>221</sup> and receives God's retribution in the interim between death and resurrection,<sup>222</sup> this eschatological notion of the separated soul in the intermediate state becomes especially problematic since it cannot be considered the complete human being who lived.<sup>223</sup>

During the Fourth Council of Constantinople (the Eighth Ecumenical Council, 870), the uniqueness of the soul was affirmed against those who, following Manichaean ideas, claimed that the human being had two souls.<sup>224</sup> Almost two centuries later, another important declaration about the nature of the soul is found in a letter, titled *Congratulamur vehementer* (1053), from Pope Leo IX to Peter, the Patriarch of Antioch, where Pope Leo reaffirms in the form of a profession of faith that the human "soul is not a part of God" but is "created from nothing."<sup>225</sup>

At the time of the Fourth Lateran Council (the Twelfth Ecumenical Council, 1215), amid heresies of the day, "Definition against the Albigensians and the Cathars" reaffirmed human nature by once again advancing the use of composite language to make the faith claim that the human being is composed of a body and a spirit or intellectual soul. In this conciliar creedal formula, the term "spirit" and the expression "intellectual soul" appear interchangeable. Therefore, there appears to be consensus that they refer to the same constitutive part of human nature. The section of the text that affirms that the human being shares in both spiritual and

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<sup>221</sup> As it is taught/reaffirmed in the recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992). Cf. CCC 990:258; 996:259; 997:259; 1005:262; 1016: 265.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. CCC 1021–37:266–71,

<sup>223</sup> The teaching of the Church on the separated soul after death is presented in the current chapter, and its problematic dimension is addressed in the following ones.

<sup>224</sup> "Can. 11. Even though the Old and the New Testaments teach that man has one rational and intellectual soul, and all the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, who are spokesmen of God, affirm the same belief" (DH 657:226). Cf. Ladaria, "O homem criado à imagem de Deus," 108.

<sup>225</sup> Latin: "Animam non esse partem Dei, sed ex nihilo . . . credo et praedico" (DH 685:232); cf. Edmund Hill, *Being Human: A Biblical Perspective*, Introducing Catholic Theology 3 (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984), 34.

corporeal created orders<sup>226</sup> was quoted verbatim in the First Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* (1870)<sup>227</sup> and indirectly reaffirmed in the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC).<sup>228</sup> In professing faith in the true humanity of Jesus, the text of the Fourth Lateran Council affirmed for centuries to come that Jesus was “made true man, composed of a rational soul and a human body.”<sup>229</sup>

Up to this point in the history of the magisterial teachings, it is important to notice that the information regarding theological anthropology derives mostly from the Christological affirmations, especially on the assertion of Jesus' true humanity. There is no direct magisterial affirmation on human nature from the beginning in the first creeds and throughout all the patristic period. Human constitution as the unity of body and soul is asserted only tangentially through the lenses of Christology, when the ontological constitution of Jesus' complete humanity is affirmed as being body and soul.<sup>230</sup> And as Christian doctrine has as its source the life of Jesus,<sup>231</sup> the affirmation of the human soul separated from the body after death is also affirmed in the magisterial teaching with regard to Jesus, as it is shown in the following section.

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<sup>226</sup> English: “from the beginning of time made at once out of nothing both orders of creatures, the spiritual and the corporeal, that is, the angelic and the earthly, and then the human creature, who as it were shares in both orders, being composed of spirit and body”; Latin: “simul ab initio temporis utramque de nihilo condidit creaturam, spiritualem et corporalem, angelicam videlicet et mundanam: ac deinde humanam, quasi commune ex spiritu et corpore constitutam” (*DH* 800:266).

<sup>227</sup> *DH* 3002:601; ND 412:173.

<sup>228</sup> CCC 335:91.

<sup>229</sup> “verus homo factus, ex anima rationali et humana carne compositus” (*DH* 801:266).

<sup>230</sup> “La toma de postura del magisterio en esta época tocan el problema alma-cuerpo sólo tangencialmente. No hay, en realidad, una propuesta antropológica directa; cuando aparecen cuestiones de antropología, se contemplan desde la óptica de la cristología o desde la repulsa de errores dualistas. Así, la determinación de la naturaleza humana se realiza en el contexto de la constitución ontológica de Cristo.” (Juan Luis Ruiz de la Peña, *Imagen de Dios: Antropología Teológica Fundamental*. Colección Presencia Teológica, 49, 3rd ed. [Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1988], 100).

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 29.

### 2.2.3. The Separated Soul: Theological Speculation and the Development of Church Teaching

The Fourth Lateran Council, while professing faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, went on to make an indirect reference to the separation between his human body and his soul by declaring: “He descended into hell, rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven; but he descended in the soul, rose again in the body, and ascended equally in both.”<sup>232</sup> Indirectly, the council asserts that, with the death of Jesus, the composite of body and rational soul that was the description of his true and complete humanity was actually undone since he descended into hell only in his separated soul, since his body was in the sepulcher. Therefore, between Jesus’ death and resurrection, he did not descend into hell in his complete humanity (body and soul) but only in his separated soul. Human death understood as the separation between the body and the soul appears, albeit indirectly, as an important conciliar declaration with serious ramifications.

An example of this is found in chapter 22 of the same Fourth Lateran Council, titled “The Sick Should Be More Concerned with the Soul than with the Body”:

Furthermore, since the soul is much more precious than the body, we prohibit under threat of anathema that any doctor should recommend to a sick person anything that could tend to endanger the soul.<sup>233</sup>

The text clearly states that there is a hierarchical order when we think about the two composite parts of the human person. The soul is “much more precious than the body,” a conviction expressed early on in the writings of Chrysostom and Ephesians 6:12.<sup>234</sup> One may wonder what a doctor would recommend to a person that would endanger his or her soul.

Perhaps, even at that time issues related to euthanasia were present.

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<sup>232</sup> “descendit ad infernos, resurrexit a mortuis et ascendit in caelum: sed descendit in anima, et resurrexit in carne: ascenditque partier in utroque” (*DH* 801:266).

<sup>233</sup> “Ceterum cum anima sit multo pretiosior corpore, sub interminatione anathematis prohibemus, ne quis medicorum pro corporali salute aliquid aegroto suadeat, quod in periculum animae convertatur” (*DH* 815: 271).

<sup>234</sup> See Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 45.



### 2.2.3.1. The Eschatology of the *Anima Separata* (The Separated Soul)

It was not until the First (1245) and Second (1274) Councils of Lyon (the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Ecumenical Councils, respectively) that more explicit assertions on the eschatology of the separated soul appeared. The Western and Eastern traditions did not agree about the concept of purgatory,<sup>235</sup> a name given by the Western Church to the intermediate state between death and resurrection.<sup>236</sup> The First Council of Lyon endeavored to arrive at an agreement between the two traditions by advancing the term “purgatory” as the “place of purification” where the “temporary fire purifies sins.”<sup>237</sup> The Second Council of Lyon continued along the same line of thinking. After proclaiming in its credal formula that the Word was “born in time . . . with a rational soul”<sup>238</sup> and that he ascended into heaven “with his risen body and his soul,”<sup>239</sup> the decree describes “the fate of the deceased” against “the errors of the Orientals.” According to the twofold eschatological view of the council, those who were repentant, but died before doing penance, “their souls are cleansed after death by purgatorial and purifying penalties”;<sup>240</sup> those who were purified “either while remaining still in their bodies or after having been divested of

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<sup>235</sup> For more, see Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 218–33. See also Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>236</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 219.

<sup>237</sup> Latin: “Purgatorium”; “locum purgationis”; “transitorio igne peccata utique” (*DH* 838:278). This First Council of Lyon also affirmed the immediate retribution of hell or heaven for the souls of the deceased: “But if anyone dies in mortal sin without repentance, beyond any doubt, he will be tortured forever by the flames of everlasting hell. But the souls of the little children after the cleansing of baptism—as well as {the souls} of adults who, having died in {the state of} charity, are bound neither by sin nor to any satisfaction for sin—ascend immediately into the everlasting homeland.”

Latin: “Si quis autem absque paenitentia in peccato mortali decedit, hic procul dubio aeternae gehennae ardoribus perpetuo cruciatur. Animae vero parvulorum post baptismi lavacrum, et adultorum etiam in caritate decedentium, qui nec peccato, nec ad satisfactionem aliquam pro ipso tenentur, ad patriam protinus transvolant sempiternam” (*DH* 839:278).

<sup>238</sup> “temporaliter natum . . . cum anima rationali” (*DH* 852:282).

<sup>239</sup> “Cum carne, qua surrexit, et anima” (*DH* 852:282).

<sup>240</sup> “eorum animas poenis purgatoriis seu catharteriis . . . post mortem purgari” (*DH* 856:283). Here, the decree of the Second Council of Lyon offers a list of acts of intercession that the living can do in order to alleviate the penalties of these souls: “the sacrifices of Mass, prayers, alms, and other works of piety that the faithful are wont to do for the other faithful according to the Church’s institutions” (*DH* 856:283).

them . . . are received immediately in heaven”;<sup>241</sup> and “as for the souls of those who died in mortal sin or with original sin only, they go down immediately to hell, to be punished.”<sup>242</sup>

Pope John XXII, in his letter to the Armenians, *Nequaquam sine dolore* (1321), reaffirms the retribution of souls in accordance with the teaching of the two councils of Lyon regarding the destiny of the dead.<sup>243</sup> In three of his homilies, however, he advanced the belief that prior to the resurrection souls would see only the human nature of Jesus and not the beatific vision.<sup>244</sup> There remains some question as to the legitimacy of the authorship attributed to him regarding the “Beatitude of the Saints,” where he declares that the separated souls of those who were purified are in heaven *before* the resurrection.<sup>245</sup>

In the years that followed, Pope Benedict XII, in the constitution *Benedictus Deus* (1336), sets forth a definitive teaching on the matter of immediate retribution of the separated soul after death. He declares that the souls of those who died without any need of purification, or after being purified, even “immediately after death . . . before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment”<sup>246</sup> are with God in heaven, enjoying (seeing) “the divine essence with an intuitive vision and even face to face.”<sup>247</sup> The constitution continues by explaining that the enjoyment of the beatific vision for these souls “will continue without any interruption and without end until the Last Judgment and from then on forever.”<sup>248</sup> Although it seems there is an implicit pause before the Last Judgment, there is no further explanation about any significant

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<sup>241</sup> “vel in suis manentes corporibus, vel eisdem exutae . . . sunt purgatae, mox in caelum recipe” (*DH* 857:283).

<sup>242</sup> “Illorum autem animas, qui in mortali peccato vel cum solo originali decedent, mox in infernum descendere, poenis tamen disparibus puniendas” (*DH* 858:283).

<sup>243</sup> Cf. *DH* 925, 926:294.

<sup>244</sup> “John XXII upheld the opinion that the souls of the dead, remaining “under the altar of God” (cf. Rev 6:9), enjoyed only the vision of the human nature of Christ and came to enjoy the fullness of beatitude only after the general judgment” (*DH* 301).

<sup>245</sup> Cf. *DH* 990, 991:301.

<sup>246</sup> “mox pos mortem suam . . . etiam ante resumptionem suorum corporum et iudicium generale” (*DH* 1000:302).

<sup>247</sup> “divinam essentiam vision intuitive et etiam faciali” (*DH* 1000:302).

<sup>248</sup> “continuabitur usque ad finale iudicium et ex tunc usque in sempiternum” (*DH* 1001:303).

difference between the enjoyment of the beatific vision before the Last Judgment and after it, other than the belief that before the Last Judgment there is a separated soul and after the Last Judgment there will be a complete human being in a risen body-soul unity. Although such speculation belongs to the realm of mystery, it seems that the resurrection of the body is treated as an accessory that will add nothing to what already has taken place in the separated souls of those who are already enjoying the beatific vision of God's face. Regarding those who died in mortal sin, immediately after death their souls will be consigned to the punishments of hell.<sup>249</sup> It also lacks an account of what difference the resurrection of the body actually makes if their souls are already suffering the pains of hell that they will continue to suffer for all eternity.

### **2.2.3.2. Separated Souls and the Place of Purification: Purgatory through the Centuries**

Later Church documents reaffirm these teachings on the entrance of separated souls into heaven after their purification in purgatory. Some of these include the Bull of Union with the Greeks issued by the Council of Florence under the title *Laetentur caeli* (1439)<sup>250</sup> and the “Decree on Purgatory” (1563) issued by the Council of Trent.<sup>251</sup> As “Luther denied the existence of the purgatory,”<sup>252</sup> the decree from the Council of Trent asserted that a “sound doctrine of purgatory” must be “believed by the faithful and that it be adhered to, taught, and preached everywhere.”<sup>253</sup> The decree warns that some of “the more difficult and subtle questions that do not make for edification” should “be excluded from the popular sermons to uneducated

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<sup>249</sup> Cf. *DH* 1002:303.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. *DH* 1304–6:336; ND 2308–9:1020–21.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. *DH* 1820:428–29; ND 2310:1021–22.

<sup>252</sup> ND 1021.

<sup>253</sup> Latin: “ut sanam de purgatorio doctrinam... a Christifidelibus credi, teneri, doceri et ubique praedicari diligenter studeant” (*DH* 1820:428–29).

people”<sup>254</sup> and that questions related to the “realm of curiosity and superstition” should be forbidden “as scandalous and injurious to the faithful.”<sup>255</sup> Besides not specifying what are the difficult questions to be avoided, the document also “remains silent as regards the nature of purgatory”<sup>256</sup> and on the state of separated souls that are the inhabitants of purgatory.

Four hundred years later, the Second Vatican Council, while affirming the communion between the Church of heaven and of earth in the Dogmatic Constitution on Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), only acknowledged the doctrine of purgatory indirectly without ever mentioning the word “purgatory” or the word “soul” and only mentioning those who have died and “are being purified.”<sup>257</sup>

#### **2.2.4. Substantial Unity of the Body and Soul: Aristotelian Hylomorphism in Aquinas**

During the Council of Vienne (October 16, 1311–May 6, 1312), the Church formally declared its teaching on the unity of the body and soul.<sup>258</sup> Under the influence of Thomas Aquinas’s appropriation of Aristotelian hylomorphism,<sup>259</sup> the council fathers defined the substantial unity between the human soul and the body. Openly, they confessed that the Son of God assumed

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<sup>254</sup> Latin: “Apud rudem vero plebem difficiliore ac subtiliore quaestiones, quaeque ad aedificationem non faciunt, et ex quibus plerumque nulla fit pietatis accessio, a popularibus concionibus secludantur” (*DH* 1820:429; *ND* 2310:1022).

<sup>255</sup> Latin: “Ea vero, quae ad curiositatem quandam aut superstitionem spectant, vel turpe lucrum sapient, tamquam scandala et fidelium offendicula prohibeant” (*DH* 1820:429; *ND* 2310:1022). See also Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 115.

<sup>256</sup> *ND* 1021. See also Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>257</sup> Latin: “alii hac vita functi purificantur” (*DH* 4169:901; *ND* 2312:1023–24).

<sup>258</sup> Hill, *Being Human*, 36.

<sup>259</sup> Cf. Müller, *Dogmática Católica*, 97; Sachs, *The Christian Vision*, 55. Ruiz de la Peña asserts that although the magisterium used the hylomorphic schema to define the substantial unity of body and soul, the teaching of the Church did not define or canonize the hylomorphism as doctrine (see Ruiz de la Peña, *Imagen de Dios*, 112, 266; Ruiz de la Peña, *El Hombre y su Muerte: Antropología Teológica Actual* [Burgos: Ediciones Aldecoa, S.A., 1971], 9–10). Cf. Ladaria, “O homem criado à imagem de Deus,” 127–28.

the parts of our nature simultaneously united, by which he, existing in himself as true God, became true man: namely, (with) a human body capable of suffering and an intellectual or rational soul truly informing, through itself and essentially, (his) very body.<sup>260</sup>

Jesus is truly human because he assumed the dual parts that constitute human nature: a body and a rational soul. To be more precise: the intellectual soul was believed to be the substantial form of the body. Although recently theologians have been more prudent in affirming this understanding,<sup>261</sup> for quite some time, the Council of Vienne was viewed as the council that condemned the doctrine of the Franciscan Peter John Olivi (1248–1298),<sup>262</sup> who “explicitly denies that one part of the soul, the rational part, can be understood as the form of the body.”<sup>263</sup> For Olivi, “the soul is the form of the body only with respect to its sensory and nutritive part.”<sup>264</sup> If the human person was not one substantial reality, however, but was divided in different substances and forms, this would pose a threat to the incarnation since it was believed that the Word of God was united to the intellectual soul, the substantial and immediate form of the body, the principle of unity of the whole person.<sup>265</sup> The denial of these theological and anthropological premises called into question the veracity the Church’s claims about human salvation as well as its Christological claims regarding the human nature of Jesus. As a consequence, the council fathers refuted theological opinions that asserted that “the substance of the rational and intellectual soul is *not* truly and of itself the form of the human body.”<sup>266</sup> The conciliar decree

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<sup>260</sup> “partes nostrae naturae simul unitas, ex quibus ipse in se verus Deus existens fieret verus homo, humanum videlicet corpus passibile et animam intellectivam seu rationalem, ipsum corpus vere per se et essentialiter informantem, assumpsisse” (DH 900:289).

<sup>261</sup> For a more recent and comprehensive discussion of the controversies surrounding the teachings of Peter John Olivi (Olieu) to which the Council of Vienne was responding, see Robert Pasnau “Olivi on the Metaphysics of Soul,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 6 (1997): 109–32; Ladaria, “O homem criado à imagem de Deus,” 124–29.

<sup>262</sup> Cf. ND 169; Müller, *Dogmática Católica*, 98.

<sup>263</sup> Pasnau, “Olivi on the Metaphysics of the Soul,” 110.

<sup>264</sup> Pasnau, “Olivi on the Metaphysics of the Soul,” 112.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Ladaria, “O homem criado à imagem de Deus,” 127; Ruiz de la Peña, *El Hombre y su Muerte*, 10.

<sup>266</sup> “quod substantia animae rationalis seu intellectivae vere ac per se humani corporis non sit forma” (DH 902:290; ND 169–70).

also declares that “whoever presumes to assert, defend, or obstinately hold that the rational and intellectual soul is not of itself and essentially the form of the human body is to be censured as heretic.”<sup>267</sup> As “the spiritualistic movements tended to separate the spirit from the realities of nature and history and so to split human nature into two heterogeneous spheres,”<sup>268</sup> the council’s decree reaffirmed the substantial union of the principles that compose human nature as a deeply held belief of the Catholic faith

### **2.2.5. The Immortality and Multiplicity of Souls: Expanding the Doctrinal Definition**

Although the human soul was affirmed in Church teachings as surviving bodily death in a separated state, it was not until the Fifth Lateran Council (1513–1521) that the bull *Apostolici regiminis* declared the immortality and multiplicity of souls as a matter of faith for all believers. This conciliar declaration was made in reaction to the position of Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525), who, by relying on Averroes’s interpretation of Aristotelian philosophy, taught that the human soul was not an individual soul but a universal soul. Pomponazzi denied that there were as many souls as there were human bodies,<sup>269</sup> and, consequently, he denied the immortality of each individual soul.<sup>270</sup> In condemning Pomponazzi’s error, the Fifth Lateran Council reaffirmed:

The intellectual soul is not only truly, of itself and essentially, the form of the human body, as it is stated in the canon of Clement V, Our predecessor of blessed memory, issued by the Council of Vienne [\*902], but it is also immortal and, according to the great

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<sup>267</sup> “quod quisquis deinceps asserere, defendere seu tenere pertinaciter praesumpserit, quod anima rationalis seu intellective non sit forma corporis humani per se et essentialiter, tamquam haereticus sit censendus” (*DH* 902:290; ND 170).

<sup>268</sup> ND 169.

<sup>269</sup> See Lorenzo Casini, “The Renaissance Debate on the Immortality of the Soul: Pietro Pomponazzi and the Plurality of Substantial Forms,” in *Mind, Cognition and Representation: The Tradition of Commentaries on Aristotle’s De anima*, ed. Paul J. J. M. Bakker and Johannes M. M. H. Thijssen (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007) 127–50.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Ladaria, “O homem criado à imagem de Deus,” 128–29; ND 172. See also the discussion around this topic in Müller, *Dogmática Católica*, 371; Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 140; Ruiz de La Pena, *Imagen de Dios*, 149–51.

number of bodies into which it is individually infused, it can be, must be, and is multiplied.<sup>271</sup>

While reconfirming the teaching of the Council of Vienne, the Fifth Lateran Council further enhanced and completed it by affirming that the rational soul, the substantial form of the body, is immortal and multiple according to the number of human bodies.<sup>272</sup>

### **2.3. Church Teachings on the Soul in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries**

Four and a half centuries after the Fifth Lateran Council, the First Vatican Council (1870), in its dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius*, condemned the error of materialism and reaffirmed that the human being “shares in both orders (of creatures), being composed of spirit and body.”<sup>273</sup> The document used composite language to describe the human being. It is important to note, however, that the council fathers, instead of using the word “soul,” chose to use the word “spirit” instead.

After Vatican I, no substantial teachings on the human soul were issued by the Church until Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950). While affirming a dialogue with human sciences, specifically with regard to the theory of evolution, Pope Pius XII affirmed that:

the Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, insofar as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from preexistent and living

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<sup>271</sup> Latin: “cum illa {animam intellectivam} non solum vere per se et essentialiter humani corporis forma existat, sicut in canone felicis recordationis Clementis papae V praedecessoris Nostri in Viennensi Concilio edito continetur [\*902], verum et immortalis, et pro corporum quibus infunditur multitudine singulariter multiplicabilis, et multiplicata, et multiplicanda sit” (*DH* 1440:359–60).

<sup>272</sup> Cf. Ladaria, “O homem criado à imagem de Deus,” 129.

<sup>273</sup> “ac deinde humanam quasi commune ex spiritu et corpore constitutam” (*DH* 3002:601; ND 412:173). At <https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/la/documents/constitutio-dogmatica-dei-filius-24-aprilis-1870.html> (Accessed on July 8, 2018).

matter—for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God.<sup>274</sup>

Some criticized Pius XII's approach to the encounter of faith and science by noting that his efforts to enter into dialogue with scientists advancing the theory of evolution began by putting in place a problematic division between the human being's body and soul.<sup>275</sup> What he was trying to do doctrinally, however, was to safeguard Church teaching that God is the only immediate origin of the human soul.

During the twentieth century, another important magisterial affirmation about the human being was put forth by the Second Vatican Council in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). In general, the documents of Vatican II avoid making affirmations about the human being through the use of body-soul language.<sup>276</sup> In affirming the fundamental unity of the human being, however, *Gaudium et Spes* recalls the traditional doctrine of the human constitution in the duality of body and soul: "Though made of body and soul, man is one" (GS 14).<sup>277</sup> The document also reaffirms that "when he recognizes in himself a spiritual and immortal soul, he is not being mocked by a fantasy born only of physical or social influences, but is rather laying hold of the deep truth of the matter" (GS 14).<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> "Ecclesiae Magisterium non prohibet quominus 'evolutionismi' doctrina, quatenus nempe de humani corporis origine inquiri ex iam existente ac vivente materia oriundi—animas enim a Deo immediate creari catholica fides nos retinere iubet" (*DH* 3896:806–7, as in AAS 42 [1950]: 561–77; text with corrections in AAS 42 (1950): 960; ND 420:175). Also [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/la/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_12081950\\_humani-generis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/la/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html) (Accessed on August 24, 2018).

<sup>275</sup> For a critique of Pius XII's position on this subject, see Hill, *Being Human*, 31–39; Ruiz de la Pena, *Imagen de Dios*, 250–67.

<sup>276</sup> Sachs, *The Christian Vision*, 55. Elma Klinger, in her article on the "Soul" in *Sacramentum Mundi*, affirms that at Vatican II, "the magisterium broke out the body-soul schema and came into line with the approach of the modern era. The key-word is now person and not soul" (Elma Klinger, *Sacramentum Mundi: Encyclopedia of Theology*, vol. 6, ed. Karl Rahner et al. [New York: Herder and Herder, 1970], 140).

<sup>277</sup> "Corpore et anima unus" (*DH* 4314:941; as in AAS 58 [1966]: 1025–1115; ND 421:176), GS 14. Also see [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) (Accessed on August 24, 2018).

<sup>278</sup> "animam, spiritualem et immortalem in seipso agnoscens, non fallacy figment illuditur, a phisicis tantum et socialibus condicionibus fluente, sed e contra ipsam profundam rei veritatem attingit" (*DH* 4314:941, as in AAS 58 [1966]: 1025–1115; ND 421:176). Also see



Three years after the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI's apostolic letter "Credo of the People of God" (1968)<sup>279</sup> was written in the form of a *motu proprio* titled *Solemni hac liturgia*. In this document, Pope Paul VI reaffirms and calls attention to the traditional doctrinal teachings of the Church regarding the human soul. In this document, while professing faith in God as the Creator of all things, Pope Paul VI also affirms that God is the "creator in each man of his spiritual and immortal soul."<sup>280</sup> He reaffirms the traditional teachings that the soul of a human being is immortal and created immediately by God. Then, in another paragraph, he stresses the importance of belief in eternal life and provides an unusual description of the intermediate eschatology of the soul:

We believe in the life eternal. We believe that the souls of all those who die in the grace of Christ, whether they must still be purified in purgatory, or whether from the moment they leave their bodies Jesus takes them to paradise as He did for the Good Thief, are the People of God in the eternity beyond death, which will be finally conquered on the day of the Resurrection when these souls will be reunited with their bodies. (28)<sup>281</sup>

Here, while the doctrine of purgatory is reaffirmed, the belief that between death and resurrection the soul remains in an intermediate state of separation from the body also is reaffirmed. Given that these reaffirmations were made a few years after the Second Vatican Council, it is interesting to note that Vatican II was mostly silent on the subject.

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[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) (Accessed on August 24, 2018).

<sup>279</sup> In Pope Paul VI, *Credo of the People of God* in [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_motu-proprio\\_19680630\\_credom.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19680630_credom.html) (Accessed on December 17, 2018). As in AAS 60, no. 8 (1968): 432–45.

<sup>280</sup> "Creatorem, in unoquoque homine, animae spiritualis et immortalis" (Paul VI, "Credo of the People of God," par. 8, in AAS 60, no. 8 (1968): 432–45.

<sup>281</sup> "Credimus vitam aeternam. Credimus animas eorum omnium, qui in gratia Christi moriuntur - sive quae aDHuc Purgatorii igne expiandae sunt, sive quae statim ac corpore separatae, sicut Bonus Latro, a Iesu in Paradisum suscipiuntur - Populum Dei constituere post mortem, quae omnino destruetur Resurrectionis die, quo hae animae cum suis corporibus coniungentur" (Paul VI, *Credo of the People of God*, par. 28).

### 2.3.1. “Letter on Certain Questions Regarding Eschatology”—Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

One of the documents dealing with the subject of the human soul within the context of eschatology is the “Letter on Certain Questions Regarding Eschatology.” Issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) on May 17, 1979, this letter asserts that the use of the term “soul” is indispensable to express the human spiritual element that, gifted with consciousness and will, survives bodily death and maintains the person’s self in the afterlife:

The Church affirms that a spiritual element survives and subsists after death, an element endowed with consciousness and will, so that the “human self” subsists *in the interim but without the complement of its body*. To designate this element, the Church uses the word “soul,” the accepted term in the usage of Scripture and Tradition. Although not unaware that this term has various meanings in the Bible, the Church thinks that there is no valid reason for rejecting it; moreover, she considers that the use of some word as a vehicle is absolutely indispensable in order to support the faith of Christians.<sup>282</sup>

Although the CDF recognizes in this document that there are “various meanings” of the term “soul” in the Scriptures, it does not go into detail about the significance of the term and if this fact interferes (or would interfere) in the way the human soul is understood by the Church’s current theological anthropology. This current understanding is based on Thomas Aquinas’s approach to human nature, which will be explored in the next chapter. The simple affirmation that the separated soul is able to perform acts of consciousness seems to be attuned to the explanation Aquinas gives on the nature of the separated soul after bodily death.<sup>283</sup> This document corroborates with the general opinion among theologians that the survival of the

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<sup>282</sup> “Ecclesia affirmat continuationem et subsistentiam, post mortem, elementi spiritualis, conscientia et voluntate praediti, ita ut ipsum “ego humanum”, *interim tamen complement sui corporis carens*, subsistat. Ad huiusmodi elementum designandum Ecclesia utitur voce “anima”, quae Sacrarum Scripturarum et Traditionis usu recepta est. Quamquam non ignorat in Scripturis Sacris huic voci diversas subici significationes, nihilominus ipsa censet nullam validam rationem adesse, cur vox reiciatur, ac iudicat praeterea prorsus necessarium esse verbale instrumentum ad christianorum fidem sustinendam” (*DH* 4653:1027; as in *AAS* 71 (1979): 940–42; ND 1026). See [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19790517\\_escatologia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19790517_escatologia_en.html) (Accessed on December 17, 2018). (Italics in both English and Latin versions is mine.)

<sup>283</sup> Aquinas deals with the theme of the separated soul in question 89 of the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*. It will be addressed Chapter Three of this dissertation.

separated soul after bodily death is necessary to guarantee the personal human identity through death and resurrection.<sup>284</sup> The subsistence of the human self through the separated soul (with consciousness and will) assures that the individual who died is the same who will rise.

This document of the CDF defends that the term “soul” should not be discarded as there is no convincing reason for doing so; “some word” is necessary as a means of strengthening the faith of Christians. This is likely a reaction to criticisms from both theologians and philosophers in the twentieth century who argued that the term “soul” was dispensable, no longer needed, or a simple mystification.<sup>285</sup> The document affirms the term as necessary, however, for the communication of the idea of the spiritual element that bears the human self and remains alive after bodily death. Edmund Hill points out that this understanding of the term “soul” as necessary for the Christians is due to an unfortunate Platonic view.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Cf. Stephen Yates, *Between Death and Resurrection: A Critical Response to Recent Catholic Debate Concerning the Intermediate State* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 129–30. Yates cites, among other theologians, Candido Pozo (Theology of the Beyond), Joseph Ratzinger (*Eschatology*), and Terrence Nichols (Death and Afterlife). Nichols affirms: “the soul can survive bodily death and carry personal identity from the death of the body into the resurrected state, in which the soul is united with the resurrected body” (Terrence Nichols, *Death and Afterlife: A Theological Introduction* [Grand Rapids, MI: BrazosPress, 2010], 129).

<sup>285</sup> Cf. Hill, *Being Human*, 96–97; Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 69–161, 241–74. The document itself justifies its defense of doctrine: “Part of the cause of this is the unintentional effect on people's minds of theological controversies given wide publicity today, the precise subject and the significance of which is beyond the discernment of the majority of the faithful. One encounters discussions about the existence of the soul and the meaning of life after death, and the question is put of what happens between the death of the Christian and the general resurrection. All this disturbs the faithful, since they no longer find the vocabulary they are used to and their familiar ideas.” See [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19790517\\_escatologia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19790517_escatologia_en.html) (Accessed on May 12, 2018). In AAS 71 (1979): 940–42.

<sup>286</sup> “Meanwhile the ordinary Christian, with some reason, will think that he cannot do without the concept of ‘soul.’ But now it has, most unfortunately and inconveniently and to a large extent through the fault of a Platonized Christianity, become a religious concept, something you believe in or something you don’t, like God. And when it comes to making rational sense of this concept the Christian remains stymied, transfixed, paralysed, mesmerized, fascinated, dumbfounded and dogged by the magisterial sneer—‘the ghost in the machine’” (Hill, *Being Human*, 96–97).

### 2.3.1.1. An Interesting and Unexpected Discovery

One curious and intriguing fact about the 1979 letter of the CDF is that there is a line that is missing in many translations of the text on the Vatican website.<sup>287</sup> The English version analyzed in this dissertation is from Denzinger's *Compendium* and is in complete accordance with the original text in Latin.<sup>288</sup> On the Vatican website, however, the phrase in question appears only in the Latin, German, and Polish versions of the text; it is omitted in the English, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish versions. The text reproduced in Denzinger's *Compendium* along with the original in Latin is taken from the *Acta Apostolicae Sede* (AAS)<sup>289</sup> and brings to light the omitted excerpt. The word *interim* (Latin and English) is a clear reference to the provisional and temporary state, or the so-called intermediate state, of the separated soul between death and resurrection. Another noteworthy fact is that in this excerpt that is absent in many translations, the human body is treated as "a complement of the soul." The affirmation of the body as a "complement" of the soul corroborates what was shown previously in the constitution *Benedictus Deus*, where the body is treated as an accessory while the intellectual or rational soul is what matters. The affirmation of the subsistent separated soul as a synonym of the human "I" and as a spiritual "element endowed with consciousness and will" makes the physical body to look almost irrelevant. What saves the body in the document is a short statement asserting that the Church understands the resurrection of the dead, based on Jesus' resurrection, as the resurrection of the "whole person."<sup>290</sup> In the understanding of the human being as this "whole person," soul and body may be considered as a "complement" to one

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<sup>287</sup> The text in question is italicized in the previous section.

<sup>288</sup> "*interim tamen complement sui corporis carens*" (Eng.: "*in the interim, but without the complement of its body.*") [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19790517\\_escatologia\\_1\\_t.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19790517_escatologia_1_t.html) (Accessed on May 27, 2018).

<sup>289</sup> AAS 71 (1979): 939–43. See [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/doc\\_doc\\_index\\_it.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/doc_doc_index_it.htm) (Accessed on May 27 2018).

<sup>290</sup> "*totum hominem*" (DH 4652:1027).

another in the formation of the whole that the person is, not just as the body being the complement of the soul.

Nonetheless, why was this excerpt absent in many translations? There are those in significant theological positions who would argue that the absence of this text was just a case of mistranslation. The text may have been intentionally omitted, however, due to the fact that the notion of the separated soul in the intermediate state was itself a matter of discussion at that time, as will be discussed in chapter 6. As Joseph Ratzinger commented in the first appendix of his work *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, the 1979 letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (to which he became the prefect in 1981) is critical. He argues that this letter expresses the obligation of the Church to be the faithful interpreter of “the fundamental truths of the faith.”<sup>291</sup> He summarizes the key truths contained in the document: the resurrection of the “whole man” and the survival of the “human I”<sup>292</sup> in the intermediate state between death and resurrection through the soul, a word and an idea that is fundamental and indispensable for the communication of the faith.<sup>293</sup> It is asserted that through this document “the Church’s teaching office has hereby entered into a theological debate which it sees as touching the limits

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<sup>291</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 241.

<sup>292</sup> Candido Pozo asserts that the affirmation of the resurrection of the “whole person” in this text is in agreement with Paul VI’s allocution from April 4, 1970, in the “Symposium International sur la Résurrection de Jésus” (AAS 62 [1970]: 223), “in which he is opposed to anyone who would explain the resurrection as a mere survival of the ‘I’” (Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, trans. Mark A. Pilon [New York: St Pauls, 2009], 249–50, footnotes 443, 448). The affirmation of this “survival of the ‘I’” or of the “human self” in the document of 1979 “is called immortality of the soul” (Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, 250). On the other hand, this view in this document is criticized by Jürgen Moltmann regarding the survival of the separated soul after death: “But from an anthropological point of view, the assumption of the soul’s continuing bodiless existence is inconceivable. . . . The unity of body and soul in human beings makes this thesis [of this 1979 document] untenable. It is refuted by a person’s death, the death of the consciousness, perception and will. The soul separated from the body is not a person. We can talk about a ‘continuing existence of the human person’ only from a theocentric viewpoint, because all finite beings are eternally present before the eternal God, and hence God’s history with human beings can continue even after their death” (Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996], 100–101).

<sup>293</sup> “The word ‘soul,’ as a vehicle for a fundamental aspect of the Christian hope, is here reckoned to be part of that fundamental language of faith whose anchor is the faith of the Church. That language is indispensable for communion in the reality in which faith believes, and therefore is not merely something that the theologian can take up or leave alone at his discretion” (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 245, 261).

of theology: the dismantling of the concept of the soul.” Ratzinger goes on to affirm that it “is not just a matter for scholars to discuss.”<sup>294</sup> Therefore, there was a debate about the pertinence of the notion of soul and its state in the interim between death and resurrection. Nonetheless, the author does not mention the absence of the abovementioned excerpt in the many translations. The absence probably is derived from the “noteworthy discrepancy”<sup>295</sup> between the text that was first published on pages 7–8 in the *Osservatore Romano* in July 23, 1979, and the one published on page 939 in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 of 1979.<sup>296</sup> While the *Osservatore Romano* did not have that part of the text, the AAS version, which is the one that “bears official doctrinal weight,”<sup>297</sup> includes the excerpt. There are different speculations about the addition of the excerpt, depending on the author.<sup>298</sup> It seems fair to say, however, by taking into consideration Ratzinger’s position on the matter, that this addition was simply a reaffirmation of the doctrinal weight that is carried by those who hold a firm belief in the intermediate state of the separated soul at a time when the matter was open to theological debate.

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<sup>294</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 245.

<sup>295</sup> Cf. ND 1026; Peter Phan, *Eternity in Time: A Study of Karl Rahner’s Eschatology* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press / London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1988), 133.

<sup>296</sup> Cf. ND 1026; Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 133.

<sup>297</sup> Paul J. Griffiths, “Self-Annihilation or Damnation? A Disputed Question in Christian Eschatology,” *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 16, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 437.

<sup>298</sup> Some of the different opinions about the discrepancy between the texts are as follows: Neuner and Dupuis: “The official text in AAS, however, qualifies the ‘human self’ that lives on beyond death as ‘deprived for the present of the complement of its body’ (interim tamen complement sui corporis carens), thus maintaining the traditional view that the wholeness of the person after death, which includes the bodily existence, is delayed presumably till the end of time. This change in the official text may point to an insecurity about the degree to which modern anthropology should be allowed to affect traditional theological thinking” (ND, 1026); Peter Phan: “This variance may indicate that there exists an uncertainty on the part of the magisterium regarding the dogmatic value of the doctrine of the intermediate state and therefore suggests, at least indirectly, that Rahner’s thesis regarding the intermediate state is not untenable” (*Eternity in Time*, 133); Paul Griffiths: “It indicates that giving a precise account of what happens in the interim state was a difficulty for the Congregation in 1979 in much the same way and for much the same reasons as it had been for Augustine 1600 years earlier” (“Self-Annihilation or Damnation?,” 437n57).

### 2.3.2. “Some Current Questions in Eschatology” (1992)—International Theological Commission

Another important post–Vatican II document that deals with the theme of the human soul is “Some Current Questions in Eschatology”<sup>299</sup> (1992), issued by the International Theological Commission (ITC). According to the theologian who was the leader of the team preparing this document, Candido Pozo, SJ, although it does not have “the value of the Magisterium,”<sup>300</sup> it is important because it brings the consensus of theologians from around the world in agreement with the Church’s Magisterium on issues of eschatology.<sup>301</sup> Peter Phan, in an article titled “Current Theology: Contemporary Context and Issues in Eschatology,”<sup>302</sup> responds critically to this document by exposing and evaluating its main points, yet he says that the document “is a continuation and confirmation”<sup>303</sup> of the 1979 letter from the CDF, “On Certain Questions Regarding Eschatology.” The document reaffirms, by drawing on Scripture and Tradition, the Church’s two phases of eschatological thought, according to which the human soul survives bodily death as a “conscious element” and is subject to God’s justice in the intermediate state between death and the resurrection in the consummation of the world.<sup>304</sup> This way, personal identity is guaranteed:

The survival of a conscious soul prior to the resurrection safeguards the continuity and identity of subsistence between the person who lived and the person who will rise,

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<sup>299</sup> International Theological Commission, “Some Current Questions in Eschatology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58 (1992): 209–43. Although this document was released in 1992, it was debated, voted on, and approved in the Plenary of the International Theological Commission in December 1991. The original in Latin, titled *De quibusdam questionibus actualibus circa eschatologiam*, was published in *Gregorianum* 73 (1992): 395–435.

<sup>300</sup> Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, 515.

<sup>301</sup> Cf. Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, 526.

<sup>302</sup> Peter C. Phan, “Current Theology: Contemporary Context and Issues in Eschatology,” *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 507–36.

<sup>303</sup> Phan, “Current Theology,” 507.

<sup>304</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, “Some Current Questions,” n. 4.1, 220–21. Comments that synthesize the main points of this document can be found also in Peter C. Phan, “Roman Catholic Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook in Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 219; Yates, *Between Death and Resurrection*, 5.

inasmuch as in virtue of such a survival the concrete individual never totally ceases to exist.<sup>305</sup>

The document rejects the thesis of resurrection at the moment of death while defending the Church's two-phased eschatology against accusations of Platonic dualism:

Since this Christian anthropology includes a duality of elements (the "body-soul" schema) which can be so separated that one of them ("the spiritual and immortal soul") subsists and endures separately, an accusation is sometimes made of a Platonic dualism. The word "dualism" can be understood in many ways. For this reason, when we speak of Christian anthropology, it is better to use the word "duality." From another perspective, since in the Christian tradition the state of the survival of the soul after death is neither definitive nor ontologically supreme, but "intermediate" and transitory and ultimately ordered to the resurrection, Christian anthropology has characteristics proper to itself and quite different from the anthropology of the Platonic philosophers.<sup>306</sup>

The Church's view of the separated soul in the intermediate state is not a dualism but a duality because it is not a permanent state.

The document quotes the CDF 1979 letter on eschatology where it affirms that it is through the soul that the "human I" survives death and resurrection. The ITC document acknowledges that the position of Thomas Aquinas regarding the separated soul cannot be considered the human I, specifically since it is not the complete human being.<sup>307</sup> The document still insists that in some sense this "human I" can be affirmed as "subsist[ing] in the separated soul" since "it is the conscious and subsistent element of people,"<sup>308</sup> safeguarding in this way the personal identity between death and resurrection. The separated soul "performs personal acts of understanding and will,"<sup>309</sup> and, therefore, through it the "I" of the human being who lived is the

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<sup>305</sup> International Theological Commission, "Some Current Questions" (no. 4.1), 221.

<sup>306</sup> International Theological Commission, "Some Current Questions" (no. 5.1), 224.

<sup>307</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, "Some Current Questions" (no. 5.4), 225.

<sup>308</sup> International Theological Commission, "Some Current Questions" (no. 5.4), 225.

<sup>309</sup> International Theological Commission, "Some Current Questions" (no. 5.4), 226.



same “I” who will rise. Nonetheless, the conscious subsistent element called a separated soul remains as “an ontologically incomplete reality.”<sup>310</sup>

Peter Phan’s assessment of this document from the ITC is very critical with regard to themes like the intermediate state, which he considers, following Karl Rahner,<sup>311</sup> a question that is still being disputed in theology.<sup>312</sup> Phan considers the document’s reaffirmation of the intermediate state as “the main burden”<sup>313</sup> of the text. For Phan, authoritative arguments based on the Bible<sup>314</sup> and Tradition are not enough to serve as evidences or confirmations of statements in eschatology such as the intermediate state. Rather, assertions like this require a hermeneutics that is “far more complex than the Commission appears to assume.”<sup>315</sup> Furthermore, they need to take into consideration questions that are being debated in the theological arena as well as contributions from scientific disciplines. For Phan, the document fails to explain how the separated soul is affected by death and, although being “legitimate in its emphasis on the immortality of the soul, is seriously inadequate in describing death as a *human* event.”<sup>316</sup> It simply affirms the separated soul as being something conscious but ontologically incomplete, without further explaining what this means.<sup>317</sup>

This document can be viewed as a reaction to the challenges raised in the twentieth century by theologians who defended the theses of the annihilation, disappearance, or total death of body and soul and of the immediate resurrection in death. As a response to these different

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<sup>310</sup> International Theological Commission, “Some Current Questions” (no. 5.4), 226.

<sup>311</sup> Peter Phan says that Rahner’s essay “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions” (1960), (in *Theological Investigations* 4:323–46) is “one of the most influential essays on the hermeneutics of eschatological statements in the history of Roman Catholic theology” (Phan, “Current Theology, 515) and was strangely ignored.

<sup>312</sup> Cf. Phan, “Current Theology,” 507.

<sup>313</sup> Phan, “Current Theology,” 520.

<sup>314</sup> Phan says that the biblical texts (Dan 12:2; Isa 26:19; Luke 23:43; John 14:1-3; Phi 1:21-24) used in the document to assert the intermediate state in fact are mere suggestions of a temporary state between death and resurrection. (Cf. Phan, “Current Theology,” 523).

<sup>315</sup> Phan, “Current Theology,” 523.

<sup>316</sup> Phan, “Current Theology,” 519.

<sup>317</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, “Some Current Questions” (no. 5.4), 226.

eschatological views, this 1992 document is a reaffirmation of the traditional doctrines that support the Church's two-phased eschatology: the subsistence of the separated immortal soul after death, the existence of the intermediate state, and resurrection at the Parousia.<sup>318</sup>

### **2.3.3. The 1992 Catechism of the Catholic Church**

Also in 1992, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* was approved and promulgated by Pope John Paul II through his apostolic letter *Laetamur magnopere*, with the “purpose of being presented as a full, complete exposition of Catholic doctrine, enabling everyone to know what the Church professes, celebrates, lives, and prays in her daily life.”<sup>319</sup> In this important postconciliar document, the theme of the human soul appears mainly under topics concerning anthropological and eschatological claims, mostly repeating and reaffirming previous magisterial teachings, many of which have been presented throughout this chapter. Due to the importance of the *CCC* as an expression of the Church's authoritative teaching, however, it is important to see how this contemporary catechism presents dogmatic and doctrinal claims from the Tradition.

#### **2.3.3.1. Anthropology**

First, by drawing on the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the *CCC* affirms that the human being is “composed of spirit and body,”<sup>320</sup> uniting in this way “the spiritual and material worlds”<sup>321</sup> of his or her own nature. The term “soul” appears for the first time in the *CCC* in the

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<sup>318</sup> Cf. Phan, “Roman Catholic Theology,” 219.

<sup>319</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter *Laetamur magnopere*,” in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, xiv. Also in the Prologue of the *CCC* it is stated: “This catechism aims at presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church's Tradition. Its principal sources are the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, and the Church's Magisterium” (*CCC* 11:9).

<sup>320</sup> *CCC* 327:85.

<sup>321</sup> *CCC* 355:91.

subtitle of paragraph 6, affirming that the human being was created as a unity: “Body and Soul but Truly One.”<sup>322</sup> The *CCC* gives some of the possible meanings of the term “soul” in the Scriptures:

In Sacred Scripture the term “soul” often refers to human life or the entire human person. But “soul” also refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him, that by which he is most especially in God’s image: “soul” signifies the spiritual principle in man.<sup>323</sup>

And although affirming that the term “soul” makes reference “to the innermost aspect” of the human being, the *CCC* asserts that the soul is the “spiritual principle” of the human being, without much explanation of what “innermost aspect” and “spiritual principle” actually mean. Furthermore, this aspect or principle of the human being is given the highest value and is connected to an understanding of the human being created in the image of God. Although the *CCC* affirms that the human being is a body-soul unity, the soul is clearly hierarchically superior to the body, which “shares in the dignity of ‘the image of God’” and “is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul.”<sup>324</sup> In reaffirming the Council of Vienne’s teaching that the soul is the form of the body, the *CCC* asserts that such consideration has to be made due to the depth of the body-soul unity. Beyond animating the body, the soul is what enables “the body made of matter” to become “a living human body; spirit and matter,” for in the human being there “are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.”<sup>325</sup> The *CCC* uses the adjective “spiritual” with the word “soul” three times, perhaps to give clear expression to its

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<sup>322</sup> *CCC* 92. This is the subtitle of the section for nn. 362-68:92-94. In the original Latin: “Corpore et anima unus.” See [http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism\\_lt/p1s2c1p6\\_lt.htm#II.%20«%20Corpore%20et%20anima%20unus%20»](http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism_lt/p1s2c1p6_lt.htm#II.%20«%20Corpore%20et%20anima%20unus%20») (Accessed on October 21 2018). The text says: “The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual” (*CCC* 362:92).

<sup>323</sup> *CCC* 363:93. To each of these meanings, the *CCC* gives examples from the Scriptures in its footnotes. Soul as human life or the entire person: Matt 16:25-26; John 15:13; Acts 2:41. Soul as the innermost aspect of the human being: Matt 10:28; 26:38; John 12:27; 2 Macc 6:30.

<sup>324</sup> *CCC* 364:93.

<sup>325</sup> *CCC* 365:93.

nature: it is a “spiritual soul.”<sup>326</sup> In addition to these assertions, the *CCC* also reaffirms the doctrines of the soul’s “immediate creation” and the “immortality of the soul.”<sup>327</sup>

### 2.3.3.2. Eschatology

The *CCC* provides affirmations about the wholeness and oneness of the human being and the body-soul unity. It clearly states that, due to its immortality, the soul “does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection.”<sup>328</sup> In the *Catechism*’s doctrinal exposition of the eleventh article of the Creed (“I believe in the resurrection of the body”), a two-phased eschatological view of the Church is well and clearly expressed:

In death, the separation of the soul from the body, the human decays and the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body. God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls, through the power of Jesus’ Resurrection.<sup>329</sup>

Death as the separation of body and soul and the resurrection as their reunion is affirmed another two times in this section on faith in the resurrection.<sup>330</sup> Although the defenders of the Church’s twofold eschatological view may argue that this concept of separation and survival of the soul after death is an anthropological duality that is “clearly distinct from Platonic dualism”<sup>331</sup> precisely because of hope in the resurrection, to the average listener, the mere idea of the separation of soul and body still sounds like dualism. Even though the body-soul unity of the human being is affirmed in its origin (creation: created in unity) and in its end (resurrection: reunion/restoration of the original unity in a new and transformed way), the death/separation

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<sup>326</sup> From the Latin: “animam spirituali/spiritualem” (*CCC* 364, 365, 366:93).

<sup>327</sup> Cf. *CCC* 366:93; 990:258.

<sup>328</sup> *CCC* 366:93.

<sup>329</sup> *CCC* 997:260.

<sup>330</sup> See also *CCC* 1005:262; 1016:265.

<sup>331</sup> See Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, 521.

remains problematic since the human being's unity is expressed in philosophical terms (the soul as the substantial form of the body) that are in some ways manipulated in order to accommodate the belief in the separated soul in the temporary intermediate state. And although for Thomas Aquinas, the separated soul is not the human "I" and cannot be considered a person, as was demonstrated in the explanation of the 1992 ITC document above, the Church still affirms that this "I" subsists in the conscious spiritual element of the human being that is called (separated) soul.<sup>332</sup> This way of believing is particularly visible in the manner the *CCC* treats the twelfth article of the creed: "I believe in life everlasting." Four of the six themes<sup>333</sup> treated in this section deal with issues concerning the first phase of the Church's eschatological view: the separated soul undergoes the (1) particular judgment, and then enters or participates into the realities of (2) heaven, the (3) final purification of purgatory (and then heaven), or (4) hell. Heaven and hell are definitive or eternal, although the soul, being a separated reality while in purgatory, is in a temporary state before heaven.

Although the separated soul cannot be considered a person, a human being (a "man" in the words of Thomas Aquinas), or the human "I" because it is not the entire person,<sup>334</sup> in the

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<sup>332</sup> Cf. Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, 522.

<sup>333</sup> Cf. *CCC* 1020–65:266–76.

<sup>334</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, "Some Current Questions" (n. 5.4.), 225. It says: "Sometimes, however, certain words of Saint Thomas are opposed to this assertion, for he said: 'my soul is not I.' [indication of footnote 59] But the words immediately preceding constitute the context for this statement, and in them he had emphasized that the soul is a part of people. This doctrine is constant in Saint Thomas in his *Summa Theologiae*: for when it is objected that 'the separated soul is an individual substance of a rational nature, but it is not however a person,' he replies: 'The soul is a part of the human species: and therefore, although it is separated, nevertheless since it retains the nature of unibility, it cannot be called an individual substance, which is hypostasis, or first substance; nor likewise can the hand or any other part of a person. And thus there belongs to it neither the definition nor the name of person.' [footnote 60] In this sense, that is, inasmuch as the human soul is not the entire person, it can be said that the soul is not the 'I' or the person. Indeed, this ought to be held so that the traditional line of Christian anthropology can be maintained. Therefore, arguing from this, Saint Thomas deduced in the separated soul an appetite for the body or for the resurrection. [footnote 61]." Footnotes 60 and 61 contain important information about Aquinas's understanding on the status of the separated soul: Footnote 60, "*STh* I, q. 29, a. 1, 5 and ad. 5. When St. Thomas considers it erroneous 'to say that Christ was a man during the three days of his death' (3, q. 50, a. 4, c), he holds that the union of soul and flesh are of the very meaning of man"; Footnote 61, "In the place cited in note 59 St. Thomas wrote: 'It is evident that the soul is naturally united to the body, but is separated from it against its own nature and *per accidens*. Whence the soul,

section of the *CCC* where it refers to the first eschatological phase, this “spiritual element” often receives the linguistic treatment of a whole person. Through the soul, the whole person (“each man”) receives his or her due retribution.<sup>335</sup> It seems that the word “soul” is avoided and that the separated souls are referred to by personal pronouns (they, their, those, all who, him) or by whole expressions that describe something of the whole person.<sup>336</sup> These expressions could have included the term “soul,” but the term appears only when reference is being made to “the souls of those who died in a state of mortal sin” and therefore “descend into hell.”<sup>337</sup> These affirmations without the word “soul” give the impression that the separated soul is a complete human being and not what it is in fact: the expression of a human reality that, although retaining the person’s identity by being conscious and able to perform acts of understanding and will, is incomplete due to the absence of the body and cannot be considered a person. Perhaps the language of the *CCC* is like this simply because everything that happens to the separated soul in the intermediate state will have an everlasting effect in the future life of the person who will rise. This may, however, reinforce a common view among Catholics that the soul is the component that really matters in the composition or constitution of the human being, who can be seen and considered as complete and lacking nothing while in his or her postmortem state of a separated soul. If, on its own, the separated soul in purgatory can make restitution for the consequence of the sins committed in life, and then enjoy the beatific vision, why would resurrection be necessary? This view could contribute to a depreciation of the human body (which means the complete human embodied

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cut off from the body, while it is without the body is imperfect. But it is impossible that that which is natural and *per se* be finite and as it were nothing, that that which is contrary to nature and *per accidens* be infinite, if the soul were to endure forever without a body.” (International Theological Commission, “Some Current Questions,” 241.)

<sup>335</sup> “Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of death” (*CCC* 1022:266).

<sup>336</sup> Examples are: “those who died in God’s grace” (1023:267; 1030:268; 1054:275), “the dead” (1032:269; 1055:275), “the elect” (1025:267; 1031:268), “the blessed” (1026:268; 1029:268), “the damned” (1031:268), “man’s immediate contemplation” (1028:268).

<sup>337</sup> *CCC* 1035:270.

existence) in the present life (before death) and also make the central event of Christian faith and hope, the resurrection of the dead/body, to be seen and understood as a mere accessory.

#### 2.3.4. Comments on Two Recent Documents: *Professio Fidei* (1998) and *Spe Salvi* (2007)

In 1998, the CDF issued a new document titled “Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the *Professio fidei*.”<sup>338</sup> Building on the 1979 document on eschatology, *Recentiores Episcoporum Synodi*, the CDF affirmed once again some doctrinal eschatological assertions made previously. Essentially, the 1998 document is a commentary on Pope John Paul II’s apostolic letter *motu proprio Ad tuendam fidem* (May 18, 1998), by which certain norms were inserted into the Code of Canon Law and into the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches.<sup>339</sup> In the commentary, the CDF gives examples of those truths of the faith that are declared by the Magisterium of the Church to be “dogmas of the faith in the strict sense.”<sup>340</sup> These dogmas are declared as irreformable since they are proposed by the Church “as divinely and formally revealed”<sup>341</sup> and therefore must be accepted and believed by all the faithful.<sup>342</sup> Then, as examples of these dogmas, the CDF commentary cites “the doctrine on the immortality of the spiritual soul and on the immediate recompense after death.”<sup>343</sup> As evidenced in this document from 1998, the immortality of the soul and the intermediate state were reaffirmed as

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<sup>338</sup> This is an official CDF document as it was signed by both the then-prefect Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and the secretary Cardinal Tarcisio, SDB. For the English version:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_1998\\_professio-fidei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_1998_professio-fidei_en.html) (Accessed on October 21, 2018).

For the Latin version with the title “Nota Doctrinalis Professionis Fidei—Formulam Extremam Enucleans”:  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_1998\\_professio-fidei\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_1998_professio-fidei_it.html) (Accessed on October 21, 2018).

<sup>339</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_1998\\_professio-fidei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_1998_professio-fidei_en.html) (Accessed on October 21, 2018).

<sup>340</sup> Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, 515.

<sup>341</sup> CDF, “Doctrinal Commentary,” no. 5:

<sup>342</sup> Cf. CDF, “Doctrinal Commentary,” no. 5.

<sup>343</sup> Latin: “doctrina de animae spiritualis immortalitate et de remuneratione statim post mortem praesenti” (CDF, “Doctrinal Commentary,” no. 11).

dogmas of faith. The text declares: “Thus, whoever obstinately places them in doubt or denies them falls under the censure of heresy, as indicated by the respective canons of the Codes of Canon Law.”<sup>344</sup>

Finally, Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical letter *Spe Salvi* (November 30, 2007)<sup>345</sup> wrote a section titled “Judgment as a Setting for Learning and Practicing Hope.” Here, right before the concluding Marian section of his text, the pope offers a reflection on the theme of the Last Judgment where he also reminds the faithful about the Church’s teachings on the souls in purgatory and on the help that the living can give to these souls that are in the intermediate state.

Both recent documents contain reaffirmations of the dogmatic value of the belief in the immortality of the soul and of its immediate retribution after death. The CDF document explains that “these doctrines require *the assent of theological faith* by all members of the faithful” and that “whoever obstinately places them in doubt or denies them falls under the censure of heresy.”<sup>346</sup> As the affirmation of the immortal soul receiving retribution entails the notion of the intermediate state,<sup>347</sup> however, it is necessary to be aware that this notion still may be considered a matter for theological debate, at least with regard to the interpretation of it, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, in Karl Rahner’s theological understanding of the intermediate state.

## 2.4. Conclusion

All of these documents demonstrate in some way that there is a proper Catholic way not only to understand the human person and his or her soul but to truly believe in the existence of

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<sup>344</sup> CDF, “Doctrinal Commentary,” no. 5.

<sup>345</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20071130\\_spe-salvi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html) (Accessed on November 8, 2018).

<sup>346</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_1998\\_professio-fidei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_1998_professio-fidei_en.html) (Accessed on November 8, 2018).

<sup>347</sup> Cited by Pope Benedict in *Spe salvi* 84. See [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20071130\\_spe-salvi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html) (Accessed on November 8, 2018).



the human soul. Though some theologians might dispute such claims, the Church continues to affirm what Roman Catholics are instructed to believe about the soul:

- as the spiritual principle in the human being composite that is immortal and that is created directly by God;
- as the substantial form of the body that therefore forms with it truly and necessarily an intrinsic unit.

How can be it possible, then, to conceive rationally this soul as separated from the body to which it is the form? As shown above in the Church's teaching, the complete human being can be conceived only as the body-soul unity. Is this separated soul an incomplete human existence? As the Church takes seriously the belief in the separated soul as the subject of God's retribution immediately after death—even considering it a dogmatically binding matter of faith—the nature of this separated soul remains a problematic issue that needs to be addressed and interpreted, so that faith remains coherent to logic and human reasoning about it.

Although the Church never affirmed Aristotelianhylomorphism as its proper doctrine, the anthropological interpretation that Thomas Aquinas gave to it did end up being assumed and ratified by the Church's Magisterium, as noted above. Mindful of the content presented in the previous chapter, let us now turn to an exploration and examination of Aquinas's understanding of the human composition in the body-soul and how the separation of the soul from the body can be understood.

Finally, as a matter of acknowledgment and guidance for the theological understanding of the nature of the human being, it is necessary to remember that during the patristic period, all anthropological affirmations made were done tangentially through Christological affirmations that declared and established the true humanity of Jesus as the body-soul unity. For the

theological reflection and for the answering of the aforementioned questions on human nature (or on the nature of the separated soul), it is fundamental to have in mind that the Christological criteria must be considered for whatever assertions that can be made about the human being.

### Chapter 3. Thomas Aquinas on the Human Soul

Aquinas is relatively uninterested in the human body. Like most other philosophers, he prefers the formal mode of explanation, concerning himself with abstract questions of function in preference to mundane facts of physiology. Moreover, when it comes to explaining the human mind (intellect and will), Aquinas has a special reason for ignoring the body, inasmuch as he believes that these capacities of the soul are entirely immaterial. Whereas the various nutritive and sensory capacities require the appropriate organ (sight, for instance, requires an eye), the mind is a power of the soul alone, to which the body (including the brain) makes only an indirect contribution. This arrangement makes for a fundamental divide between human beings and other animals. Of most importance, it means that our souls can endure beyond death, opening up the promise of human immortality.<sup>348</sup>

Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) stands among the greatest philosophers and preeminent theologians in the history of the Catholic Church.<sup>349</sup> His prolific works, addressing the themes of Christian faith both philosophically and theologically, provided the foundations for several doctrines of the Church.<sup>350</sup> Aquinas’s methodological use of philosophy in dialogue with (and as the rational basis for) theology is largely recognized by the Magisterium of the Church as sound and coherent with true faith. His (philosophical) theology was adopted and incorporated into the Church’s teachings on several principle tenets of the Christian faith. One of these tenets deals with the human soul, which Aquinas defines according to his own appropriation of Aristotelian hylomorphism. Basically, this philosophical theory considers that everything in the natural order (in the universe) is made up of or composed of, in hylomorphic language, the unity of two principles: *prime matter* and *forms*. With regard to human nature,

Aquinas adopts Aristotle’s account of human beings as composites of soul and body, wherein soul is related to body as form to matter. This is the so-called hylomorphic theory of human nature. Composed of matter and form, human beings are akin to all other natural substances. But, since the highest capacity of human soul, the intellect, is an

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<sup>348</sup> Robert Pasnau, “Introduction,” in Thomas Aquinas, *The Treatise on Human Nature: Summa Theologiae Ia*, 75–89, trans. Robert Pasnau (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), xvii.

<sup>349</sup> See Joseph Peiper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

<sup>350</sup> See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1: *The Person and His Work*, rev. ed., trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), and *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2: *Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

immaterial power, human beings are peculiar examples of matter-form composition. Nowhere else do we find an immaterial power united to a body.<sup>351</sup>

The human being is understood by Aquinas as a kind of hybrid being that participates in both the natural and supernatural orders and is like a hinge between the material and the immaterial worlds.<sup>352</sup> The human being is the unity of form and matter, as are all natural beings, but at the same time the form of the human being has a peculiar characteristic that differentiates it from the other forms in nature: it is an intellectual soul whose intellective and volitional powers are immaterial, although manifest through the material body.

By drawing on Aristotle, “Aquinas identifies the form of the human being with the soul,”<sup>353</sup> which is the “animating, organizing, and directing principle of the body.”<sup>354</sup> Actually, the notion of soul as the internal principle of life, according to both Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophical viewpoints, is the valid explanatory reason for a thing to be alive. Souls, therefore, animate all living things, from plants to animals. To be alive, a soul is needed. What differentiates the human soul from the souls of all other living creatures is its “intellectual and volitional powers”<sup>355</sup> or its “rational capacities of intellect and will.”<sup>356</sup>

### **3.1. The Human Soul, Its Relationship with the Body, and Its Faculties or Powers**

The primary focus of this chapter is Aquinas’s understanding of the human soul by means of a precise description and careful review of his theological appropriation of Aristotelian hylomorphism. It examines Aquinas’s use of hylomorphism in the formulation of some of his

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<sup>351</sup> Thomas Hibbs, “Introduction,” in Thomas Aquinas, *On Human Nature*, ed. Thomas S. Hibbs (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), vii.

<sup>352</sup> Giacomo Canobbio, *Sobre el Alma: Más Allá de Mente y Cerebro*, trans. Luis Rubio Morán (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 2010), 56–57 (footnote 38).

<sup>353</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *The Treatise on Human Nature: Summa Theologiae Ia*, 75–89, xv.

<sup>354</sup> Hibbs, “Introduction,” vii.

<sup>355</sup> Robert Pasnau, “Philosophy of Mind and Human Nature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 350.

<sup>356</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *The Treatise on Human Nature: Summa Theologiae Ia*, 75–89, xv.

arguments in the first part of his *Summa Theologiae* (*ST*), from the section known as the “Treatise on Human Nature” (Questions 75–89),<sup>357</sup> specifically topics from Questions 75, 76, and 89, where Aquinas discusses, respectively, the nature (a) of the soul itself, (b) of its union with the body, and (c) of the knowledge of the separated soul from the body after death.

Although Aquinas elaborates and discusses themes regarding human nature as the substantial unity of body and soul in several of his works,<sup>358</sup> this set of questions from the *ST* was chosen for exposition and analysis in this chapter because it is considered, in the words of Robert Pasnau, “the most concise and authoritative statement of Aquinas’s theory of human nature.”<sup>359</sup> Especially in this section, Aquinas deals with important questions regarding the human soul, its relationship with the body, and its faculties or powers.<sup>360</sup>

The main objective of this chapter is twofold: (1) to examine Aquinas’s theological

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<sup>357</sup> This section of the *Summa Theologiae* is called by Robert Pasnau “The Treatise on Human Nature,” as published in Thomas Aquinas, *The Treatise on Human Nature: Summa Theologiae Ia 75–89*.

<sup>358</sup> Some of the works Thomas Aquinas references in his treatment of the composition of the human being in the unity of body and soul include *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard - *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* (1252–1256); Disputed Questions on Truth, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*: (1256–1259): Q. 10, The Mind, Q. 19, Knowledge of the Soul after Death, Q. 26, The Passions of the Soul; *Summa Contra Gentiles* (*Tractatus de fide catholica, contra Gentiles [contra errores infidelium]*) (1261–1263); Disputed Questions on the Soul, *Quaestiones disputatae de Anima* (1267); *Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima*, On the Soul (1268); *Summa Theologiae* (1265–1273).

<sup>359</sup> Robert Pasnau, “Philosophy of Mind and Human Nature,” 350. The same author, Robert Pasnau, in his book *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa Theologiae Ia 75–89* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), explains the importance of the *Summa Theologiae* [*ST*] in the words of other scholars: “James Weisheipl (1974) refers to the *ST* as ‘Thomas’s major work, the crown of his genius’ (p. 361). John Jenkins (1997) writes that ‘on any given issue, the *Summa* generally contains the most mature, clear and definitive statement of Aquinas’s position’; it ‘expresses his most fully developed thought’ (p. 78). These remarks suggest that *ST* manages to be both concise and definitive, accessible to students and at the same time his most profound masterpiece” (Pasnau, *Aquinas on Human Nature*, 5). Pasnau also justifies the importance of the *ST*: “At the same time, because the Treatise was written at the height of Aquinas’s powers, and sets out what he regards as his very best arguments, it is the natural focal point for more detailed scholarly work” (Pasnau, *Aquinas on Human Nature*, 6).

<sup>360</sup> It is curious that Robert Pasnau when explaining the scope of this section of the *ST* (part 1, qq. 75–89) in his book *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, seems to prefer to use the word “mind” instead of “soul”: “It is here, more than anywhere else in the *ST*, that Aquinas confronts perennial questions about the human mind, the relationship between mind and body, the senses, intellect, and the scope of human knowledge” (see Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 3). Although in the rest of the book he uses the word “soul” and does not seem to make use of the word “mind” as interchangeable, in one small excursus titled “Anima” at the beginning of the first chapter (“Body and Soul”) where he questions why the Latin *anima* did not become an English word, he says that it would express better the idea of life as do the English derivatives *animate*, *animated*, and *animal* (cf. Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 27).

thought on the human soul as the essential and substantial form of the human body, and (2) to explore his understanding of the nature and status of the separated soul after death. From this exposition, some comments and reflections are made about Aquinas's idea of the complete immateriality (noncorporeality) of the soul's intellectual faculties and powers and about his explanation of the separated soul's intellectual activity. Aquinas's view on the separated soul is particularly important due to the eschatological dimension of this dissertation.

Aquinas's theological and philosophical appropriation of Aristotelianhylomorphism in the description of the human being as a soul-body substantial unity is foundational for official Catholic teaching on human nature since the Council of Vienne (1312).<sup>361</sup> Aquinas's view builds up a middle ground between materialism and substantial dualism since it is based on an Aristotelian orientation that is naturalistic and biological and also a supernaturalistic

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<sup>361</sup> As was shown in Chapter Two, this council “censured as heretics” those who denied that the “the substance of the intellectual and rational soul is not truly and of itself the form of the human body” (DH 902:290). Thomas Aquinas's theological and philosophical thought had and continues to have a strong influence on Catholic doctrine to the point that it is frequently incorporated into documents of the Church's Magisterium. Some Church documents affirm the importance of the teachings of Thomas Aquinas for the Church's doctrine. See Pope Leo XII, Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (August 4, 1879), where Thomas Aquinas is presented “as the master teacher of Christian philosophy and theology” (DH 624); “The preeminence of the Scholastic Method and the Authority of St. Thomas Aquinas” (DH, 626; see DH 3139–40:626); “Approved Theses of Thomistic Philosophy” concerning the subject of study (the human soul) from the *Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Studies*, July 27, 1914 (DH 3601–24:720–23); Aquinas's philosophical theses specifically regarding the human being as the substantial union of body and soul are in DH 3608–21:721–23). Pope Benedict XV, Encyclical on St. Dominic, *Fausto Appetente Die* (1921) says: “Thomas Aquinas, in whom especially, a follower of Dominic, God ‘deigned to enlighten his Church.’ This Order, therefore, always in honor as the teacher of truth, acquired new luster when the Church declared the teaching of Thomas to be her own and that Doctor, honored with the special praises of the Pontiffs, the master and patron of Catholic schools” (see [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xv\\_enc\\_29061921\\_fausto-appetente-die.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xv_enc_29061921_fausto-appetente-die.html) [Accessed on June 2, 2018]). Pius XI, Encyclical *Studiorum Ducen* (June 29, 1923) states as a “norm” the teaching of Thomas Aquinas's philosophy and theology in the formation of future priests. (Cf. DH 3666:731, Dz 3666). *The Code of Canon Law* (1983) also makes mention of the importance of Thomas Aquinas on the theological studies of candidates for the priesthood (*Codex Iuris Canonici*, Canon 252, §3, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/latin/documents/cic\\_liberII\\_lt.html#TITULUS\\_III](http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/latin/documents/cic_liberII_lt.html#TITULUS_III) [Accessed on June 2, 2018]). Pope St. John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, reaffirms the importance of Thomas Aquinas's thought for the Church: “This is why the Church has been justified in consistently proposing Saint Thomas as a master of thought and a model of the right way to do theology” (no. 43; see [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html) [Accessed on June 3, 2018]).

understanding of the human intellect.<sup>362</sup>

Given that Catholic doctrine relies on Aquinas's understanding of human nature, an exposition of his thought that is as accurate as possible is paramount for this discussion on the complexities and ambiguities inherent (a) in the use of the term "soul" in biblical interpretation and homiletics; (b) in liturgical rites, rituals, and devotional practices of the Church; and (c) in the contemporary dialogue between theology and science. What is key to this research is the argument that only with a more precise understanding of Aquinas's concept of human soul is it possible for ordained and lay ecclesial ministers to have: an informed and critical understanding of the theological debates that focus on the soul and a capacity for making theologically constructive and ministerially astute contributions to the faith formation and pastoral care of the People of God.

Special attention is given to Aquinas's affirmation that the rational soul is not a body (meaning that it is not material) and that its intellectual powers or capacities for knowledge (or understanding) do not belong to, and are not located in, any bodily organ,<sup>363</sup> in the sense that these powers are not *the product* of any material or biological structure of the human body but rather *a capacity* that is a manifestation solely of the immaterial soul.

Nowadays, it is possible with some degree of precision to locate the neuro-physiological structures (the physical material basis or substrates) connected to the higher-level intellectual functions related to the person's mental life, such as thought and the decision making based in

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<sup>362</sup> Cf. Pasnau, "Philosophy of the Mind and Human Nature," 348–50.

<sup>363</sup> The bodily organs are parts of the human body. The body is per se the compound made of rational soul/form and prime matter. The sensitive faculties or powers of the soul belong to the soul-body compound and occur through bodily organs. The intellectual capacity belongs solely to the soul and not to the soul-body compound, although in order to work the intellectual capacity of the soul needs to turn to "phantasms" from (provided by) the sensitive faculties" (Canobbio, *Sobre el Alma*, 86; *ST I*, q.75, a.2, ad 3).

moral values.<sup>364</sup> Aquinas understands that these two human capacities of “understanding” and “will” are operations and powers of the human “intellectual soul” that are *not* exercised or caused by any specific body part or organ. As these powers—also called “intellect”—belong to the intellectual soul (or intellective principle), which is the substantial form of the whole body,<sup>365</sup> in this sense, it can be said that these intellectual powers are in the body. They are, however, separated from the body in the sense that they are not performed through any bodily organ.<sup>366</sup> Although these two functions of the intellectual soul are not performed through any body part, they depend, at least partially, on the body in order to operate because they need the phantasms or body-sense images located and produced by the body through the *sensitive soul*. The powers of the intellectual soul (understanding and will) operate properly only when the intellectual soul “turns” to the phantasms.<sup>367</sup> These phantasms are produced by the senses and imagination of the sensitive soul. They have their origin in and are dependent on the bodily organs. Therefore, as the powers of the intellectual soul called understanding and will are dependent on these phantasms to properly work, they are partially dependent on the bodily organs.

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<sup>364</sup> Barbara J. Knowlton and Keith J. Holyoak. “Prefrontal Substrate of Human Relational Reasoning,” in *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, ed. Michael S. Gazzaniga, 4th ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 1005–17; Christopher Summerfield and Etienne Koechlin. “Decision Making and Prefrontal Executive Function,” in Gazzaniga, *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, 1019–29; Michael S. Gazzaniga, “Who Is in Charge?,” *BioScience* 61, no. 12 (December 2011): 937–38. For a study of the connections between what Aquinas calls the functions of the rational soul and their relation to brain processes, see Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies? Current Issues in Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 65–110. Also, for a study of the changes in mental states related to reasoning/thoughts and decision making in brain-damage patients and specific brain locations related to those mental states, see Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 3–79.

<sup>365</sup> Pasnau, in commenting on Question 76, Article 1 of the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*, explains that, for Aquinas, “the intellective principle is described as the *substance of intellect*, using ‘substance’ in the sense of *essence*. . . . The intellect principle is the form—that is, the substantial form of the human body” (Pasnau, “Commentary,” in Thomas Aquinas, *The Treatise on Human Nature: Summa Theologiae Ia*, 75–89, 241).

<sup>366</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q 76, a. 1. See <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/summa/FP/FP076.html#FPQ76A1THEP1> (Accessed on June 3, 2018).

<sup>367</sup> Cf. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*. vol. 2: *Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1950), 375–97; Martin Pickavé, “Human Knowledge,” in Davies and Stump, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 313–16; Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 278–95.



With this in mind, a critical question comes into focus: Can the functions of the intellectual soul, specifically understanding and will, continue to be thought of *as unrelated to or not being exercised and caused by any* bodily organ, as if these functions were happening *only through and in* the intellectual soul? Neuroscientific (or scientific) knowledge suggests that the response may be *no*.<sup>368</sup> And herein lies the dilemma for contemporary theology: Catholic doctrine teaches that the human being's intellectual soul is immaterial and immortal and, therefore, survives bodily death.<sup>369</sup>

Given these two conditions—one scientific and one theological—further investigation into Aquinas's understanding of the separated soul is needed and becomes the subject of inquiry. The following selected questions orient this chapter:

1. What is Aquinas's understanding of the human soul regarding its relationship with body, and how are we to understand the intellectual faculties of the soul as noncorporeal?
2. What is the proper interpretation of Aquinas's understanding of the *anima separata*?
3. Given that the functions/operations or powers of the intellectual soul are partially dependent on the body, how is it possible (or proper) to say that these powers are still preserved and working in this separated soul?

These are the questions that will be addressed throughout this inquiry into some aspects of Aquinas's theological thought on human nature. Due to the way Aquinas addresses these topics himself, these questions will be treated not separately but rather inherently and organically, together and in relationship to each other throughout the text.

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<sup>368</sup> See footnotes 511-519; 562-565; 596 in the present dissertation.

<sup>369</sup> The human being "bears in himself an eternal seed which cannot be reduced to sheer matter" (*GS* 18; cf. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, 139, in *AAS* 23 [1931]: 214; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, 249, in *AAS* 53 [1961]: 429).

Properly understanding Aquinas’s theological views on the composite nature of the human beings and on the status of the separated soul is essential to the process of providing responses to these three questions. Having a more precise understanding of the issues raised by these questions is essential to the theological task of addressing and interpreting the paradoxes raised in the previous chapters, especially with regard to what the Church teaches and how such teachings inform and influence (or not) its particular ministerial practices, such as the Liturgy for the Dead.

### **3.2. Thomas Aquinas’s “The Treatise on Human Nature” (*ST I QQ 75–89*)**

Robert Pasnau, in his book *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, provides a detailed study of the contents of the “Treatise on Human Nature,” Questions 75–89. At the outset of the first chapter, Pasnau states that “[a] study of human nature involves, first and foremost, a study of the human soul.”<sup>370</sup> The questions and passages of the *ST* that are examined here are those believed to be among the most significant for grasping Aquinas’s understanding of the human soul.

#### **3.2.1. Question 75: On the Nature of the Soul**

In Question 75, Aquinas deals with questions regarding the essence of the human soul. For him, the belief that human beings have a spiritual and corporeal composite nature is not a question that is open for discussion.<sup>371</sup> Rather, what concerns him is the very nature of the human soul. It is the soul that needs to be studied if the Church is to have a proper understanding of the

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<sup>370</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 25.

<sup>371</sup> In the prologue of Question 75, Aquinas describes the human being as “composed of spiritual and corporeal substance.” In Latin: “ex spiritali et corporali substantia componitur” (*ST I*, Q 75, prologue). Hereafter, all citations from the first part of the *Summa Theologiae* will be abbreviated as *ST I*, followed by the number of the question, then the number of the article. See <https://dhsprory.org/thomas/summa/FP/FP075.html#FPQ75OUTP1> (Accessed on June 3, 2018). All the quotes in Latin and English from the *Summa Theologiae*, unless otherwise stated, are taken from this web source, which is a translation done by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, published by Benziger Brothers in 1947.

human being. In beginning his pursuit, in the first article, Aquinas responds to the question of whether the soul is a body.<sup>372</sup> The response is negative:

I answer that, to seek the nature of the soul, we must premise that the soul is defined as the first principle of life of those things which live: for we call living things “animate,” [i.e., having a soul] and those things which have no life “inanimate.” Now life is shown principally by two actions, knowledge and movement. The philosophers of old, not being able to rise above their imagination, supposed that the principle of these actions was something corporeal: for they asserted that only bodies were real things; and that what is not corporeal is nothing: hence they maintained that the soul is something corporeal. This opinion can be proved to be false in many ways; but we shall make use of only one proof, based on universal and certain principles, which shows clearly that the soul is not a body.<sup>373</sup>

Here, Aquinas explains the meaning of a corporeal body and clearly asserts that the soul is not a body.<sup>374</sup> In doing so, Aquinas defines the soul as the “first principle of life” of those things that are alive, although he does not explain at this point the meaning of the expression “first principle.” Pasnau affirms that it refers to what “is primarily responsible for the existence of a living being” and to what first “contributes to the purpose”<sup>375</sup> of being alive. The term refers to “the fundamental (‘first’) explanation (‘principle’) of life in the natural world.”<sup>376</sup> The English words “animate” and “inanimate” are direct and good derivatives from the Latin term *anima*, which in English ended up being “soul.” Those English derivatives express one of the principal functions that demonstrates that something is alive: movement. The “animals” are examples of

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<sup>372</sup> Pasnau affirms that this is “perhaps the hardest article of the Treatise” (Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 25).

<sup>373</sup> “Respondeo dicendum quod ad inquirendum de natura animae, oportet praesupponere quod anima dicitur esse primum principium vitae in his quae apud nos vivunt animate enim viventia dicimus, res vero inanimatas vita carentes. Vita autem maxime manifestatur duplici opera, scilicet cognitionis et motus. Horum autem principium antiquae philosophi, imaginationem transcendere non valentes, aliquod corpus ponebant; sola corpora res esse dicentes, et quod non est corpus, nihil esse. Et secundum hoc, animam aliquod corpus esse dicebant. Huius autem opinionis falsitas licet multipliciter ostendi possit tamen uno utemur, quo et communius et certius patet animam corpus non esse” (*ST I*, 75, 1).

<sup>374</sup> Earlier in the *ST*, Aquinas explains that bodies “are those substances ‘in which one finds three dimensions’ (I8.2c)” and “Aquinas treats this characterization of body as utterly commonplace and unobjectionable” (Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 28).

<sup>375</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 29.

<sup>376</sup> Pasnau, “Philosophy of Mind and Human Nature,” 350.

beings that are alive—due to their souls, which are their first principle or source of life—and then demonstrated by their capacity for movement. As Aquinas continues his investigation of human nature, in addition to movement, he affirms “knowledge” as the other important function that displays life in a living thing.

### 3.2.1.1. The Soul Is the First Principle of Life

From the outset of his theological reflection on the soul, Aquinas affirms that the first principle of life in living things is the soul, such that it is the soul, not the body, that makes living things truly alive. In making this claim, he is responding to the philosophical naturalistic thought that held that some kind of body or corporeal principle from the natural world (e.g., water, air, or fire) was the first principle of life.<sup>377</sup> For Aquinas, therefore, the first principle of life, called soul, is not corporeal and cannot be a body. For him, human nature cannot be explained or described in “corporeal terms.”<sup>378</sup>

Aquinas agrees that “bodily parts can be principles of the various operations associated to life.”<sup>379</sup> As an example, the eyes are the principle of vision.<sup>380</sup> Following Aristotle, he even affirms the heart as a principle of life in animals.<sup>381</sup> Neither an organ nor the whole body, however, can be the first principle of life of itself in a living being: “Nothing bodily can be the

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<sup>377</sup> For further explanation of these ancient naturalists, see Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 30–34.

<sup>378</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 34.

<sup>379</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 36.

<sup>380</sup> “It is manifest that not every principle of vital action is a soul, for then the eye would be a soul, as it is a principle of vision; and the same might be applied to the other instruments of the soul: but it is the ‘first’ principle of life, which we call the soul.” Latin: “Manifestum est enim quod non quodcumque vitalis operationis principium est anima, sic enim oculus esset anima, cum sit quoddam principium visionis; et idem esset dicendum de aliis animae instrumentis. Sed primum principium vitae dicimus esse animam” (*ST I*, 75, 1).

<sup>381</sup> “Now, though a body may be a principle of life, or be a living thing, as the heart is a principle of life in an animal, yet nothing corporeal can be the first principle of life.” Latin: “Quamvis autem aliquod corpus possit esse quoddam principium vitae, sicut cor est principium vitae in animali; tamen non potest esse primum principium vitae aliquod corpus” (*ST I*, 75, 1). Pasnau explains that, by following Aristotle, Aquinas gave more importance to the heart than to the brain in being a principle of life in the body: “Just as we now look to the brain as the most likely material explanation for animal life, so Aquinas looked to the heart” (Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 37).

primary explanation of the body's being actually such as to be alive."<sup>382</sup> The soul is the principle of life that is the *act* of the body.<sup>383</sup> The soul is the principle of life that from within makes the body to be what it *actually* is.

Thomas Aquinas was not a Platonic dualist. For him, the relationship between body and soul is not a relationship between two substances or two independent and self-subsistent elements together. The soul is the substantial form of the body: both are one substance or subsistent being.<sup>384</sup> The soul in its relationship with the body is what makes the body what it is: it is in this sense that the soul is the principle of life of the body, the source of its movements and knowledge.<sup>385</sup>

### 3.2.1.2. The Soul Is Incorporeal and Subsistent

Turning to the specificity of human nature, in the second article of Question 75, Aquinas provides fundamental information regarding his understanding of the human soul: different from the souls of all other living things, the human soul as the first principle of life of the human being is incorporeal and subsistent. To the question of "whether the human soul is something

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<sup>382</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 37.

<sup>383</sup> "For it is clear that to be a principle of life, or to be a living thing, does not belong to a body as such; since, if that were the case, everybody would be a living thing, or a principle of life. Therefore, a body is competent to be a living thing or even a principle of life, as 'such' a body. Now that it is actually such a body, it owes to some principle which is called its act. Therefore, the soul, which is the first principle of life, is not a body, but the act of a body; thus heat, which is the principle of calefaction, is not a body, but an act of a body." Latin:

"Manifestum est enim quod esse principium vitae, vel vivens, non convenit corpori ex hoc quod est corpus, alioquin omne corpus esset vivens, aut principium vitae. Convenit igitur alicui corpori quod sit vivens, vel etiam principium vitae, per hoc quod est tale corpus. Quod autem est actu tale, habet hoc ab aliquo principio quod dicitur actus eius. Anima igitur, quae est primum principium vitae, non est corpus, sed corporis actus, sicut calor, qui est principium calefactionis, non est corpus, sed quidam corporis actus" (*ST I*, 75, 1).

<sup>384</sup> The soul is not in the body as "a ghost in a machine"; this would be Platonic and Cartesian dualism. The human body-soul unity/reality in Aquinas's description cannot be compared with hydraulic machines described by Descartes as metaphors for the relation between body and soul, where body would be a hydraulic machine and soul would be the water making it move.

<sup>385</sup> It is important to note that in the Aristotelian and Thomistic system, form and matter do not refer so much to immaterial and material as to act and potency. Although the use and meaning of these terms are not treated in this dissertation, it is important to note their importance for Aquinas, as it appears in *ST I*, 75, 5 and 76, 1. In the latter: "For since the form is an act, and matter is only in potentiality"; "Cum enim forma sit actus, materia vero sit ens in potentia tantum" (*ST I* 76, 1).

subsistent,” Aquinas gives an emphatic response: “It is necessary to say that the principle of intellectual operation which we call the soul, is a principle both incorporeal and subsistent.”<sup>386</sup>

The soul is not only subsistent but, because it is a principle of intellectual operation, it follows that it is incorporeal. He explains:

For it is clear that by means of the intellect man [*sic*] can have knowledge of all corporeal things. Now whatever knows certain things cannot have any of them in its own nature; because that which is in it naturally would impede the knowledge of anything else.<sup>387</sup>

Aquinas argues that if the soul had the same nature as corporeal things, it would not be able to know them. And as the human soul is able to know corporeal things, it follows that it is incorporeal. Therefore, from the human soul’s capacity to know other bodies, Aquinas concludes that “it is impossible for the intellectual principle to be a body”<sup>388</sup> and that “it is likewise impossible for it to understand by means of a bodily organ; since the determinate nature of that organ would impede knowledge of all bodies.”<sup>389</sup> Aquinas’s argument is basically that the nature of the knower needs to be different from the nature of what is known; otherwise, knowledge of it is not possible. Therefore, the human soul, because of its capacity for knowledge or intellect, cannot be of the same nature as the objects it knows. For Aquinas, the soul’s cognitive operation of knowing things is neither corporeal nor does it happen through any organ of the body. Based on this argument, Aquinas concludes that the soul, because it has an operation *per se*, is subsistent:

Therefore, the intellectual principle which we call the mind or the intellect has an operation *per se* apart from the body. Now only that which subsists can have an operation

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<sup>386</sup> “Respondeo dicendum quod necesse est dicere id quod est principium intellectualis operationis, quod dicimus animam hominis, esse quoddam principium incorporeum et subsistens” (*ST I*, 75, 2).

<sup>387</sup> “Manifestum est enim quod homo per intellectum cognoscere potest naturas omnium corporum. Quod autem potest cognoscere aliqua, oportet ut nihil eorum habeat in sua natura, quia illud quod inesset ei naturaliter impediret cognitionem aliorum” (*ST I*, 75, 2).

<sup>388</sup> “Impossibile est igitur quod principium intellectuale sit corpus” (*ST I*, 75, 2).

<sup>389</sup> “Et similiter impossibile est quod intelligat per organum corporeum, quia etiam natura determinata illius organi corporei prohiberet cognitionem omnium corporum” (*ST I*, 75, 2).

“per se.” . . . We must conclude, therefore, that the human soul, which is called the intellect or the mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent.<sup>390</sup>

Aquinas identifies the human soul with what is called the intellect or the mind. The intellectual capacity of the soul to know bodily things leads to the conclusion that this soul is incorporeal and that its intellectual operations (knowing and thinking) do not occur by means of bodily organs. This nonbodily operation leads to the conclusion that the soul is subsistent. Although Pasnau thinks that this argument “seems to be one of the weaker arguments of the Treatise,”<sup>391</sup> he also says that the fact that “the soul can think without the body . . . is the fundamental premise on which the whole of Aquinas’s theory of human nature rests.”<sup>392</sup> This “independence operation premise,” as Pasnau calls it, shows that, for Aquinas, “the human soul is a substance, because to be a substance just is to be the sort of thing that can exist without inhering in something else.”<sup>393</sup> Therefore, for Pasnau, Aquinas’s affirmation of the subsistence of the soul entails also the affirmation that the soul “is in some way an independent substance.”<sup>394</sup>

The conclusion that the soul is subsistent is derived from the fact that it is incorporeal and that it has a function that is performed apart from or independent of the body. Aquinas does not believe, however, in the complete independence of the intellect from the body since the mind needs the phantasms that are generated in the body:

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<sup>390</sup> Ipsum igitur intellectuale principium, quod dicitur mens vel intellectus, habet operationem per se, cui non communicat corpus. Nihil autem potest per se operari, nisi quod per se subsistit. Non enim est operari nisi entis in actu, unde eo modo aliquid operatur, quo est. . . . Relinquitur igitur animam humanam, quae dicitur intellectus vel mens, esse aliquid incorporeum et subsistens” (*ST I*, 75, 2).

<sup>391</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 45.

<sup>392</sup> Pasnau, “Philosophy of Mind and Human Nature,” 353. Pasnau describes Aquinas’s argument that the soul has this operation “per se” as the “independent operation premise.”

<sup>393</sup> Pasnau, “Philosophy of Mind and Human Nature,” 353.

<sup>394</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 45.

Ad 3. The body is necessary for the action of the intellect, not as its origin of action, but on the part of the object; for the phantasm is to the intellect what color is to the sight. Neither does such a dependence on the body prove the intellect to be non-subsistent.<sup>395</sup>

Aquinas defends a necessary connection between the body and the intellect due to the fact that the body provides the phantasms (body-sense images) in order for the intellect to operate. The body is not, however, the origin of the acts of the intellect or the means through which these acts happen, since they are apart from any bodily organ.

The argument that the soul would not be able to know bodies if it were of a bodily nature is a difficult one to defend. Pasnau criticizes the argument by saying that he does not “see how to defend this argument.”<sup>396</sup> He cites Aquinas’s arguments on Question 84, Article 2 (“Thus, it is clear that the nature of cognition is inversely correlate with the nature of materiality”<sup>397</sup>) and Question 86, Article 2 ad 4 (“If a subject cannot know an object of the same nature as itself, the intellect would not know itself”). As Pasnau says, however, “immateriality does not seem to limit cognition in the way that materiality does, and so the argument of 75.2 cannot be turned against the intellect itself.”<sup>398</sup> Aquinas’s argument that the soul cannot be material or corporeal because of the incompatibility of modes of existence (the same nature cannot know the same nature) is weak. In that which concerns the mind, Pasnau says:

There is nothing here that forces us to conclude, for instance, that if the mind were just the gray matter of the brain, the mind would be incapable of thinking of anything other than gray matter. So although Aquinas softens his analysis by incorporating the notion of intentional existence, he at the same time insists on a direct link between intentional and concrete existence. It would be reasonable to follow Aquinas in thinking of cognition in terms of intentional existence, but I see no reason why we should accept a direct link between the intentional and the concrete. The argument of 75.2 takes this link for

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<sup>395</sup> “Ad tertium dicendum quod corpus requiritur ad actionem intellectus, non sicut organum quo talis actio exerceatur, sed ratione obiecti, phantasma enim comparatur ad intellectum sicut color ad visum. Sic autem indigere corpore non removet intellectum esse subsistentem” (*ST I*, 75, 2).

<sup>396</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 56.

<sup>397</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 56.

<sup>398</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 56.



granted. It is disappointing that at this crucial juncture there is not more to say on Aquinas's behalf. But so far as I can see, there is not.<sup>399</sup>

### 3.2.1.3. The Human Intellectual or Rational Soul Does Not Rely on Any Bodily Organ

In Article 3 of Question 75, Aquinas asks “whether the souls of brute animals are subsistent.” By drawing on Aristotle, he responds that, of all the operations of the soul, understanding is the only one that is “performed without a corporeal organ.”<sup>400</sup> As the souls of animals are basically sensitive, they are performed through the organs of the senses and therefore they are not subsistent.<sup>401</sup> As the operations of the sensitive soul are “evidently accompanied with change in the body,”<sup>402</sup> Aquinas concludes that “it is clear that the sensitive soul has no ‘per se’ operation of its own, and that every operation of the sensitive soul belongs to the composite.”<sup>403</sup> By showing that the sensitive operations do not transcend matter, Aquinas concludes that the souls of the animals are not subsistent.<sup>404</sup> The only soul that transcends matter and does not require and involve it (or the body) for its operation is the human intellectual or rational soul. This means that the human soul “can potentially exist apart from its matter—that is, apart from the body.”<sup>405</sup> As Aquinas does not differentiate the sensory operation of the human soul from the sensory operation in the irrational beings with regard to their complete dependence

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<sup>399</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 57.

<sup>400</sup> “Sed Aristoteles posuit quod solum intelligere, inter opera animae, sine organo corporeo exercetur” (*ST I*, 75, 3).

<sup>401</sup> “Wherefore we conclude that as the souls of brute animals have no ‘per se’ operations they are not subsistent. For the operation of anything follows the mode of its being.” Latin: “Ex quo relinquitur quod, cum animae brutorum animalium per se non operentur, non sint subsistentes, similiter enim unumquodque habet esse et operationem” (*ST I*, 75, 3).

<sup>402</sup> “et consequentes operationes animae sensitivae, manifeste accidunt cum aliqua corporis immutatione” (*ST I*, 75, 3).

<sup>403</sup> “Et sic manifestum est quod anima sensitiva non habet aliquam operationem propriam per seipsam, sed omnis operatio sensitivae animae est coniuncti” (*ST I*, 75, 3).

<sup>404</sup> Cf. Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 58.

<sup>405</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 57. Even though classifying Aquinas's argument on the incorporeality and subsistence of the soul in *I*, 75, 2 as disappointing, Pasnau explains that: “In saying that the human soul is subsistent, Aquinas means that the soul is a form that somehow surpasses matter, meaning that it can potentially exist apart from its matter—that is, apart from the body. This requires, as we have seen in §2.2, that the soul has an operation that transcends matter” (Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 57).

on the bodily organs, like the souls of animals, the sensitive operation of the human soul is not subsistent.<sup>406</sup>

For Aquinas, “understanding” is an operation of the human (intellectual) soul that does not rely on any bodily organ. Aquinas says that the operations of the sensitive soul are bound by the body since they promote a change in the body and therefore are connected to and dependent on the body. The sensitive operation of the soul belongs to the compound body-soul<sup>407</sup> and not only to the soul as the intellect. Aquinas’s view on the immateriality (incorporeality) of the intellect may be dualistic. In arguing about the senses only in terms of changes in the body, however, he seems more materialistic than many contemporary theories would affirm, for instance, that the sense of seeing (the example Aquinas uses in Q 75, Art. 3, to explain the bodily changes that happen with the senses), although having neural correlates, “is a non-bodily mental operation.”<sup>408</sup>

For Aquinas, it seems that there is no change in any bodily organ while the function of knowing/understanding is happening, and, therefore, the function of the intellectual soul or mind does not belong to the composite body-soul but only to the soul. Aquinas, due to a lack of neuroscientific knowledge in the thirteenth century, had no understanding of the fundamental role of the brain in intellectual functions. As the findings of contemporary neuroscience demonstrate, all of the intellectual functions of a human being are related to specific brain activity and areas.<sup>409</sup> Moreover, all brain activity is accompanied by changes in the neuronal

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<sup>406</sup> Cf. Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 58.

<sup>407</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 75, 3. As discussed later, Aquinas argues that the body is an expression of the composite nature of the human being, in a way that everything that belongs to the body as sensations belongs to the body-soul composite. This is not the case regarding the human intellect, which belongs solely to the soul.

<sup>408</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 59.

<sup>409</sup> Cf. Richard Passingham, *Cognitive Neuroscience: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 55–65.

structures at the cellular level (e.g., strengthening of synaptic connections<sup>410</sup>) and systemically (mechanisms of neural structural changes and plasticity<sup>411</sup>). It is a known process in which neural activity related to reasoning produces changes in the brain. Therefore, it can be said that *there are changes in a person's brain while it is being used in intellectual activities* like “understanding.” The act of thinking (reasoning, understanding, solving problems), a function of the intellectual soul, is connected with changes in the brain. Since Aquinas had no knowledge of such changes, though, he asserted that the intellectual power of understanding (while acting) is related solely to the incorporeal soul and not to any bodily organ. As will be seen later in this chapter, however, if the intellectual power of the soul is affirmed as also being located in or performed through a body organ, Aquinas's argument of the subsistence and immortality of the soul seems to be threatened. Furthermore, given the changes that occur in the brain, it may be argued that the operation of the senses happens through a bodily organ (brain), and, therefore, it may be argued that these changes are directly related to these actions of the senses and not to the intellect.

It follows from these contemporary arguments, based on neuroscientific evidence, that it is difficult to uphold the assertions of Aristotle and Aquinas that the operation of the intellectual soul, described as *understanding*, is performed without a corporeal organ. If the intellectual power of understanding is in fact accompanied by *bodily change*, it could be said (possibly and

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<sup>410</sup> See Anne Trafton, “Neuroscientists Reveal How the Brain Can Enhance Connections: Newly Identified Mechanism Allows the Brain to Strengthen Links between Neurons,” *MIT News* (November 18, 2015), <http://news.mit.edu/2015/brain-strengthen-connections-between-neurons-1118> (Accessed on August 15, 2018).

<sup>411</sup> See A. P. Mackey, A. T. Miller Singley, C. Wendelken, S. A. Bunge, “Characterizing Behavioral and Brain Changes Associated with Practicing Reasoning Skills,” *PLoS ONE* 10, no. 9 (2015): e0137627, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0137627> (Accessed on October 10, 2018); K. Prehn, M. Korczykowski, H. Rao, Z. Fang, J. A. Detre, D. C. Robertson, “Neural Correlates of Post-Conventional Moral Reasoning: A Voxel-Based Morphometry Study,” *PLoS ONE* 10, no. 6 (2015): e0122914, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0122914> (Accessed on October 22, 2018); Daphne Bavelier, C. Shawn Green, and Mathew W. G. Dye, “Exercising Your Brain: Training-Related Brain Plasticity,” in Gazzaniga, *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, 153–64; Courtney Stevens and Helen Neville, “Profiles of Development and Plasticity in Human Neurocognition,” in Gazzaniga, *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, 165–81.

logically) that the intellectual functions also belong to the composite (body-soul) and not only to the intellectual soul. And if these intellectual functions also belong to (or are connected to or dependent on) the body (a bodily organ, the brain, if they are functions of the brain), this affirmation could be a possible threat to the Aristotelian and Thomistic assertion that the intellectual soul is subsistent per se.

In Aquinas's reply to the second objection on Question 75, Article 3, he reaffirms his argument that the activity of the sensitive faculty of the soul is accompanied with changes in the body, while the activity of the intellectual faculty is not.<sup>412</sup> Even though in order for operations of the intellectual soul to occur it is necessary that body-sense images or phantasms are generated in the senses (as a result of the impressions of external objects in the senses that are accompanied with body changes), Aquinas maintains that intellectual functions are not accompanied by changes in the body.

Again, can this assertion be upheld once contemporary neuroscientific data is taken into account? One possible justification that may be made is this: Whatever change may occur in the brain while reasoning is happening is due to the fact that, for reasoning to happen, the constant simultaneous activity of the sensitive faculty must happen as well. Understood in this way, the changes that occur in the body are due to the operation of the sensitive powers that are required by the intellect.<sup>413</sup>

#### **3.2.1.4. The Soul Is Not a Human Being**

In Article 4 of Question 75, Aquinas responds negatively to the question of "whether the soul is a man [*sic*]." Although in Question 76 Aquinas deals specifically with the union of soul

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<sup>412</sup> *ST I*, 75, 3, ad 2.

<sup>413</sup> *ST I*, 75, 3, ad 2.

and body, it is here that he asserts that the human soul alone is *not* a human being. For Aquinas, the human being is a composite of body and soul. He uses the concepts of “form” and “matter” in his description of the human being. To say that the human being is a soul or that the soul is a human being would be defining the person as being a “form,” and this is not possible since the human being is a “species” that belongs to the natural order of things and, therefore, as with all natural things, is composed of “form and matter.”<sup>414</sup> He says that a particular human being “is composed of this soul, of this flesh, and of these bones; so it belongs to the notion of man [*sic*] to be composed of soul, flesh, and bones.”<sup>415</sup> Aquinas continues his argument that the soul is not a human being by reinforcing the notion previously discussed in Question 75, Article 3, that the sensitive operations of the human being (or operations of the sensitive soul) are also operations of the body (are dependent on the body). Just as sensation is an operation of the human being’s body and soul, only the composite of body and soul can be considered a human being. The soul alone is not a human being.

### **3.2.1.5. The Intellectual Soul is an Absolute Form**

In Article 5 of Question 75, Aquinas says that the soul is not something composed of matter and form. Aquinas says that, because the intellectual soul is able to know things in their formal idea or absolute nature and not only particularly (e.g., in knowing a stone, the human soul knows not only the particular stone but the general notion of stone), it follows that there is no matter in the soul, as matter would be an impediment for the knowledge of these formal ideas:

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<sup>414</sup> “sed formam et materiam” (*ST I*, 75, 4).

<sup>415</sup> “Sicut enim de ratione huius hominis est quod sit ex hac anima et his carnibus et his ossibus; ita de ratione hominis est quod sit ex anima et carnibus et ossibus” (*ST I*, 75, 4).

“Therefore, the intellectual soul itself is an absolute form, and not something composed of matter and form.”<sup>416</sup>

### 3.2.1.6. The Soul Is Incorruptible

In Article 6 of Question 75, Aquinas relies on his previous arguments to assert that the intellectual soul is subsistent and that it is an absolute form (and not composed of matter and form). Thus, he arrives at the conclusion that “the intellectual principle which we call the human soul is incorruptible.”<sup>417</sup> He then goes on to affirm that “it is impossible for a subsistent form to cease to exist.”<sup>418</sup> Aquinas’s defense of the incorruptibility of the human soul is important for this dissertation because it is foundational to the Catholic belief that the soul survives bodily death in a separated state. According to Aquinas the human soul is subsistent—that is, as it has an existence per se—and is only a form (without material composition), therefore, it cannot be corrupted. Given this claim, Aquinas goes on to address the survival of the soul when it separates from the body in death. In short, he asserts that the rational soul, because it is a subsistent incorporeal form, is imperishable.<sup>419</sup>

Could this assertion be upheld if it were proven that the function or power of the intellect actually happens through a bodily organ, namely, the brain? Would the claim that the human soul is incorruptible be undermined if the human soul were considered to be composed of matter and form? For Aquinas, even if the intellectual soul were composed of matter and form, it would remain incorruptible.<sup>420</sup> To this end, he uses the argument of the natural desire to exist forever:

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<sup>416</sup> “Anima igitur intellectiva est forma absoluta, non autem aliquid compositum ex materia et forma” (*ST I*, 75, 5).

<sup>417</sup> “animam humanam, quam dicimus intellectivum principium, esse incorruptibilem” (*ST I*, 75, 6).

<sup>418</sup> “Unde impossibile est quod forma subsistens desinat esse” (*ST I*, 75, 6).

<sup>419</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 66.

<sup>420</sup> “Granted even that the soul is composed of matter and form, as some pretend, we should nevertheless have to maintain that it is incorruptible.” Latin: “Dato etiam quod anima esset ex materia et forma composita, ut quidam dicunt, adhuc oporteret ponere eam incorruptibilem” (*ST I*, 75, 6).

“Everything that has an intellect naturally desires always to exist. But a natural desire cannot be in vain. Therefore, every intellectual substance is incorruptible.”<sup>421</sup> If something has, as the human intellect does, the natural desire to exist forever, Aquinas concludes that it is incorruptible. As the human being can conceive of an unending existence, this natural longing for immortality may have been imbedded in the intellect by God and therefore it cannot be futile.<sup>422</sup> According to Giacomo Canobbio, there is no agreement among interpreters of Aquinas that his defense of the incorruptibility of the soul is also an argument for its immortality. His use of the argument of a “natural desire” as the basis for incorruptibility, however, demonstrates Aquinas’s theological perspective, and, in this sense, it also serves an argument in favor of the immortality of the soul.<sup>423</sup> As Étienne Gilson observes, “[to] be immortal is to be incorruptible,”<sup>424</sup> and the simple admittance that the soul is an immaterial substance is the admittance of its immortality.<sup>425</sup>

### 3.2.1.7. The Intellectual Soul Is Created Directly by God

In response to those who would contend that the human soul is corruptible, precisely because, in coming from the earth, as is the case with all the other animals, it has the same generation or origin, Aquinas argues a contrary position in Question 75, Article 6, ad 1. Using biblical texts to support his claim, Aquinas asserts that the origin of the human (intellectual) soul

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<sup>421</sup> “Unde omne habens intellectum naturaliter desiderat esse semper. Naturale autem desiderium non potest esse inane. Omnis igitur intellectualis substantia est incorruptibilis” (*ST I*, 75, 6).

<sup>422</sup> Cf. Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 384: “Man, as distinct from the irrational animal, can conceive perpetual existence, divorced from the present moment, and to this apprehension there corresponds a natural desire for immortality. As this desire must have been implanted by the Author of Nature, it cannot be in vain (*frustra* or *inane*).”

<sup>423</sup> Cf. Giacomo Canobbio, *Sobre el Alma*, 90–91.

<sup>424</sup> Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 188.

<sup>425</sup> This argument on natural desire helps to preserve the notion that the soul is incorruptible even when the claim is made that all functions and powers of the intellectual soul are related to and dependent on the brain and, therefore, are functions of the body-soul composite.

is not the same of the souls of the animals. Unlike the souls of animals, the human intellectual soul is a product of God's action and therefore it does not die with the body.<sup>426</sup>

### **3.2.2. The Substantial Unity of the Soul with the Body (Question 76)**

In Question 76, Aquinas defines the human soul as the only substantial form of the body. He does so in order to guarantee the body-soul unity of the human being.<sup>427</sup> By drawing on Aristotelian hylomorphism, Aquinas asserts that human beings are not the result of a union between two different and independent substances; rather, he argues that the body and the soul form one substantial unity.<sup>428</sup> In the case of living things, their souls or forms are the principle of life, or that which causes them to be alive.

#### **3.2.2.1. The Soul Is Self-Subsistent and Exists Separated from the Body after Death**

In Article 1 of Question 76, Aquinas affirms that the intellectual soul, or simply, “the intellect, which is the principle of intellectual operation, is the form of the human body.”<sup>429</sup> The human intellectual soul is the first principle of all the vital actions that occur in human beings, which include nourishment, sensation, movement, and understanding.<sup>430</sup> Although this soul is the source of all vital actions of the human body, Aquinas considers that the cognitive or intellectual capacity or operation of the human being is the very principle that “is united to the body as its

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<sup>426</sup> “Thus death comes to both alike as to the body, but not as to the soul.” Latin: “Et ideo similis est interitus quantum ad corpus, sed non quantum ad animam” (*ST I*, 75, 6).

<sup>427</sup> Cf. Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 73.

<sup>428</sup> “Aristotle’s hylomorphic metaphysics . . . is the thesis that corporeal substances in general are form-matter composites. Matter by itself—‘prime matter’—cannot exist at all without form. . . . On this understanding of the hylomorphic framework, everything that exists has form. So the fact that human nature consists not just of a body, but of an *informed* body, is just an application of a broader metaphysical thesis” (Pasnau “Philosophy of Mind and Human Nature,” 351).

<sup>429</sup> “quod intellectus, qui est intellectualis operationis principium, sit humani corporis forma” (*ST I*, 76, 1).

<sup>430</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 76, 1.



form.”<sup>431</sup> Aquinas says that “the human soul is the highest and noblest of forms” and that “it excels corporeal matter in its power by the fact that it has an operation and a power in which corporeal matter has no share whatever.”<sup>432</sup> In virtue of its intellectual power, Aquinas refers to the human soul as intellect and again, as in Question 75, affirms that its activity does not happen through any organ of the body. Unlike the acts that belong to the senses, such as the act of seeing, which belongs to and is performed by a corporeal organ, the intellectual act of knowing/understanding does not belong to, nor can it be performed by, any corporeal organ.<sup>433</sup> The intellectual power (and operation) of the human being is affirmed as separated and (relatively) independent from bodily matter, as it is not performed by any bodily organ, thus being an act only of the intellectual soul and not of the body.<sup>434</sup> Nevertheless, this intellectual soul remains the first principle of life in the body and all of its functions. And as it is subsistent, the soul does not deteriorate with bodily death. In Question 76, Aquinas reinforces two of the claims that he defended in Question 75: specifically, that the function of the intellectual soul is not related to or dependent on the body and that the human soul is a kind of form that is self-subsistent and therefore does not deteriorate, decay, or disappear with bodily death.

Different from the forms that are the principle of life in other living things, the human intellectual soul communicates its own existence to the *compositum* that it forms with the corporeal matter. It does so in such a way that, in unity with the *compositum* (the whole human being), the intellectual soul does not lose its existence when communicating with the body.

Therefore, it subsists after the dissolution of bodily death.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> “intellectivum principium unitur corpori ut forma” (*ST I*, 76, 1).

<sup>432</sup> “Anima autem humana est ultima in nobilitate formarum. Unde intantum sua virtute excedit materiam corporalem, quod habet aliquam operationem et virtutem in qua nullo modo communicat materia corporalis. Et haec virtus dicitur intellectus” (*ST I*, 76, 1).

<sup>433</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 76, 1.

<sup>434</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 76, 1.

<sup>435</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 76, 1.

Although Aquinas insists that the soul is self-subsistent and therefore remains in existence separated from the body after death (of the body), he maintains that the human soul, even when separated from the body after death, has what he calls “an aptitude and a natural inclination to be united to the body.”<sup>436</sup> The separated soul has this propensity toward its previous union with the body since “[to] be united to the body belongs to the soul by reason of itself.”<sup>437</sup> Whether this readiness and inclination of the separated soul toward its previous (and natural) embodied state means an inclination for “a” body or for “its” body is difficult to grasp from Aquinas’s thought. The eschatological reality of the risen “spiritual” body is difficult to even conceive and imagine. As it will be an embodied existence, and as the soul is the “form” of a “matter,” the risen body may, however, have some resemblance with the present material body but in a new and transformed way. Therefore, this inclination of the soul toward its previous union must be an inclination to a union that at least resembles its previous unity, therefore, an inclination toward “its” body, no matter how different this risen body is from the old one.

### **3.2.2.2. Each Human Being Has an Intellectual Soul That Retains Its Own Being after Dissolution of the Body**

In Article 2 of Question 76, Aquinas denies the theory that there is only one single and common intellect shared for all human beings. He affirms that each human being has its own intellectual soul, which is its form or principle of existence. While justifying that each human being has a different intellect, Aquinas adds that human “thinking” (or “understanding”), which is an operation of the intellect, “is not affected by any organ other than the intellect itself.”<sup>438</sup> And even though the human intellectual soul is not produced by a material reality (by a body

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<sup>436</sup> “habens aptitudinem et inclinationem naturalem ad corporis unionem” (*ST I*, 76, 1).

<sup>437</sup> “se convenit animae corpori uniri” (*ST I*, 76, 1).

<sup>438</sup> “non fit per aliquod aliud organum, nisi per ipsum intellectum” (*ST I*, 76, 2).

organ), it is “the form of a certain matter.”<sup>439</sup> Aquinas continues: “It is clear that the intellectual soul, by virtue of its very being, is united to the body as its form; yet, after the dissolution of the body, the intellectual soul retains its own being.”<sup>440</sup> At this point, the relevant information for this dissertation is that the intellectual soul, even though being the form of the body, has an operation that is not affected by any bodily organ, and it is able to remain in existence after the body is destroyed in death.

### 3.2.2.3. The Body Has No Other Souls Beyond the Intellectual Soul

In the third article of Question 76, Aquinas affirms that the body has no other souls beyond the intellectual soul that is its first principle of life and its form. The powers that the human being has belong to and have their source in the intellectual soul. Those faculties that in other living beings are attributed to the vegetative soul (e.g., nutrition) and/or to the animal soul (e.g., sensibility) in human beings are attributed to the intellectual soul. By arguing against Plato’s theory that there are many souls acting in the human body, and by drawing on Aristotle, Aquinas asserts “that in man the sensitive soul, the intellectual soul, and the nutritive soul are numerically one soul.”<sup>441</sup> Therefore, the person, although having the powers of the nutritive, the sensitive, and the intellectual souls, has only one soul.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> “tame est forma materiae alicuius” (*ST I*, 76, 2).

<sup>440</sup> “Manifestum est autem quod anima intellectualis, secundum suum esse, unitur corpori ut forma; et tamen, destructo corpore, remanet anima intellectualis in suo esse” (*ST I*, 76, 2). The subsistence of the soul after death was already affirmed in 75, 6 and will be reaffirmed in 77, 8 and again in 89.

<sup>441</sup> “Sic ergo dicendum quod eadem numero est anima in homine sensitiva et intellectiva et nutritiva” (*ST I*, 76, 3).

<sup>442</sup> One curious comment is made by Aquinas when he responds to a claim that the person would have two souls due to the fact that the embryo was an animal before becoming a human being and therefore had a sensitive soul and an intellectual soul. Aquinas responds: “The embryo has first of all a soul which is merely sensitive, and when this is removed, it is supplanted by a more perfect soul, which is both sensitive and intellectual: as will be shown further on (Question [118], Article [2], ad 2).” Latin: “Ad tertium dicendum quod prius embryo habet animam quae est sensitiva tantum; qua abiecta, advenit perfectior anima, quae est simul sensitiva et intellectiva; ut infra plenius ostendetur” (*ST I*, 76, 3). Aquinas’s position on the ensoulment of the embryo is controversial and raises questions that cannot be explored in this dissertation. If, at first, the embryo has as its form a sensitive soul, and it is not subsistent per se, if the embryo should die before this sensitive soul is supplanted by an intellectual soul,

#### 3.2.2.4. The Intellectual Soul Is the Only Substantial Form of the Human Being

In Article 4 of Question 76, Aquinas affirms that the intellectual soul is the only “substantial form”<sup>443</sup> of the human being. This substantial form contains only virtually two other souls, the nutritive and the sensitive,<sup>444</sup> since these function in the human being the way the vegetative soul functions in the case of plants and the way the sensitive soul functions in the case of irrational animals.<sup>445</sup>

In the human being, the intellectual soul and the body are not two different substances merged together. The human intellectual soul is the only substance of unity. It is the life principle that makes the body a body. The human intellectual soul is the act through which prime matter, which is a body only in potency, becomes an actual body. To affirm that the human soul is the substantial form of the body is to say that a human body is the result of the union of a substantial form (intellectual soul) and prime matter.<sup>446</sup>

#### 3.2.2.5. The Intellectual Soul (Form) Exercises and Realizes Its Own Being in Substantial Unity with the Body (Matter)

With regard to this union, Aquinas draws on Aristotle and asserts that “the soul is the act of a physical organic body having life potentially.”<sup>447</sup> The realization of this act only happens when the soul (form) is in union with matter that exists for this purpose (“exists for the form”).<sup>448</sup>

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then nothing of the embryo would remain. In such a case, would the embryo be considered a human being? When exactly is a sensitive soul supplanted by an intellectual soul? This line of inquiry raises an array of questions for theologians and ethicists given the current Catholic understanding that affirms that the immortal human soul is created at the moment of conception. For a thorough discussion on the embryology of Thomas Aquinas, see Fabrizio Amerini, *Aquinas on the Beginning and the End of Human Life*, trans. Mark Henninger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 45–101, 165–240.

<sup>443</sup> “Anima autem est forma substantialis hominis” (*ST I*, 76, 4).

<sup>444</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 76, 4.

<sup>445</sup> Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 376.

<sup>446</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 76, 4.

<sup>447</sup> “Sed contra est quod dicit philosophus, in II de anima, quod anima est actus corporis physici organici potentia vitam habentis” (*ST I*, 76, 5).

<sup>448</sup> Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 376.

Only in the substantial unity that it forms with the body can the soul exercise and realize its own being. Aquinas explains that as the soul does not have innate ideas, it “has to gather knowledge from individual things by way of the senses.”<sup>449</sup> For this to happen, beyond the faculty of understanding, the soul needs also to have the faculty of the senses that only works through bodily organs. In other words, the soul needs “to be united to a body fitted to be a convenient organ of sense.”<sup>450</sup>

And as prime matter alone is only in potentiality, its actual existence is due to its unity with its substantial form, which is the soul. As existence is an act, it depends on the form. It is this essential (and substantial) form that in its unity with matter makes the human being what he or she is: a body. It could be said that the human body is the actual existence of matter through its unity with its substantial form that is the intellectual soul. This corporeality comes about with the union of a substantial form (that is the soul) with matter. The human body is the result of this union. Aquinas says that “the intellectual soul is united by its very being to the body as a form,”<sup>451</sup> without any intermediary or mediation. “The soul is immediately united to the body as the form to matter.”<sup>452</sup>

There is something interesting in Aquinas’s response to Objection 3 (Q. 76, a. 7) that affirms that soul and body are united through a medium due to the incorruptibility of the soul.<sup>453</sup> When Aquinas argues that the body and soul are united immediately, he affirms that, because the soul is the form of the body, “it does not have an existence apart from the existence of the body,

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<sup>449</sup> “sed oportet quod eam colligat ex rebus divisibilibus per viam sensus” (*ST I*, 76, 5).

<sup>450</sup> “Oportuit igitur animam intellectivam tali corpori uniri, quod possit esse conveniens organum sensus” (*ST I*, 76, 5).

<sup>451</sup> “Sed anima intellectiva corpori unitur ut forma per suum esse” (*ST I*, 76, 6).

<sup>452</sup> “Quod fictitium et derisibile apparet, tum quia lux non est corpus; tum quia quinta essentia non venit materialiter in compositionem corporis mixti, cum sit inalterabilis, sed virtualiter tantum; tum etiam quia anima immediate corpori unitur ut forma materiae” (*ST I*, 76, 7).

<sup>453</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 76, 7, Obj. 3.

but by its own existence is united to the body immediately.”<sup>454</sup> Given that Aquinas insists on the subsistence of the separated soul after death, perhaps its “existence” needs to be considered differently from its “subsistence.” Maybe the separated soul does not have existence since its own being (*thingness*) demands union with the body. As the soul has operations “in which the body has no part,” it subsists by itself and, therefore, “is an immaterial [formal] substance.”<sup>455</sup> On the other hand, Eleonore Stump argues that, for Aquinas, the separated soul not only exists but “is sufficient for the existence of the human being whose soul it is.”<sup>456</sup>

While affirming that the whole soul is entirely in the entire body and in all of its parts,<sup>457</sup>

Aquinas also says that the faculties of intellect and will “are not said to be in any part of the body.”<sup>458</sup> While some of the powers of the soul are common to both body and soul, they are not everywhere in the body but are located in parts of the body that are tailored to specific powers of function.<sup>459</sup> These other powers, such as the vegetative and sensitive, belong to the *compositum* soul-body, while the powers of the intellect “belong to the soul as such and are not intrinsically dependent on a bodily organ.”<sup>460</sup> Nevertheless, Aquinas affirms that intellect and will are not related to any part of the body due to the fact that these powers surpass any capacity of the body. Therefore, they belong only to the soul.

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<sup>454</sup> *ST I*, 76, 7.

<sup>455</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 188. It is difficult to express a reality that subsists in a state separated from the body, but only “exists” in its substantial unity with the body. Therefore, the separated soul does not exist but subsists (as it is a substance).

<sup>456</sup> Eleonore Stump, “Resurrection and the Separated Soul,” in Davies and Stump, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 463. The author defends that, in Aquinas’s understanding, the human being exists through his or her separated soul although they are not identical. She distinguishes what is the human being’s constitution (body-soul unity) and his or her identity, which is kept by the soul that informed him or her. Stump uses the argument of “sufficiency” to affirm that the existence of the separated soul is sufficient to affirm the existence of the human being it was: “And so although a person is not identical to his soul, the existence of the soul is sufficient for the existence of a person” (463).

<sup>457</sup> “in each body the whole soul is in the whole body, and in each part is entire.” Latin: “quod anima in quocumque corpore et in toto est tota, et in qualibet eius parte tota est” (*ST I*, 76, 8).

<sup>458</sup> “scilicet intellectus et voluntas, unde huiusmodi potentiae in nulla parte corporis esse dicuntur” (*ST I*, 76, 8).

<sup>459</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 76, 8.

<sup>460</sup> Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 376.

### 3.2.3. The Powers and Functions of the Soul (Questions 77–88)

According to Aquinas, among the powers of the soul, there are two kinds of order: nature and generation. In the order of nature, the intellectual powers are superior to the sensitive that are superior to the nutritive powers. But in the order of generation and time, the nutritive powers are prior to the sensitive that are prior to the intellectual.<sup>461</sup>

#### 3.2.3.1. Question 77

In Article 5 of Question 77, Aquinas affirms that the soul's sensitive and nutritive operations are related to or have as their subject the composite of body and soul,<sup>462</sup> not only the soul. This does not happen, however, with regard to the powers of understanding and will. Since they are “performed without a corporeal organ,”<sup>463</sup> the soul is their subject and not the composite of body and soul. Although the majority of the powers are performed by means of the composite of body and soul, these powers are called “powers of the soul” because the soul is their principle, even though it is not always their subject.<sup>464</sup>

Aquinas affirms that all the powers of the soul flow from its essence. The soul is what makes the composite (body-soul) to be actual and not potential. Although the majority of the functions of the soul proceed from the body-soul composite (understanding and will flow from the soul alone and not from the composite), they flow from the essence of the soul. The soul is in this sense superior in importance to the body.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 77, 4.

<sup>462</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 77, 5.

<sup>463</sup> “*quae exercentur sine organo corporali*” (*ST I*, 77, 5).

<sup>464</sup> Cf.: “All the powers are said to belong to the soul, not as their subject, but as their principle.” Latin: “*Ad primum ergo dicendum quod omnes potentiae dicuntur esse animae, non sicut subiecti, sed sicut principia*” (*ST I*, 77, 5). Also, “All such powers are primarily in the soul, as compared to the composite; not as in their subject, but as in their principle.” Latin: “*Ad secundum dicendum quod omnes huiusmodi potentiae per prius sunt in anima quam in coniuncto, non sicut in subiecto, sed sicut in principio*” (*ST I*, 77, 5).

<sup>465</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 77, 6.

Although all the powers of the human being have “the soul alone as their principle,”<sup>466</sup> when the soul is separated from the body, only the powers of intelligence and will remain (in actuality active) in the soul as they have the “soul alone as their subject.”<sup>467</sup> Aquinas states that the other powers (vegetative and sensitive), although remaining virtually in the soul that is their “principle or root,”<sup>468</sup> have no way to act (or cannot operate) as they are apart from bodily organs.<sup>469</sup>

### 3.2.3.2. Questions 78–79

Following Aristotle, Aquinas asserts that there are three souls: the vegetative, the sensitive, and the rational soul.<sup>470</sup> The last one, once again, is described as being “an operation of the soul which so far exceeds the corporeal nature that it is not even performed by any corporeal organ,”<sup>471</sup> since it transcends the corporeal nature. Aquinas then goes on to explain the ways in which these powers of the soul are distinct from each other according to their objects. While the vegetative power (or soul) has as its object only the body to which the soul is united, the sensitive and the intellectual have extrinsic objects. In the case of the sensitive power the object of the soul is its own body and other bodies; regarding the intellectual power, the object of the soul is its proper body and the universals, which can be considered as everything that is intelligible.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> “animam solam sicut ad principium” (*ST I*, 77, 8).

<sup>467</sup> “animam solam sicut ad subiectum” (*ST I*, 77, 8).

<sup>468</sup> “sed virtute tantum manent in anima, sicut in principio vel radice” (*ST I*, 77, 8).

<sup>469</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 77, 8.

<sup>470</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 78, 1.

<sup>471</sup> “Est ergo quaedam operatio animae, quae intantum excedit naturam corpoream, quod neque etiam exercetur per organum corporale. Et talis est operatio animae rationalis” (*ST I*, 78, 1).

<sup>472</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 78, 1.



In the substantial union of the body and soul, “there is a real distinction between the soul and its faculties, and between the faculties themselves.”<sup>473</sup> All of these faculties or powers (and their operations or realizations) belong to the soul, but some “belong to the *compositum* and cannot be exercised without the body.”<sup>474</sup> There is a hierarchical order among these faculties, depending on their objects. The lower is the vegetative faculty that has as its object only the body. Then comes the sensitive faculty that has as its object its own body and the other sensible bodies. The highest is the intellectual faculty that goes beyond having as its objects those of the vegetative and the sensitive faculties. The object of the intellectual faculty is “being in general.”<sup>475</sup>

The vegetative faculty or power has three capacities and operations: generation or reproduction, growth, and nutrition.<sup>476</sup> The sensitive faculty has five external senses<sup>477</sup> and four internal senses,<sup>478</sup> “the power of locomotion and the sensitive appetite.”<sup>479</sup> The intellectual faculty has passive intellect, active (or agent) intellect, and will.<sup>480</sup> With regard to memory, or the capacity to retain the species of the things, Aquinas asserts that memory is the work not only of the senses but also of the intellect. And although it belongs to the *compositum*, the intellect is able to retain it “without the association of any corporeal organ.”<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 376.

<sup>474</sup> Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 376–77.

<sup>475</sup> Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 377.

<sup>476</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 78, 2; Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 377.

<sup>477</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 78, 3. The exterior senses are “sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch” (Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 377).

<sup>478</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 78, 4. The interior senses of the sensitive faculty of the soul are common sense (*sensus communis*), the imagination (*phantasia*), the estimative power (or *vis aestimativa*), and memory (or *vis memorativa*). Cf. Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 377.

<sup>479</sup> Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 378.

<sup>480</sup> Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 378. The passive intellect is discussed by Aquinas in *ST I*, 79, 2, the active or agent intellect in *ST I*, 79, 3–13, and the will in *ST I*, 82 and 83.

<sup>481</sup> “*praeter concomitantiam organi corporalis*” (*ST I*, 79, 6).

In Article 7 of Question 79, Aquinas says that memory is not a power distinct from the intellect but that they are practically the same reality.<sup>482</sup> And in Article 8 of the same question, Aquinas also affirms that reason is not a power distinct from the intellect, and it can even be said that “reason, intellect and mind are one power.”<sup>483</sup>

### 3.2.3.3. Questions 84–85

Regarding the relationship between the intellectual and the sensitive faculties, Aquinas explains that the intellectual faculty, which does not operate through a bodily organ, can only know or understand things by turning to the sense images or phantasms<sup>484</sup> produced through and received from the body organs of senses (sensation). Through the process of abstraction, the intellect makes the phantasms intelligible.<sup>485</sup>

The faculty of the intellect (knowledge and will) needs to turn to the phantasms produced by the faculty of the senses through the bodily organs in order to exercise its function of knowing

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<sup>482</sup> Cf.: “Therefore there can be no other difference of powers in the intellect, but that of passive and active.

Wherefore it is clear that memory is not a distinct power from the intellect: for it belongs to the nature of a passive power to retain as well as to receive.” Latin: “Sic igitur nulla alia differentia potentiarum in intellectu esse potest, nisi possibilis et agentis. Unde patet quod memoria non est alia potentia ab intellectu, ad rationem enim potentiae passivae pertinet conservare, sicut et recipere” (*ST I*, 79, 7).

<sup>483</sup> “Ratio ergo et intellectus et mens sunt una potentia” (*ST I*, 79, 8). And also: “Much more, therefore, by the same power do we understand and reason: and so it is clear that in man reason and intellect are the same power.”

Latin: “Multo ergo magis per eandem potentiam intelligimus et ratiocinamur. Et sic patet quod in homine eadem potentia est ratio et intellectus” (*ST I*, 79, 8). Aquinas also describes intelligence as the act of the intellect (Cf. *ST I*, 79, 10).

<sup>484</sup> Phantasms are “material images” (*ST I*, 85, 1) that are produced by the senses in the bodily organs. See also Pasnau, *Aquinas on Human Nature*, 278–84.

<sup>485</sup> *ST I*, 84, 6. The intellect knows things through the process of abstraction from the phantasms. By turning to the phantasm or body-sense image of something generated by the senses and imagination, the intellect abstracts the form of this individual thing and so is able to know it: “But to know what is in individual matter, not as existing in such matter, is to abstract the form from individual matter which is represented by the phantasms. Therefore we must needs say that our intellect understands material things by abstracting from the phantasms.” Latin: “Cognoscere vero id quod est in materia individuali, non prout est in tali materia, est abstrahere formam a materia individuali, quam representant phantasmata. Et ideo necesse est dicere quod intellectus noster intelligit materialia abstrahendo a phantasmatis” (*ST I*, 85, 1; Cf. *ST I*, 85, 5). The intellect understands the universal directly by abstracting the intelligible species of it, but in order to understand the singular, it is indirectly by turning to the phantasm.

<sup>485</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 86, 1.

things. In fact, “the soul understands nothing without phantasms.”<sup>486</sup> And Aquinas is emphatic in affirming the dependence of the intellect on the phantasm. He states: “In the present state of life in which the soul is united to a passible body, it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to the phantasms.”<sup>487</sup> In this way, Aquinas explains that, even though the intellectual faculty does not work through a bodily organ, it may be impeded from functioning if some organ is injured.<sup>488</sup> As the intellect needs phantasms to work, it is indirectly dependent on bodily organs, once the phantasms are produced by the faculty of the senses and the imagination through corporeal organs.<sup>489</sup> Again, Aquinas asserts that when an injured part of the body damages imagination and memory, the intellect or reason can neither understand nor remember things, such is its dependence on the senses and, indirectly, on the corporeal reality.<sup>490</sup> Therefore, although the faculty of the intellect does not operate through any bodily organ, it is indirectly dependent on them since, to work, the intellect continuously relies and depends on the bodily senses (phantasms) produced by the senses by the use of corporeal organs.

One could say that the acts of understanding and will are accompanied, connected, and sustained by brain activity and, therefore, that they rely on a bodily organ—the brain. By following the logic of Aquinas’s arguments, however, the fact that brain activity may be happening while intellectual acts of knowledge/understanding and will are being performed does not necessarily mean that these intellectual functions or powers of the soul are connected to, dependent on, or the product of brain activity. Given that the intellectual soul constantly turns to

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<sup>486</sup> “quod nihil sine phantasmate intelligit anima” (*ST I*, 84, 7).

<sup>487</sup> “Respondeo dicendum quod impossibile est intellectum nostrum, secundum praesentis vitae statum, quo passibili corpori coniungitur, aliquid intelligere in actu, nisi convertendo se ad phantasmata” (*ST I*, 84, 7).

<sup>488</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 84, 7.

<sup>489</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 84, 7.

<sup>490</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 84, 7.

phantasms so that knowing may occur, it is only related to the body indirectly since these phantasms are the product of bodily organs produced by the senses and imagination (which are dependent on the brain, for instance). Therefore, if the brain is injured and the human being loses his or her capacity for sensibility, memory, or imagination, the human being's soul is unable to perform his or her intellectual function, not because it was damaged, but because the bodily organ responsible for the senses and imagination was damaged. In Aquinas's view, the intellectual soul is only indirectly related to, connected to, or dependent on a bodily organ such as the brain to the extent that it relies on the senses.

#### **3.2.4. On the Knowledge of the Separated Soul (Question 89)**

In his "Treatise on Human Nature," Aquinas expresses his view that the human soul is subsistent or immortal; therefore, it does not perish with bodily death. His two main arguments regarding the subsistence of the soul are developed in Question 75, Article 6, as discussed above. The first of these arguments is derived from evidence that human beings have a natural desire to continue their existence or to live forever. As this desire cannot be futile or frustrated, Aquinas argues that it must be an expression of truth regarding human immortality. The second argument is based on Aquinas's claim that the human soul, as the first principle and substantial form of the body, is subsistent or has an existence *per se* independent of the body precisely because it has operations that are independent from the body, and therefore the soul does not perish with the dissolution of the body in death.<sup>491</sup> Aquinas's argument that the intellectual power of the soul (although not happening through any bodily organ) relies on the phantasms produced by the senses and imagination, however, requires an explanation of exactly *how* the cognitive powers of

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<sup>491</sup> Pasnau discusses the difficulties of Aquinas's argument on the subsistence and incorruptibility of the soul in *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 361–66.

the soul work in the soul's separated state after death. This explanation on the knowledge (the working of the intellectual power) of the soul in its state of separation from the body is what Aquinas discusses in Question 89.

### **3.2.4.1. How the Soul Separated from the Body Understands**

In Article 1 of Question 89, Aquinas asks if the soul when separated from the body can understand. Aquinas responds that the soul is able to subsist in the separated state after death precisely because it has an operation that is proper to itself, which is its intelligence or capacity for understanding: "Therefore the soul can understand when it is apart from the body."<sup>492</sup> The problem with this response is the explanation of *how* the soul can know/understand something since this action was possible, while in its previous substantial unity with the body, "only by turning to the phantasms"<sup>493</sup> that were produced and supplied by the senses in the corporeal organs. Since this is the soul's natural mode of understanding/knowing, that is, while in union with the body, what happens after separation? Aquinas explains that when the soul is separated from the body, things change regarding the cognitive capacity of the soul: "it has a mode of understanding, [that works] by turning to simply intelligible objects, as is proper to other separate substances."<sup>494</sup> Aquinas asserts that as the separated soul is not a natural mode of being, likewise it is not natural for the soul to understand things without turning to the phantasms. The unity of the soul and body constitutes the very nature of the human being. Moreover, this union is for the good of the human soul because, united with the body, it can turn to phantasms and is able to understand things in the best possible way.<sup>495</sup> As it is possible for the soul to exist

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<sup>492</sup> "Intelligit ergo sine corpore existens" (*ST I*, 89, 1).

<sup>493</sup> "nisi convertendo se ad phantasmata" (*ST I*, 89, 1).

<sup>494</sup> "competit ei modus intelligendi per conversionem ad ea quae sunt intelligibilia simpliciter, sicut et aliis substantiis separatis" (*ST I*, 89, 1).

<sup>495</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 89, 1.

separated from the body, however, Aquinas affirms that the operation of the understanding is still possible but occurs in a different way. The separated soul “understands by means of participated species arising from the influence of the Divine light, shared by the soul as by other separate substances, though in a lesser degree.”<sup>496</sup> Aquinas’s basic argument is that the separated soul understands through divine illumination. And since “God is the author of the influx of both the light of grace and of the light of nature,”<sup>497</sup> this different way or mode of understanding of the separated soul is not unnatural. Even though Aquinas provides an explanation of how, in its new mode of existence, the separated soul understands, Pasnau asserts that Aquinas does not prove his argument logically.<sup>498</sup> According to Pasnau’s assessment, the claim that the separated soul knows through divine illumination “damages the credibility of Aquinas’s proposal.”<sup>499</sup>

As Aquinas continues to describe the separated soul’s cognition, he asserts that “the soul apart from the body has perfect knowledge of other separated souls”<sup>500</sup> because they have the same mode of existence. The same cannot be said, however, about the separated soul’s knowledge of the things of nature. According to Aquinas, although the separated soul can know the things of nature, its knowledge of them is not proper and certain but happens only in a “general and confused manner.”<sup>501</sup>

With regard to that knowledge previously acquired during life (in union with the body), Aquinas affirms that the separated soul retains only that knowledge that “belongs to the intellect itself.”<sup>502</sup> By this, he means the simple intellections regarding the essence of the things—the intellections that involve operations of composition, division, and reasoning—are the ones that

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<sup>496</sup> “ut obiectio probat, sed per species ex influencia divini luminis participatas, quarum anima fit particeps sicut et aliae substantiae separatae, quamvis inferiori modo” (*ST I*, 89, 1).

<sup>497</sup> “quia Deus est auctor non solum influenciae gratuiti luminis, sed etiam naturalis” (*ST I*, 89, 1).

<sup>498</sup> Cf. Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 368.

<sup>499</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 375.

<sup>500</sup> “Et ideo de aliis animabus separatis perfectam cognitionem habet” (*ST I*, 89, 2).

<sup>501</sup> “sed communem et confusam” (*ST I*, 89, 3).

<sup>502</sup> “habet in ipso intellectu” (*ST I*, 89, 5).

“remain in the separated soul.”<sup>503</sup> Aquinas also asserts that intelligible species or likenesses of objects remain in the separated soul; therefore, the soul “can understand what it understood formerly, but in a different way; not by turning to phantasms, but by a mode suited to a soul existing apart from the body.”<sup>504</sup>

#### **3.2.4.2. Does the Separated Soul Know about Earthly Matters?**

In Article 8, the last article of Question 89, Aquinas explains that the separated souls do not know what is happening in the world.<sup>505</sup> He also mentions that Gregory the Great and Augustine have different opinions regarding the souls of the blessed ones.<sup>506</sup> Gregory believes that the blessed ones have knowledge of earthly affairs, while Augustine disagrees with this assertion. While not providing his own position on this contested matter, Aquinas comments that, in the same way the living are concerned with souls and pray for them without knowledge of their state, “the souls of the departed may care for the living, even if ignorant of their state.”<sup>507</sup> Aquinas goes a step further by saying that, although the separated souls cannot know by themselves what is happening in the world, “the affairs of the living can be made known to them not immediately, but [through] the souls who pass hence thither, or by angels and demons, or even by ‘the revelation of the Holy Ghost...’”<sup>508</sup> Against arguments that separated souls know things from earth and appear to people who are alive, without further comment, Aquinas simply

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<sup>503</sup> “manet in anima separata” (*ST I*, 89, 5). See also Pasnau, “Commentary,” in Thomas Aquinas, *The Treatise on Human Nature*, 376.

<sup>504</sup> “anima separata intelligere possit quae prius intellexit; non tamen eodem modo, scilicet per conversionem ad phantasmata, sed per modum convenientem animae separatae” (*ST I*, 89, 6).

<sup>505</sup> In the sense that they do not know about worldly affairs through “natural knowledge” (“naturalem cognitionem” - *ST I*, 89, 8).

<sup>506</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 89, 8.

<sup>507</sup> “quod animae mortuorum possunt habere curam de rebus viventium, etiam si ignorent eorum statum” (*ST I*, 89, 8).

<sup>508</sup> “Possunt etiam facta viventium non per seipsos cognoscere, sed vel per animas eorum qui hinc ad eos accedunt; vel per Angelos seu Daemones; vel etiam spiritu Dei revelante...” (*ST I*, 89, 8).

responds that if this happens, it may be through a special dispensation from God or through the act of angels.<sup>509</sup>

### **3.3. Assessments of Aquinas's Teachings on the Soul**

#### **3.3.1. Comments on the Immateriality and Nonbodily Origin of the Functions (or Powers and Acts/Activities) of the Rational Soul Called Intellect and Will**

Aquinas affirms that the intellectual capacities of knowledge and will are noncorporeal. All other capacities related to the life of the body, such as nutritive and sensitive properties, are functions of (and dependent on) the rational soul (as it is the only substantial form of the body), but these other powers occur in and through bodily organs; they are products of the soul-body composite. Intellect and will, however, are powers that belong (and are attributed) solely to the rational immaterial soul and therefore are also completely immaterial, although they depend on phantasms provided from the senses in order to function. By turning to these images provided by the senses, the (possible) intellect abstracts the particulars of the objects in the world and so knowledge of them is made possible. Knowledge (or the intellect) per se is considered an immaterial function (or capacity or property) that is identified with the soul.<sup>510</sup> To function properly, the active intellect and the will need to keep (re-)turning to the phantasms supplied by the senses, the imagination, and memory, all of which are also functions of the soul produced by and located in bodily organs. Therefore, intellect and will are indirectly dependent on bodily organs since they need images from the senses in order to function properly.

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<sup>509</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 89, 8.

<sup>510</sup> See Canobbio, "La demostración de Santo Tomás se basa en la identificación entre alma y entendimiento," in *Sobre el Alma*, 87.



### 3.3.2. A Criticism of Aquinas's Theory from the Perspective of Neuroscience

This criticism of Aquinas's theory, regarding the immateriality and nonbodily origin of the functions of the rational soul called intellect and will, relies on basic scientific data and contemporary insights offered by the neurosciences. These data and insights affirm the crucial role played by the human brain in events concerning the mental life: thoughts involved in the (powers and act of) knowledge of things (intellect) and on the decision-making processes (will). This criticism is based on scientific evidence that brain activity is always happening while the powers of intellect and will are functioning and that there is no act of intellect and will without neurons firing in the brain.<sup>511</sup> Mindful of this criticism, Aquinas's assertion that the intellect and the will need to return to and to rely constantly on the body-generated sense-images to function would explain the constant and concomitant brain activity while thinking and understanding or decision making is happening. Therefore, constant brain activity could be the embodied activity of the senses, imagination, and memory generating the phantasms and supplying them to the intellect and the will, so that they can function as activities solely of the immaterial rational soul.

New findings about the timing of brain activity occurring *before* the human being is conscious of thoughts or has knowledge of options for decision making, however, provide new information about the autonomy or precedence of organic processes to thoughts. If the rational soul is what is eliciting (producing) the activation of the brain before the subject is conscious that he or she wants to think or to decide, it seems that it is acting even previously to the awareness or

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<sup>511</sup> The acts of the intellect and will are mental events that occur when the human being is in the so-called state of consciousness. This state of consciousness and the mental events that characterize it (such as what is described for Aquinas as the powers of intellect and will) have specific patterns of brain activity that can be detected, measured, and located by modern techniques such as Electroencephalography (EEG), Magnetoencephalography (MEG), positron emission tomography (PET), and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). For this, see Stanislas Dehaene, *Consciousness and the Brain: Deciphering How the Brain Codes our Thoughts* (New York: Viking, 2014), 115–60, 200–233. For brief introductions on the theme of the relationship between human brain activity and human mental states, see David Eagleman, *The Brain: A Story of You* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2015); Passingham, *Cognitive Neuroscience*; Susan Blackmore, *Consciousness: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

consciousness of the subject of action.<sup>512</sup>

Another problem associated with treating the act of knowledge as a function only of the rational immaterial soul and not locating and relating it to any bodily organ is related to the scientific evidence that acts of knowing/understanding and willing/deciding rely on complex language and meaning-making processes that occur in several systems or parts in the brain.<sup>513</sup> These areas in the brain function not only by providing images of words or their sounds but also by giving words their meaning, logic, and syntax. There are areas in the brain related to meaning making and also to decision making (operations of the intellect and of the will) that are not exactly related to the input of external and internal senses, fantasy, and memory (activities of the sensitive faculty of the soul responsible for generating the phantasms). The region of the brain called the Wernicke area is subdivided anatomically in zones related to proper meaning making, speech comprehension, speech production, and conceptual knowledge.<sup>514</sup> Neuroimaging techniques have provided information about areas in the brain that are involved with decision

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<sup>512</sup> See Benjamin Libet, "How Does Conscious Experience Arise? The Neural Time Factor," *Brain Research Bulletin* 50, no. 5/6 (1999): 339–40. This article provides important information about brain activity that precedes mental awareness of intentions or will: "The time-factor appeared also in an endogenous experience, the conscious intention or will to produce a purely voluntary act [4,6]. In this, we found that cerebral activity initiates this volitional process at least 350 msec before the conscious wish (W) to act appears" (339). See also Benjamin Libet, "The Neural Time-Factor in Perception, Volition and Free Will," in *Neurophysiology of Consciousness*, Selected Papers of Leaders in Brain Research (Boston, MA: Birkhäuser, 1993), 367–84 (originally published at *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 2 [1992]: 255–82); Benjamin Libet, "Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the Role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action," *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 8 (1985): 529–66; B. Libet, C. A. Gleason, E. W. Wright, and D. K. Pearl, "Time of Conscious Intention to Act in Relation to Onset of Cerebral Activities (Readiness-Potential); the Unconscious Initiation of a Freely Voluntary Act," *Brain* 106 (1983): 623–42.

<sup>513</sup> See David Caplan, "The Neural Basis of Syntactic Processing," in Gazzaniga, *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, 805–17; Peter Hagoort, Giosuè Baggio, and Roel M. Willems, "Semantic Unification," in Gazzaniga, *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, 819–35; James L. McClelland, Timothy T. Rogers, Karalyn Patterson, Katia Dilkina, and Matthew Lambon Ralph, "Semantic Cognition: Its Nature, Its Development, and Its Neural Basis," in Gazzaniga, *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, 1047–66; R. Vandenberghe, C. Price, R. Wise, O. Josephs, and R. S. J. Frackowiak, "Functional Anatomy of a Common Semantic System for Words and Pictures," *Nature* 383, no. 6597 (October, 1996): 254–56.

<sup>514</sup> See Stephan Carlson, "The Neuroscience of Religious Experience: An Introductory Survey," in *Neuroscience and Religion: Brain, Mind, Self, and Soul*, ed. Volney P. Gay (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2009), 156.

making,<sup>515</sup> logical problem solving,<sup>516</sup> nonverbal reasoning,<sup>517</sup> and moral reasoning.<sup>518</sup> Many of these functions are related to what is proper to the intellect and the will. Such evidence from neuroscientific research poses challenges to Aquinas's theories on the immateriality or noncorporeality of the faculties of the mind. One of the most important and key structures of the brain, the neocortex, which is involved with sensory activity, thinking, and other actions, remains a challenging focus of research as scientists endeavor to "understand how information is represented and transformed in the neocortex, the proverbial gray matter of the brain."<sup>519</sup>

Aquinas asserts that the soul cannot be a body or material, and his most important argument focuses on the soul's intellectual function of knowing/understanding. He makes the claim that the intellectual soul knows the objects of the world (particulars), and, in order to do so, it cannot be one of them; that is, it cannot be a material object. Aquinas's argument focuses on the identity of the intellectual immaterial soul and its intellectual capacity for knowing: the knower only knows because it is different from what is known. On the basis of this assertion, the

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<sup>515</sup> Eagleman, in *The Brain: The Story of You*, points out that in situations that evolve emotion, brain areas such as the anterior cingulate cortex, the medial prefrontal cortex, the amygdala, and the hypothalamus are "more involved in the decision making" (109; cf. A. Collins and E. Koechlin, "Reasoning, Learning, and Creativity: Frontal Lobe Function and Human Decision-Making," *PLoS Biol* 10, no. 3 [2012]: e1001293, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.1001293> [Accessed on December 16, 2018]).

<sup>516</sup> David Eagleman says that some of the regions in the brain "involved in solving logical problems" (*The Brain*, 108) are the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, and the parietal cortex.

<sup>517</sup> See Passingham, *Cognitive Neuroscience*, 55–58; Alexandra Woolgar, Alice Parr, Rhodri Cusack, Russell Thompson, Ian Nimmo-Smith, Teresa Torralva, Maria Roca, Nagui Antoun, Facundo Manes, and John Duncan, "Fluid Intelligence Loss Linked to Restricted Regions of Damage within Frontal and Parietal Cortex," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)* 107, no. 33 (August 17, 2010): 14899–14902, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1007928107> (Accessed on December 16, 2018).

<sup>518</sup> See K. Prehn, M. Korczykowski, H. Rao, Z. Fang, J. A. Detre, D. C. Robertson, "Neural Correlates of Post-Conventional Moral Reasoning: A Voxel-Based Morphometry Study," *PLoS ONE* 10 (June 2015): e0122914, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0122914> (Accessed on December 16, 2018); Jorge Moll, Ricardo de Oliveira-Souza, Paul J. Eslinger, Ivanei E. Bramati, Janaína Mourão-Miranda, Pedro Angelo Andreiuolo and Luiz Pessoa, "The Neural Correlates of Moral Sensitivity: A Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Investigation of Basic and Moral Emotions," *Journal of Neuroscience* 22, no. 7 (April 1, 2002): 2730–36, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.22-07-02730.2002> (Accessed on December, 16 2018).

<sup>519</sup> Christof Koch et al., "Project MindScope," in *The Future of the Brain: Essays by the World's Leading Neuroscientists*, ed. Gary Marcus and Jeremy Freeman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 25.

intellectual soul and its intellectual power of knowing are affirmed as not corporeal/material.<sup>520</sup>

In this regard, one contemporary challenge to Aquinas's understanding of the noncorporeality of the intellectual faculties of the soul is the scientific evidence that intellectual activities related to knowledge, like deductive and reflective reasoning and decision making, are actually happening or are the product of processes connected to and dependent on the brain. The argument in favor of Aquinas's position is that what is happening in the brain actually (brain activity through neuronal firing) is the production of the phantasms to which the intellect turns (and relies on) in order to properly function. Therefore, brain activity is the work of this bodily organ that is enabling the senses as well as the powers of imagination and memory to produce the phantasms to which the intellectual soul turns in order to function.

One might say that such a discussion is unnecessary due to the fact that Aquinas did not have access to scientific resources on the brain functions that are available today. Although he used sophisticated and logical metaphysical arguments, he lacked contemporary knowledge of neuroscience and of the connection (causation) between mental or intellectual processes/operations and brain activity. In the thirteenth century, there was neither evidence of nor reason to believe that there were causal connections between the intellectual life and the brain. As Pasnau observes, the human heart was a far more serious candidate for the principle of life in the human being than the brain.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> The philosophical argument used by Aquinas that the human intellect cannot be material because there is no possibility of knowledge if the knower is the same, i.e., material, as the objects it knows continues to be affirmed by contemporary theologians like the former prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Müller *Dogmática Católica*, 97.

<sup>521</sup> Cf. Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 377. One question: Would the affirmation that “the principle of intellectual operation” is not something that occurs apart from the body but is connected to and dependent on the body compromise Aquinas's affirmation that this same principle (or soul) is also incorporeal and subsistent?

### 3.3.3. Comments on the Nature of the Separated Soul

Aquinas's arguments on the nature of the separated soul do not seem to follow the same logical reasoning as the rest of his "Treatise on Human Nature." As Pasnau observes:

Aquinas ascribes to separated souls an existence so different from our earthly existence that it is hard to believe we are still talking about human nature—or hard to believe we are still talking about Aquinas on human nature.<sup>522</sup>

Although Aquinas argues that the intellectual faculty of the soul "is not intrinsically dependent on the body"<sup>523</sup> and that intellectual activity of the soul does not happen through any bodily organ, the fact remains that the mind relies on images supplied by the organ of the senses to think and to form ideas that make Aquinas's teachings on the separated active soul difficult to understand and defend. His argument in relation to the intellectual activity of the separated soul based on God's illumination that supplies the human soul with what the bodily senses previously provided is insufficient, both in terms of its rationality and its logical argumentation. While it may be satisfactory from a religious or mystical perspective, it seems a bit forced when compared with Aquinas's other arguments on the nature of the soul and its activity side-by-side with the senses.

This difficulty in conceptualizing the separated substantial form of the body performing the acts proper to its powers seems to be a direct consequence of Aquinas's view and description of the human being as a substantial unity. As Pasnau observes, Aquinas's understanding of human nature has an "essentially biological orientation"<sup>524</sup> that can be grasped even regarding those intellectual activities that he affirms as not happening through the body, since the human mind relies on the working of the body senses. These intellectual activities may even be performed by the separated soul. But as Aquinas's arguments demonstrate, these activities (may)

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<sup>522</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 377.

<sup>523</sup> Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 385.

<sup>524</sup> Pasnau, "Philosophy and Human Nature," 365.

happen in a very limited (special) mode and through direct divine intervention/illumination. As Frederick Copleston notes, for Aquinas, “it is natural for the soul to be united to the body.”<sup>525</sup> He “does not hesitate [then,] to draw the conclusion that the state of separation is *praeter naturam* and that the soul’s mode of cognition in the state of separation is also *praeter naturam*.”<sup>526</sup> Therefore, the separated soul and its mode of cognition can be qualified as unnatural.<sup>527</sup> Pasnau refers to these “new modes of existence and operation” of the separated soul as *praeter naturam*, which he translates as “foreign to its nature.”<sup>528</sup>

As for Aquinas’s teaching on the human being that is the substantial union of soul and body, it follows that “the soul is not the complete nature of man [*sic*], and therefore man [*sic*] cannot be called a soul.”<sup>529</sup> Given this assertion, can the separated soul be called a person? Anton Charles Pegis observes that, for Aquinas, “if the soul is a form, it is not a person, because, while a person has the nature of something complete or whole, the soul as a form is only a part. It is not therefore a person.”<sup>530</sup> Although the understanding of the concept of “person” is complex and may be widely debated, it can be affirmed by following the logic of the argument mentioned above that the separated soul cannot be considered a human being. It can be considered a part of a human being, but not a human being.

Though this famous and well-known passage from Aquinas’s “Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians” does not appear in the *Summa Theologiae*, it nonetheless illustrates his position regarding the identity of the separated soul and the human being who once lived:

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<sup>525</sup> Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 385.

<sup>526</sup> Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 385.

<sup>527</sup> Cf. Canobbio, *Sobre el Alma*, 91–95.

<sup>528</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 379. In a very graphic way, Pasnau says that “the separated soul is like a fish out of water, existing and functioning as best it can” (379).

<sup>529</sup> Anton Charles Pegis, *St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1934), 179.

<sup>530</sup> Pegis, *St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul*, 153.

“But the soul, since it is part of man’s [*sic*] body, is not an entire man [*sic*], and my soul is not I; hence, although the soul obtains salvation in another life, nevertheless, not I or any man [*sic*].”<sup>531</sup>

It seems quite clear that Aquinas affirms that the soul of the person cannot be identified with the person. In this regard, Eleonore Stump criticizes those scholars who hold on to isolated arguments like the one mentioned above to say that the “persisting separated soul is not to be identified with the person who died.”<sup>532</sup> She argues that Aquinas’s arguments cannot be taken out of their theological context and that in his theological view, for example, “the separated soul is judged on the basis of the actions and dispositions of the human being it informed.”<sup>533</sup> She is criticizing the fact that this position may entail arguments that the human being ceases to exist after death. For her, in Aquinas’s view, although “a person is not identical to his soul, the existence of the soul is sufficient for the existence of the person.”<sup>534</sup> Nonetheless, Stump’s arguments seem to be insufficient to demonstrate that the existence of separated soul is enough to affirm the existence of the person who lived. It can maybe be affirmed that the existence of the separated soul is sufficient for the existence of something of the person who lived, namely, his or her soul, the substantial form of the body. Due to Aquinas’s own insistence on the wholeness of the human being as the substantial unity, however, a separated soul as an unnatural mode of existence is neither identical nor sufficient for the existence of the whole human being or person who lived. As Aquinas affirms also that this intellectual principle or substantial form of the body

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<sup>531</sup> “anima autem cum sit pars corporis hominis, non est totus homo, et anima mea non est ego; unde licet anima consequatur salutem in alia vita, non tamen ego vel quilibet homo” (see <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/SS1Cor.htm#152> [Accessed on June 30, 2018]). See Thomas Aquinas, *On the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Super I Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios lectura)*, trans. Fabian Larcher. By quoting one passage from Aquinas’s *Commentary on the Sentences*, book 3, Pegis says: “These questions are concerned with the personality of the separated soul and with the problem of the humanity of our Lord during the three days when His body lay in the sepulchre. *The first question is, utrum anima separata sit persona?* The second question seeks to discover whether Christ could have been called a man during the interval of these three days: *Utum Christus in triduo quo jacuit in sepulchro, potuerit dici homo?*” (Pegis, *St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul*, 152).

<sup>532</sup> Stump, “Resurrection and the Separated Soul,” 462.

<sup>533</sup> Stump, “Resurrection and the Separated Soul,” 462.

<sup>534</sup> Stump, “Resurrection and the Separated Soul,” 463.

is subsistent, it seems that the only thing that can be affirmed is that “something” of the human being (a body-soul unity) who lived “subsists,” and whether, as Aquinas affirms, this “subsistent” entity can perform acts of intellect and will, these acts can be done only in a mysterious way through God’s intervention.

### **3.3.4. Comments on the Persistent Importance of Aquinas’s Thought for Church Teaching on the Human Being**

Sixteen years ago, the International Theological Commission issued a document titled “Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God,”<sup>535</sup> which explicitly addresses the ongoing influence of Thomas Aquinas’s view on the human soul on the Church’s teachings:

In order to maintain the unity of body and soul clearly taught in revelation, the Magisterium adopted the definition of the human soul as *forma substantialis* (cf. Council of Vienne and the Fifth Lateran Council). Here the Magisterium relied on Thomistic anthropology which, drawing upon the philosophy of Aristotle, understands body and soul as the material and spiritual principles of a single human being. *It may be noted that this account is not incompatible with present-day scientific insights.* (30)<sup>536</sup>

The document is clear in affirming that the official teaching authority of the Catholic Church assumed as its own the definition given by Thomas Aquinas on the human soul as the *substantial form* of the body. As it is stated, the great accomplishment of this definition and the purpose of the Church in assuming it was to “maintain the unity of body and soul.”

Given everything presented in this chapter regarding Aquinas’s description of the soul’s nature, the conclusions presented by Aquinas in his “Treatise on Human Nature,” “show that the soul is more than just a collection of powers carrying out the various operations of life. Beyond

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<sup>535</sup> See International Theological Commission, “Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God,” in [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20040723\\_communi-on-stewardship\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communi-on-stewardship_en.html). (Accessed on October 11, 2018).

<sup>536</sup> See International Theological Commission, “Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God,” (emphasis added).



these discrete functions of nutrition, sensation, and intellection, the soul has the more basic function of accounting for the unity of a living organism.”<sup>537</sup> Aquinas’s exposition on the nature of the human soul and its relationship with the body is defended with solid philosophical and theological arguments, whereby he establishes the unicity of the human being in the *compositum* where the intellectual soul is the substantial form of the body. Differentiated from the view of substantial dualism, where the soul and body are considered independent substances, Aquinas’s view describes human nature as an organic unity of principles that are difficult to even be thought as separated from one another (as it is the idea of the soul separated from the body). The soul is the substantial intrinsic principle of life and *organ*-ization of the body. The body’s own being is given to the substantial soul so that it can realize its own intellectual capacities through that which the organic structure of the body gives to it.

Although Aquinas’s teaching that the intellect has functions that are performed only through the soul, without being a product of any bodily organ, can be questioned by neuroscientific findings, it cannot be completely ignored or dismissed, since consciousness and the relationship between the human mental life and its neural correlates is still an unexplained phenomenon.

Nonetheless, the neuroscientific data available cannot be ignored and calls into question Aquinas’s position (and, therefore, the position of Catholic teaching) regarding human intellectual functions. For Aquinas, the human mental life as the capacity of thinking and knowing belongs to the soul. The body has an indirect role or contribution as the whole human being is said to be the subject that “thinks,” “understands,” and “knows.” The acts of “thinking,” “understanding,” and “knowing,” however, are performed by the soul as they are operations solely of the soul. They do not happen independent from the body during life, as they depend on

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<sup>537</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 99.

the phantasms produced by the body, but there is no bodily organ producing the intellectual power and operations. As these operations of the soul transcend the material body, and as the soul as the intellectual principle is subsistent, or has an existence per se, it continues to subsist following bodily death and performs the intellectual acts that belong to it. Catholic teaching, based on Aquinas's arguments, also affirms the persistence of the separated soul after death, as a spiritual principle able perform acts of intellect and will.

In dialogue with neuroscience and its evidence, Aquinas and the traditional Catholic teaching on the separated soul performing intellectual acts is no longer credible. More than ever Aquinas's and the Church's affirmation of the human being's wholeness and oneness in the body-soul substantial unity is pertinent and plausible for the dialogue between theology and science. The consideration of the intellectual life as having only an immaterial source or principle of operation seems to be inadequate, however, and needs a revision or at least a reinterpretation that takes into account the importance of and the currently known role of the brain in the performance of intellectual acts. Perhaps the substantial unity between form and matter as proposed by Aquinas and absorbed by the Church's teaching is to be understood in an even stronger new way, by affirming a soul that performs its intellectual acts only because it is in the union with the body, in such a way that no longer is possible to affirm that these intellectual acts belong to or are performed just by the soul. If the soul as a spiritual principle in the human constitution is an essential or fundamental point of Catholic faith, theology may find a way of continuing to affirm it in a credible and intelligible manner in the new situation, especially in light of neuroscience. The soul is created when the body is generated. It was not preexistent. The unity with the body is in the soul's genesis, history, and end. The intellectual powers being affirmed as belonging to and being performed by the human body-soul unity does not seem to

present an insurmountable theological problem. What remains problematic is the understanding of the separated soul and its capacity for performing intellectual acts of understanding and will.

Perhaps the understanding of the eschatological assertions regarding the immortal soul and its retribution in the intermediate state should be understood only as highly metaphorical affirmations that concern the individual's destiny but always contain in them the understanding that the human soul is inseparable from the body—even when the immortal soul is thought or understood after death, somehow the body is there with it. Or perhaps theological silence would be better for what belongs to the realm of mystery.

#### **Chapter 4. Reflections on the Consequences of Catholic Practice in the Context of Death and the Importance of Neuroscience for Theological Anthropology**

The previous chapters have offered reflections on the Catholic tenets of faith about death and the destiny of the deceased person in the afterlife, in some of its biblical and liturgical texts, and how it teaches these truths. In view of this, in this chapter, the impacts of popular piety and contemporary science on theological anthropology will now be explored.

The first goal of this reflection is to examine some of the possible consequences that the consideration of the human being as a composite of body and soul may have in the way the faithful think about and deal with the reality of human death. As shown in Chapter Two, Catholic doctrine affirms that the human soul is the immortal spiritual element in the person's composition that survives bodily death, and this belief has consequences for the way the faithful think about, understand, celebrate, and imagine the afterlife, and the "life" of the dead or the status of the souls of the deceased. In the present chapter, the consequences and influences that the belief in the immortal soul has on the way the faithful practice their faith, will be considered, based on the struggles and concerns that they encounter.

The second purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify why the developments and findings of science, especially from the field of neuroscience, cannot be ignored and are important in discussions of contemporary theological anthropology, especially concerning the long-established belief that the human person is the substantial unity of body and soul and in the discussions and controversies around this bipartite understanding of the person. Although the Catholic doctrinal understanding of the human person implies a duality of body and soul, it is not a dualism. While dualistic approaches like those of Plato and Descartes propose the human being as the union of body and soul understood as two different and independent substances, Catholic anthropological theology, relying on the Thomistic appropriation of Aristotelianhylomorphism,

understands the body-soul unity as forming one substance, where the soul is the substantial form of the body.<sup>538</sup>

In this chapter, it will be shown that René Descartes's philosophical dualism has influenced not only philosophical and scientific thought but also the way people now think about the human being as having two different and separable realities: physical and mental. Due to the emphasis of this dissertation, special attention will be given to the fact that, although he uses the terms "soul" and "mind" interchangeably in some of his works, Descartes ends up favoring "mind" instead of "soul" in later works because of the religious connotations of the latter. Since modernity, "mind" has been the predominant term used in philosophy, the sciences, and current popular use to describe the seat of a person's consciousness, self, "I," or mental life. Descartes has had an important historical role in the development of the concept of mind used today.

#### **4.1. Psychological and Pastoral Considerations on the Theme of Human Death Regarding the Effects of the Belief in the Immortal Soul: Acceptance or Denial?**

As was shown in Chapter One, in many of the proposed prayers for Catholic funerals, even when the person who died is not treated as a soul, it is implied that the current state or situation of the deceased is a disincarnated or disembodied soul. This happens, for instance, in prayers that ask that the deceased may be received in the joys of paradise. As was presented in Chapter Three, according to Thomas Aquinas, the separated soul cannot be considered as the

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<sup>538</sup> In Thomism, by following Aristotelian hylomorphism, all created material reality is formed by two principles: form and prime matter. Although body and soul are not and cannot be treated as synonyms of matter and form, they are the result of the union of a substantial form (the intellectual soul) with prime matter. Aquinas's understanding of the person as the body-soul unity was examined in Chapter Three. See more in Thomas Aquinas, *On Human Nature*, ed. Thomas S. Hibbs (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), vii; Jeffrey E. Brower, "Matter, Form, and Individuation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 85–103; Robert Pasnau, "Philosophy of Mind and Human Nature," in Davies and Stump, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 348–68; Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa theologiae Ia 75–89* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 74–75, 80–95; Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 2: *Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1950), 324–35, 375–86; Mauricio Beuchot, "Cuerpo y alma en el hilemorfismo de Santo Tomás," *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval* (1993): 39–46.

complete reality of the person; rather, it is an incomplete and unnatural provisional form of existence.<sup>539</sup> Because the soul is a subsistent reality (that can be affirmed philosophically and theologically), however, even in this incomplete provisory state after death it can be affirmed that the soul is immortal and survives death, which guarantees that the identity of the person who dies will be the same as the one who will rise in the resurrection of the dead, when the separated soul will be joined to its body again.<sup>540</sup> The problem is that people do not know about the philosophical and theological arguments on the incompleteness of a soul that is separated from its body. What matters for the living is the present situation of the deceased, which is taken as permanent, and what can be done to guarantee that he or she is well in heaven for eternity.

The belief that the soul is immortal and therefore survives bodily death can bring certain psychological comfort to the anguish, distress, and fear inherent in the reality of human mortality. Studies have found that people with strong religious belief in God and in the afterlife have lower levels of anxiety about the idea of death and tend to accept better the reality of death itself.<sup>541</sup> Research also shows, however, that “a literal, closed-minded and dogmatic approach to

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<sup>539</sup> See more in Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 361–93; Giacomo Canobbio, *Sobre el Alma: Más Allá de Mente y Cerebro*, trans. Luis Rubio Morán (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 2010), 91–95; Eleonore Stump, “Resurrection and the Separated Soul,” in Davies and Stump, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 458–66; Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas, Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 51–54; Anton Charles Pegis, *St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1934), 153; Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 385.

<sup>540</sup> The nature of the risen body is a theme of debate in the theological arena but cannot be discussed here due to the scope of this dissertation. Some words must be said, however, especially with regard to the existence of different ways of thinking and expressing the faith in the resurrection of the body: that the “soul will be rejoined to its old body with the same physical matter” and that the “soul will receive its newly glorified body.” There is a theological and scientific problem that concerns the fact that previous Church teaching seems to infer the faith and hope that the very body that has disintegrated in the grave will be restored to life. But the Church’s faith in the resurrection of the body is a faith not in the fate of the dust or molecules that is buried but in the resurrection of the full personal (and therefore, embodied) human existence/life in the glory—the glory of the risen Lord Jesus—a new existence that can only be imagined.

<sup>541</sup> Cf. Stephen R. Harding, Kevin J. Flannelly, Andrew J. Weaver, and Karen G. Costa, “The Influence of Religion on Death Anxiety and Death Acceptance,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 8, no. 4 (2005): 253–61, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249000492\\_The\\_Influence\\_of\\_Religion\\_on\\_Death\\_Anxiety\\_and\\_Death\\_Acceptance](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249000492_The_Influence_of_Religion_on_Death_Anxiety_and_Death_Acceptance) (Accessed on October 23, 2018). A large review and meta-analysis of one hundred studies on the correlation between religious beliefs and death anxiety has found, however, that these studies show that only very nonreligious and very religious people have less death anxiety, while those who are not so strong in their

religious contents is associated with more death anxiety and with a stronger tendency to avoid and suppress death-related thoughts.”<sup>542</sup> Jonathan Jong et al. present one very interesting study from 1980 done by M. R. Leming, who found

that religion both causes and alleviates the fear of death; it causes anxiety by introducing ideas about post-mortem judgment and the possibility of divine punishment, and only alleviates it when believers are sufficiently committed, aware of their commitment, and concomitantly confident of their salvation.<sup>543</sup>

Therefore, it can be said that the affirmation of the survival of the immortal separated soul along with literal images of punishment and suffering (e.g., purgatory) in the afterlife can increase anxiety about death and the fate of the dead. The belief in the immortality of the soul can also work as a denial of the concreteness of human death as an event that affects the whole human being. Especially if there is not a sound theological understanding of the human being as a body-soul unity, this separated soul may be imagined literally as representing the complete human existence of the deceased. This can lead to the understanding that death is an event that affects *only* a person’s body. Therefore, death is denied as an event that affects the whole human being who died, and this denial may suppress the anxiety and suffering inherent to the knowledge that death affects the entire person, body and soul. The survived soul is not a consolation for the living but a mode of existence difficult to understand rationally.

Does this belief have consequences for the way people believe and live out their faith? It certainly has effects on the way people understand death and react when facing the death of

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religiosity may have even more death anxiety. Cf. Jonathan Jong, Robert Ross, Tristan Philip, Si-Hua Chang, Naomi Simons, and Jamin Halberstadt, “The Religious Correlates of Death Anxiety: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis,” *Religion, Brain & Behavior* (2017): 1–17, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2016.1238844> (Accessed on October 23, 2018).

<sup>542</sup> Jessie Dezutter, Bart Soenens, Koen Luyckx, Sabrina Bruyneel, Maarten Vansteenkiste, Bart Duriez, and Dirk Hutsebaut, “The Role of Religion in Death Attitudes: Distinguishing Between Religious Belief and Style of Processing Religious Contents,” *Death Studies* 33, no. 1 (February 2009): 73–92, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23783818\\_The\\_Role\\_Of\\_Religion\\_in\\_Death\\_Attitudes\\_Distinguishing\\_Between\\_Religious\\_Belief\\_and\\_Style\\_of\\_Processing\\_Religious\\_Contents](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23783818_The_Role_Of_Religion_in_Death_Attitudes_Distinguishing_Between_Religious_Belief_and_Style_of_Processing_Religious_Contents) (Accessed on October 12, 2018).

<sup>543</sup> Jong et al., “The Religious Correlates of Death Anxiety,” 12; cf. the original study of M. R. Leming, “Religion and Death: A Test of Homans’ Thesis,” *Omega* 10 (1980): 347–64.

someone. As a general psychological rule, death needs to be accepted for what it is, represents, and means—as the territory of the unknown, of the mystery of our lives—so that the anguish and distress inherent in and brought by it may be overcome. Real acceptance of death based on its concrete reality helps in the process of the psychological resolution and recovering (as far as possible) of a person who has lost a loved one. Faith in the immortality of the soul and the psychological effects of this belief cannot replace or bypass the sadness, fears, and anguish inherent in death itself as a natural phenomenon.

If death is to be overcome, it first needs to be accepted as it is. And if there is a religious source of relief for the anguishing and terrifying effects of human mortality, the only source is Jesus' death *and* resurrection, with all its effects and significance—not the belief in the immortal soul and what can be done to help the souls of the dead. Although Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee that death is not the definitive end of human existence, Jesus' acceptance of his human dying and death is a model for our own acceptance of our human dying and death.

When a loved one dies, the survivor needs to face the concreteness of death, going through the process of mourning by suffering the loss and permanent absence of the person and by accepting it with time.<sup>544</sup> Especially when death is completely unexpected, as in the case of the passing of a young person, the loss may be experienced as extremely absurd, brutal, and incomprehensible, making the process of acceptance even more difficult. Acceptance is an act of surrender, of letting the loved one go, of understanding that there is no ultimate control. It is a personal act of courage that can be performed through faith, hope, and love. This way, it

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<sup>544</sup> For more on the process of grief and mourning, see Judy Tatelbaum, *The Courage to Grieve* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 177–80; Donald Capps, *Biblical Approaches to Pastoral Counseling* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 47–97; Donald Capps, *Pastoral Counseling and Preaching: A Quest for an Integrated Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 142–51; Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning: The Life of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 119–30.



becomes a surrender to the reality that death represents. When a person is buried, although the religious discourse and some prayers are insistent that what is being buried is only the “body” of the person who died, in reality what is being buried is part of what the person represents. Belief in the immortality of the soul cannot mask (or be a denial of) the fact that the burial is also a ritual symbol that the person is no longer present. It is an act of surrender while facing the irreversible event. It also becomes a psychological way to begin the healing process of acceptance, so necessary in the face of the death of a loved one.

These reflections are not aiming to be a denial or refusal of the doctrinal Catholic belief in the survival of the separated human soul and of the events related to the intermediary eschatological realities (death, judgment, heaven, hell). Nor are these reflections trying to affirm that the belief in the elements of the intermediate eschatology are just a means to relieve the anguish and terror brought about by the reality of human mortality. It is important, however, for ministers who encounter the people of God when death is imminent or has occurred to understand that the belief in the separated soul and in the intermediary eschatological realities cannot be used in the discourse to mask the reality of death. They can be a source of consolation through faith and hope, but they cannot be a way of denying suffering.

#### **4.1.1. Practices for the Salvation of the Souls**

As was affirmed previously, practices of faith that pursue only the salvation of one’s soul can make people feel released from and uncommitted to their Christian duties to change the material conditions of others in the world. Very often ministers hear concerns from people of faith about how to help and release souls from the punishments in purgatory, about how to avoid spending too much time there, or about what needs to be done in order to save one’s own soul and other souls. The salvation of the souls of the living (of the person who prays and of the

others, generally their immediate family members) or the relief of the souls of the dead who face the pains of purgatory seem to be achieved only through private or communitarian prayer practices of piety like the rosary, litanies, specific prayers, novenas, and Masses for souls and in reparation for their sins. Although acts of corporal charity can be made in order to gain indulgences, they rarely occur or are mentioned when people talk about the remission of their own sins.

*Example of a Practice of Piety for the Salvation of a Person's Soul:* Within the Azorean Portuguese faith community, one popular practice of piety for the soul of a deceased person that mixes both an act of corporal charity and a prayerful practice of faith is the celebration of a Mass for the intention of the “clothing of the soul” of a specific deceased person. In this practice, the family of the deceased person chooses a living person (usually the same gender and with similar physical measurements of the deceased) and pays for his or her clothes. This person will be present and dressed in the brand-new clothes at the Mass of the “clothing of the soul.” Although this practice is connected to a kind of concrete charitable action, it is almost superstitious or cultural, connected not to the real need of a living person but to the need of the deceased one, with no significant effect on the life of the person who receives the new clothes, who usually is not someone in need. It is for the benefit of the soul of the person who died.

Catholic belief in the afterlife is not the eternal happiness of a disincarnated soul living with God. This is Platonism. Catholic faith foresees eternal happiness with the resurrection of our bodies.

*Testimony of a Grieving Mother on the Afterlife:* This testimony comes from a woman who spoke with her pastor about her difficulties in accepting the death of a daughter she lost over

twenty-five year ago. Here are her words, which she said in almost a whisper, about the impact of her daughter's death on her understanding of the afterlife:

Since she died, I am afraid to die. I never thought about it before, but now I think a lot about it, that in death everything is over, everything comes to an end and that is it. And I do not know why we come into this world. Before her death I did not think about it. Now, every day I think about how useless everything in this life is. And what leaves me more confused is what happens after a person dies. I do not know where do we go and if there is something on the other side. Sometimes I think that I do not have faith, that my faith is not strong enough. I believe, but at the same time I have so many doubts. I would like to think in a different way: that we came to this world with a purpose, and that after dying we will go to heaven. I do not know about it. I do not know that I will go to heaven. I read some books with people relating their "close to death" experiences while in a coma. Maybe I should read more about the theme. But I still think that with death, everything is ended and comes to nothing. I know by faith that we have a soul and that it goes to heaven, purgatory, or hell, depending on the works we have done. However, I always have doubts about these things. Before my daughter's death, I never thought about death. Now I have the sensation that everybody forgot her. And that this is normal. That other people forgot her. I was like this when someone whom I knew lost her daughter too. People forget. Before I remembered her all the time. Now, I remember her several times a day. We do not forget, but we learn how to live. I hope to see her again. But truth being said, I do not know. Nobody came back.

Although we all know we will die, we do not necessarily think much about death and correlated questions, like what happens to the person in the afterlife (or even if there is an afterlife). People who think and ask questions about the afterlife are usually those who are facing death—either their own or someone they know. When people are asked about their convictions about the afterlife, they generally *do not* make use of concepts, ideas, or images related to the future resurrection of the body. People think of and explain the afterlife by talking about the destiny of the person's soul according to his or her actions in life. As can be gathered from the experience reported above, of the woman who lost her daughter—despite her doubts and disbelief, probably due to her ongoing grieving process and her inability to accept (yet) the fact of her daughter's death—there is no mention of the faith in the resurrection. Although she mentions elements of the intermediary eschatology (the soul that goes to heaven, hell, or

purgatory), these elements are not enough to bring solace to her. She is in her process of acceptance. One may wonder, however, what the role of faith and hope in the resurrection of the dead is in a situation of grieving like this. Faith in the resurrection does not diminish the weight of the suffering caused by the reality of death but points to what faith says about the hoped-for future, being a help to the needed healing without denying the suffering that death brings in the present.<sup>545</sup>

#### **4.1.2. On Praying for the Souls in Purgatory**

Based on Scripture and on the faithful's practice of praying for the dead, Catholic doctrine teaches that purgatory is a possibility for the "final purification of the elect."<sup>546</sup> This purification takes place immediately after death so that the faithful deceased who are still imperfect may "achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven."<sup>547</sup> At this stage, the living can help the dead to advance toward heaven through acts of faith offered on behalf of the dead. This teaching of the Church<sup>548</sup> on the ability of the living to intercede for the dead and to intervene in their "present" situation has scriptural roots<sup>549</sup> and "is also based on the practice of

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<sup>545</sup> This is anecdotal evidence based on the author's own experience in practice as a diocesan parish priest; therefore, it does not have (and it does not pretend to have) universal validity. This affirmation of faith and hope in the resurrection may be helpful in the long-term process of recovery for a grieving person, although it is necessary for the minister to be aware that it may also lead the grieving person to the denial of death. In fact, some authors argue that the centrality or emphasis of Jesus' resurrection (or of the paschal mystery) in the celebration of Catholic funerals, according to the new reformed Roman Catholic funeral liturgy, seems to lead people to the denial of death. Cf. John F. Baldovin, "The Varieties of Liturgical Experience: Presidential Address," *Studia Liturgica* 32 (2002): 10; and Andreas Redtenbacher, "Theological and Pastoral Foundations of the 1999 Study Edition of the Funeral Rite in the Archdiocese of Vienna," *Studia Liturgica* 32 (2002): 150.

<sup>546</sup> CCC 1031:268.

<sup>547</sup> CCC 1030:268.

<sup>548</sup> Cf. Council of Lyons II (1274), *DH* 856:283; (1336), 1000–1002; Council of Florence (1439), *DH* 1304:336; *DH* 1487–1490:367; Council of Trent (1563), *DH* 1743:418, 1753:420, 1820:428–29; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 1032. See also Pope Leo X's decree *Cum postquam* on indulgences (1518), *DH* 1448:362, and the bull *Exsurge Domine* (1520) which points out Martin Luther's errors in regard purgatory, *DH* 1487–1490:367.

<sup>549</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 1032, mentions 2 Maccabees 12:46 in which is said: "Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin."

prayer for the dead.”<sup>550</sup> According to the Church’s practice, the living faithful can relieve the “purgatorial punishments”<sup>551</sup> of the dead in a special way through the “Sacrifice of the altar,”<sup>552</sup> but also through several “acts of intercession” such as prayers, “almsgiving, indulgences, [and] works of penance”<sup>553</sup> as well as “other works of piety.”<sup>554</sup> As the Council of Trent asserted, this truth about purgatory must be believed, taught, and preached. This same council, however, recommends prudence in the teaching of purgatory and also the exclusion of forms of superstition and financial abuse with regard to indulgences.<sup>555</sup>

It is undeniable that the practice of praying for the dead who may or may not be in purgatory is an expression of the faith of the Church, also connected to the beliefs in the communion of saints and the cooperation in the purifying process of the dead in need.<sup>556</sup> Care must be taken, however, so this idea of participation of the living through religious practices in the “life” of the dead may not lead the faithful to a form of psychological denial of the reality of death. If there is some kind of power or influence over the fate of those who have died by the offering of prayers, novenas, and sacrifices to gain indulgences and to relieve the pains that the souls may be experiencing in purgatory, this may lead to a notion of control over the fate of the dead and, indirectly, over the effects of death itself. Although the undeniable beauty of these practices as efforts of the living to be in communion with and help the dead, in some cases these practices can become dysfunctional and obsessive ways of diminishing the anxiety and

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<sup>550</sup> CCC 1032:269.

<sup>551</sup> Council of Florence, *DH* 1304:336.

<sup>552</sup> Council of Trent, *DH* 1820:428.

<sup>553</sup> CCC 1032:269.

<sup>554</sup> *DH* 1304:336.

<sup>555</sup> Cf. Council of Trent (1563), *DH* 1820:429. For more on the doctrine of purgatory, see Juan L. Ruiz de la Peña, *La Otra Dimensión: Escatología Cristiana*, Colección “Presencia Teológica” 29, 5th ed. (Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1986), 307–22; Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 218–33; Zachary Hayes, *Visions of a Future: A Study of Christian Eschatology*, New Theology Studies 8 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 111–19; Müller, *Dogmática Católica*, 385–95. For a classic study with a historic perspective on the development of the idea and doctrine of purgatory in the medieval period, see Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>556</sup> Cf. Müller, *Dogmática Católica*, 386–88.

sufferings brought by death. People can be so concerned with what they can do to relieve the pains of those who have died that this becomes their religious experience: endless prayers, novenas, and Masses offered for the (salvation of the) souls in purgatory. But the reality of what happens after death belongs to the unknown, and the acceptance of it is part of the healing in the grieving process and its resolution. In this process, death must be accepted as a territory of the unknown. Faith that intercession may be helpful for the deceased as well as faith in the future resurrection of the dead can also be helpful for the living in the mourning process, but it should not deny the natural anxiety and suffering provoked by the death of a loved one. The practices of piety cannot become a form of denial of what death is in fact: an unknown reality over which there is no control.

These beliefs may bring some solace and relief to the living as they “inform” the living that death is not complete annihilation and that the dead are somehow alive, at the same time propitiating (providing) for the living an opportunity to participate in and contribute to the fate of the dead through intercessory acts. Therefore, it is necessary that the ministers who promote or oversee these practices of piety in favor of the souls in purgatory, with due respect for personal and communal popular practices of piety, may help the people accept the distressing aspect of death as irreparable loss as well as the impossibility of having precise or concrete knowledge about the afterlife. Everything in this regard is a matter of faith and hope and, therefore, derived from the paschal mystery. And here, another point may be added to this reflection: precisely because faith in the afterlife has as its source Jesus’ death and resurrection, these practices of faith cannot become the center of gravity of the people’s religious life. These practices cannot overshadow or replace (as a kind of denial or consciousness relief in the face of death anxiety) the real source of Christian consolation in the face of death: Jesus’ death and resurrection and our

resurrection. The paschal mystery is the definitive word on the fate of all human beings: (the acceptance of) death and (faith and hope in the) resurrection. The reality of human death is not denied but accepted as not being an absolute end.

Although the Church believes in the immortality of the soul and the acts of intercession in favor of the souls that may be in purgatory, the Church's center of gravity is the paschal mystery. Faith and hope must be centered in Jesus' resurrection and in human participation in his resurrection in the present through an ethical way of living that expresses Christian hope and faith. True consolation does not and cannot come from a denial of the reality of death through affirmations and practices of piety based on the belief in the immortality of the soul. Christian solace and consolation do not deny death but accept its reality with faith in Jesus' resurrection and hope in the resurrection of all human beings.<sup>557</sup>

*Guilt and Regret:* It is also important to note that people may feel guilt and regret about what they did not do for their loved ones while they were alive. People might feel they are released from these feelings of guilt by knowing that they are able to still do something for them after their death. Although it is impossible to measure the connections between practices of piety and these feelings, the practice cannot be only a way of alleviating the painful emptiness and sorrow that can be resolved only with (self-)forgiveness and acceptance.

*Where Are the Dead?* Many times, people who have recently lost someone are anxious about the fate of those they loved dearly. They want to know where are they and what is happening to them. Faith that the deceased ones may be in purgatory allows the living to believe they can "do something" for them. In this way, the relationship with the deceased loved ones

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<sup>557</sup> The author is aware that the topics treated at this section are extremely complex and a deeper treatment of them would demand further research. They are cited only as reflections from the author's anecdotal experience as illustrations of possible problems related to the life of the faithful and the practices related to the salvation of the souls in the afterlife.

continues. These pious practices for souls in purgatory should be conceived theologically as participation in God's mission of redemption, as a help or support to complete the purification needed by the dead,<sup>558</sup> not as a way of bargaining with God. Still, the illusion of controlling the afterlife to deny or repress anxiety about death may be among the reasons for these practices (especially when people get obsessed about them). If the prayers of the living can affect the state/situation of the dead, there may be the impression that something about death can be controlled and known. By this participating, death seems less unknown. But faith is not about knowing-therefore-controlling things. And with regard to the afterlife, as already affirmed, faith relies only on Jesus' resurrection and in God alone, who "knows about the afterlife" and who is the only one with the power to raise the dead to life. God is the only guarantee, not some action that the living might take for the sake of someone's soul. It is important for ministers to be aware that the discourse and the practices of piety for the salvation of souls have the potential to create the impression for the living that something about death and the afterlife is known and therefore controlled, since the practices of piety have an impact on the salvation of the deceased souls. This cannot erase the unknown aspect of the situation of the dead.

*Other Consequences of a Religious Dualistic View of the Human Person:* The religious understanding of the human person as a separable being—body and soul—after death may reinforce a dualistic way of understanding the human person in the present life. Does this dualism drive people to some kind of practical disconnection between faith and life, between what belongs to the spiritual realm and what is only from the material reality? Could it be affirmed that this belief can lead people to devalue embodied existence by considering it inferior to the spiritual soul? Does it reinforce that only the salvation of the soul is important?

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<sup>558</sup> Cf. Müller, *Doctrina Católica*, 386.



*Belief in the Separated Soul and Its Powers:* Some other difficulties may arise from the theological discourse as the Church in its recent documents still affirms that the disembodied separated souls of the dead are “*endowed with consciousness and will, so that ‘the human self’ subsists.*”<sup>559</sup> The Church’s teachings maintain that the separated disembodied soul is conscious and can perform “personal acts of understanding and will.”<sup>560</sup> Is the Church aware of the developments in neuroscience that allow us to affirm that everything related to the mental states of a person is completely related to (and possible only through) brain activity? Can these affirmations of the ability of the disembodied soul to perform its core powers, namely, understanding and will, which are grounded in philosophical-theological texts of Thomas Aquinas, even be conceived without the presence of the physical structures or substrates that generate and maintain these abilities? How can it be if all of these capabilities or powers of the soul are directly related to and dependable on body structures?

From this reflection, the present chapter will now move to its second topic, which is a reflection on the importance of contemporary neuroscientific data to the traditional Catholic theological understanding of the human being as a body-soul unity. The theological affirmation that the human soul is responsible for the intellectual functions of human mental life and the doctrinal assertion that human consciousness and will are preserved and active in the separated soul after death makes the dialogue with contemporary scientific knowledge on the brain an unavoidable task for Catholic theological anthropology.

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<sup>559</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter on Certain Questions Regarding Eschatology” (May 17, 1979), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19790517\\_escatologia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19790517_escatologia_en.html) (Accessed on May 10, 2018); emphasis added.

<sup>560</sup> International Theological Commission, “Some Current Questions in Eschatology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58 (1992): 226. These two magisterial documents are presented in more detail in Chapter Two.

## 4.2. Does Neuroscience Matter for Theology?

The abovementioned documents of the Church about the separated soul of the dead maintaining and performing acts of intellect and will are based on Thomas Aquinas's explanation of what the separated soul can know and do in the *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>561</sup> As contemporary science, through the developments and findings of neuroscience in the past decades, associates these functions to the brain, more specifically, to the prefrontal cortex, those functions that are considered to be solely the work of the intellectual soul are related, by scientific thought, to specific structures located in the physical body (in the brain). This does not deny that these functions belong to the soul but relates them to specific structures in the body. Not only is the human being able to express his or her intellectual soul's ability to know and decide through his or her body (speaking, acting, writing, etc.), but the occurrence of these intellectual functions is now associated with a specific brain area. Even though not much is known yet about the complex relationship between the neurophysiological processes in the brain and the aforementioned intellectual faculties,<sup>562</sup> it seems undeniable (as it is confirmed by the findings in the neurosciences) that these mental events or intellectual powers are connected with brain activity.<sup>563</sup> How this physical activity (namely, the neurophysiology and neurochemistry of the interconnection among the neuronal circuits in the brain) is related to or connected with the

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<sup>561</sup> Specifically on question 89 of the first part of the *Summa Theologiae* (ST I. 89), <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/summa/FP/FP089.html#FPQ89OUTP1> (Accessed on May 13, 2018).

<sup>562</sup> Cf. Gerald M. Edelman and Giulio Tononi, *A Universe of Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); John Polkinghorne and Nicholas Beale, *Questions of Truth: Fifty-One Responses to Questions about God, Science, and Belief* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 74–78; Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, *Current Issues in Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 65.

<sup>563</sup> Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 55–70; Nancey Murphy, “Human Nature: Historical, Scientific, and Religious Issues,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, *Theology and the Sciences Series* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 13–19; Malcolm Jeeves, “Brain, Mind, and Behavior,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?*, 73–87; M. I. Posner, S. E. Petersen, P. T. Fox, and M. E. Raiche, “Localization of Cognitive Operations in the Human Brain,” *Science* 240, no. 4859 (June 17, 1988): 1627–31, <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/240/4859/1627> (Accessed on May 24, 2018).

mental life or intellectual events (perception, memory, imagination, understanding, moral judgment, consciousness, etc.) is the central object of study of the philosophy of mind.<sup>564</sup>

The goal of this section is not to give neuroscientific information on the concomitance and relation of intellectual or mental activities and systems of cells in the brain but to offer some reflections on the Catholic understanding of the human soul and the need to take the findings of neuroscience into account in theology.<sup>565</sup> If Catholic theology understands that the human higher intellectual capacities are functions of the soul, this comprehension needs to take into account the role of the brain in the making/doing of these functions. Could the human brain be considered the seat of the human soul? Should Catholic theological thought recognize it? Or is the brain just the organ that gives support to functions performed by soul? If the soul is responsible for intellectual functions, then the seat of the soul seems to be the brain. One could even say that, without the proper functioning of the brain, there is no proper manifestation of the soul. Given the potential ethical difficulties of locating the soul within the brain,<sup>566</sup> however, one option for

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<sup>564</sup> The central theme of study of the philosophy of the mind is the “mind-body/brain problem,” or the questions concerning the nature of the connection and relationship between the brain/body and the mental events/states. For more on this theme, see the collection of essays in David J. Chalmers, ed., *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Timothy O’Connor and David Robb, eds., *Philosophy of Mind: Contemporary Readings*, Routledge Contemporary Readings in Philosophy (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2003). See also William R. Stoeger, “The Mind-Brain Problem, the Laws of Nature, and Constitutive Relationships,” in *Neuroscience and the Person: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, Theo C. Meyering, and Michael A. Arbib (Vatican City / Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory Publications / Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2002), 129–46.

<sup>565</sup> Some of the contemporary Christian theologians and/or philosophers have discussed the importance of the findings of neuroscience to the theological understanding of the human being: Philip Clayton, “Neuroscience, the Person, and God: An Emergentist Account,” in *Neuroscience and the Person*, 182–214; Michael A. Arbib, “Towards a Neuroscience of the Person,” in *Neuroscience and the Person*, 77–100; Giorgio Bonaccorso, “L’Anima: Contributo e Limiti Delle Neuroscienze,” in Associazione Teologica Italiana, *Per Una Scienza Dell’Anima: La Teologia Sfidata*, Forum ATI 6, ed. Jean Paul Lieggi (Milano: Edizioni Glossa, 2009), 139–61; Nicola D’Onghia, *Il Concetto di Anima Tra Neuroscienze e Teologia*, Corona Lateranensis 48 (Città del Vaticano: Lateran University Press, 2011), 103–262; Hans Schwarz, *The Human Being: A Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 125–37; and also Nancey Murphy and Malcolm Jeeves in the works cited in footnote n. 27.

<sup>566</sup> Among the important ethical problems and implications of this affirmation regard the status of the human soul in an anencephalic fetus, people with severe brain damage, patients in stages of dementia, brain-dead people, etc. The exploration of these ethical difficulties are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

the Catholic theological understanding of the human soul would be to dissociate it from the human being's intellectual functions and to affirm its existence as the spiritual element of the human without relating it to these functions.<sup>567</sup>

#### 4.2.1. Descartes and the Modern Concept of Human Mind: A Replacement for the Soul?

René Descartes (1596–1650), French mathematician and philosopher, is considered one of the fathers of modern Western philosophy and science, due to his consideration of the importance of the laws of nature and methodology in the seventeenth century.<sup>568</sup> What is important for this dissertation, though, is not Descartes's view on the philosophy of nature but his understanding of the human being as composed of two different substances and his metaphysical theory of the human intellect, which has since influenced the way the human soul is understood. Descartes's way of understanding and describing the human body and its functions as a mechanism and his metaphysical way of understanding the human soul or mind were a shift from the neo-Aristotelian account of the human person to a more scientific and dualistic understanding of the human being.<sup>569</sup>

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<sup>567</sup> A return to the biblical Hebrew meaning of *nephesh* as the expression of the life of the human being or of the whole person would be an option. Cf. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 39; Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 54; Joel B. Green, "Restoring the Human Person: New Testament Voices for a Wholistic and Social Anthropology," in *Neuroscience and the Person*, 4; Ray S. Anderson, "On Being Human: The Spiritual Saga of a Creaturely Soul," in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?*, 178.

<sup>568</sup> A comprehensive discussion on this can be found in John Henry's "Metaphysics and the Origins of Modern Science: Descartes and the Importance of Laws of Nature," *Early Science and Medicine* 9, no. 2 (2004): 73–114.

<sup>569</sup> "Descartes offers two accounts of the basic nature of human being: a physical theory about soul, couched in medical-organic terms, and a metaphysical theory about the mind and its relation to ensouled living bodies. His theory of soul is solidly situated in the prevailing medical model of organic functions and deploys concepts from a fairly standard arsenal, whereas his metaphysical theory comprises a radical overthrow of the standard Neo-Aristotelian account. He had contemplated a revolutionary physical theory, the first part on light, the second on human nature, which he called *The World*, but withheld the texts from publication when he heard of Galileo's condemnation in 1633. Four years later, in *The Discourse on the Method*, he took up the theme of a new rational 'science' of the human soul (perhaps originally planned as the third part of *The World*), explained entirely in mechanistic terms. But his most concise, sophisticated attempt to articulate this new position appeared in the *Meditations* in 1644. There are two highly condensed passages in the Second Meditation that encapsulate the

For Descartes, the human being is composed of two different substances: *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. These substances are self-subsistent and can be defined and perceived by their attributes.<sup>570</sup> The *res cogitans* is the intellectual and spiritual or immaterial substance whose primary attribute is “thinking.”<sup>571</sup> For Descartes, the human soul or mind is the substance responsible for the elements of human intellectual life, not the organic and physical functions of the body. The *res extensa* is the corporeal substance, and it is defined by its principal attribute, the “extension” with all its dimensional characteristics.<sup>572</sup> The *res extensa* is the human body and all its biological and physical functions. Both, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, although closely united in the integrity that forms the human being, are distinct and independent of each other. This way of describing the human being brought a change to the overall accepted mainstream philosophical mind-set:

In Scholastic Aristotelianism the human being was depicted as a unity, soul standing to body as form to matter. The soul, moreover, was not reduced to mind: it was regarded as the principle of biological, sensitive and intellectual life. And in Thomism at least it was depicted as giving existence to the body, in the sense of making the body what it is, a human body. Clearly, this view of the soul facilitated insistence on the unity of the human being. Soul and body together form *one complete substance*. But *on Descartes’ principles it would appear to be very difficult to maintain that there is any intrinsic relationship between the two factors*. For if Descartes begins by saying that I am a substance the whole nature of which is to think, and if the body does not think and is not included in my clear and distinct idea of myself as a thinking thing, it would seem to follow that the body does not belong to my essence or nature. And in this case, I am a soul lodged in a body.<sup>573</sup>

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most significant watershed in the history of modern speculation about the significance of soul and mind in theories of human nature” (Paul S. MacDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind: Speculations about Soul, Mind and Spirit from Homer to Hume* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003], 279).

<sup>570</sup> Cf. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 4: *Modern Philosophy: From Descartes to Leibniz* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 118–19.

<sup>571</sup> Cf. Copleston, *Modern Philosophy*, 119.

<sup>572</sup> “Thus extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance” (Copleston, *Modern Philosophy*, 119).

<sup>573</sup> Copleston, *Modern Philosophy*, 120; emphasis added.

Descartes rejected the conclusion, however, that the soul “was lodged in the body as a pilot in a ship.”<sup>574</sup> Although independent of each other, body and soul form the unity of the person and mutually influence each other: “He was aware . . . that the soul is influenced by the body and the body by the soul and that they must in some sense constitute a unity.”<sup>575</sup>

Nonetheless, the understanding of body and soul/mind as independent and separable substances remain in his thought.<sup>576</sup> The soul or mind is the seat of the intellectual faculties or of the mental life, the “self,” or the “I.”<sup>577</sup> It is connected to the body, which functions independently of the soul,<sup>578</sup> although responding to and being directed by the soul. Descartes describes with logic and rich anatomical details—although at his time with understandable limited resources and knowledge in biology—his hypothesis of the inner and complex

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<sup>574</sup> Copleston, *Modern Philosophy*, 121. Descartes, on the Sixth Meditation in the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, explains how closely united are body and soul/mind: “Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unity. If this were not so, I, who am nothing but a thinking thing, would not feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight if anything in his ship is broken. Similarly, when the body needed food or drink, I should have an explicit understanding of the fact, instead of having confused sensations of hunger and thirst. For these sensations of hunger, thirst, pain and so on are nothing but confused modes of thinking which arise from the union and, as it were, intermingling of the mind with the body” (René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984], 56).

<sup>575</sup> Copleston, *Modern Philosophy*, 121.

<sup>576</sup> This affirmation of the independence of the soul from the body is also an affirmation that the soul does not die with the body. When Descartes differentiates the souls of the animals from the human soul, he says: “When we know how far they differ we much better comprehend the reasons which establish that *the soul is of a nature wholly independent of the body*, and that consequently it is not liable to die with the latter; and finally, because no other causes are observed capable of destroying it, we are naturally led thence to judge that *it is immortal*” (René Descartes, “Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking the Truth in the Sciences,” in *French and English Philosophers: Descartes, Rousseau, Voltaire, Hobbes*, Harvard Classics 34, ed. Charles W. Eliot [New York: P. F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1938], 48).

<sup>577</sup> The famous and paradigmatic Cartesian anthropocentric affirmation and postulation of the first truth: “I think, therefore I am.” It appeared first in the *Discourse on the Method*: “But immediately upon this I observed that, whilst I thus wished to think that all was false, it was absolutely necessary that I, who thus thought, should be somewhat; and as I observed that this truth, *I think, hence I am*, was so certain and of such evidence, that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the Sceptics capable of shaking it, I concluded that I might, without scruple, accept it as the first principle of the Philosophy of which I was in search” (Descartes, “Discourse on the Method,” 28–29). Then, in the Second Meditation from his work *Meditations on First Philosophy*: “So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, I am, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind” (Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings*, 2:17n25).

<sup>578</sup> Cf. René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 108.

relationship between the body-machine and the soul-mind. His description of the mechanism of interconnection between soul and body can be found in many of his texts.<sup>579</sup> Body/material operations work independently of but connected to and under reciprocal influence of mental/nonmaterial operations.

Although there are many critiques against Cartesian dualism and against his logic of putting together in the explanation of the human being categories that belong to different realities,<sup>580</sup> the importance of his thought for modern Western philosophy and to the development of science is undeniable. His methodical description of human nature as the union of two separable substances in interaction is foundational and has left its mark on the way people understand the human person even today. And as the human “I” that “think,” considered the first principle and indubitable truth of his philosophical thought, is identified with the human substance of thought (*res cogitans*), it logically became the central or more important part of the whole human being, as the person’s own self. Although connected to and in a relationship of mutual influence with the material body, this immaterial part of the human being is independent of the body. Stepping away from the Aristotelian (and Thomistic) philosophical hylomorphic understanding of the human being, Descartes’s radical dualism (more aligned with the dualistic theories of Plato and Augustine), along with his mechanic atomistic way of understanding the

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<sup>579</sup> A reflection about Descartes’s understanding of the unity and interaction between body and soul can be found in MacDonald’s *History of the Concept of Mind*, 284–91; also in Copleston, *Modern Philosophy*, 121–23. The description that Descartes gives of the relationship between body and soul can be found in his own writings: René Descartes, “Sixth Meditation” from “Meditations on First Philosophy,” in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2:58–62 (n. 84–90). Descartes also gives a detailed description of the working of the body with detailed anatomical accuracy in his “Treatise on Man,” in Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 1:99–108.

<sup>580</sup> For Gilbert Ryle, putting together or separating body and mind, physical process and mental process, mechanical causes of movements and mental causes of movements, is a mistake or what he calls a “category-mistake.” For him, terms like “mind” and “matter” belong to different “logical types” and cannot even be analyzed and put together as describing the human person as composed of matter and form, or of body and mental/soul. Not that one cannot use terms like “bodily” and “the mental,” but it is a mistake to describe both as working causes of the same phenomena. The author is criticizing Descartes’s philosophical description and explanation of the human being in terms of mind/soul and body. For the complete explanation of Ryle’s arguments, see Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1949), 20–25.

body and the relation between body and soul, created, as Nancey Murphy affirms, “what is now seen by many to be an insoluble problem: mind-body interaction.”<sup>581</sup> The contemporary scientific paradigm tries to explain the reality only through the measurable physical data of nature. It does not take into account the existence of a metaphysical immaterial “substance” like a soul as possible explanation for the phenomena of reality. As mentioned above, however, the explanation (and the understanding) of the relationship between the events of the “mental life” and physiological processes in the brain connected to them remain problematic.<sup>582</sup>

#### 4.2.2. From Soul to Mind

In Descartes’s thought, the concept of soul was interchangeable with the concept of mind.

Descartes’s soul was not, however, the same as in Thomas Aquinas:

Notice that there is a linguistic shift here from “souls” to “minds.” Either term is a fair translation of Descartes’s Latin or French. For Thomas the mind was equivalent to the rational soul (intellect and will). For Descartes, everything of which we are conscious, including sensations, is a function of the mind, and all of the other faculties (such as the ability to move) are attributed to the body. Earlier translations of Descartes’s writings used “soul,” but as this term has increasingly taken on religious connotations, translators have come to prefer the word “mind” in most contexts. In contrast to the Aristotelians, Descartes believed that only humans have souls. Animals and the human bodies are complex hydraulic machines.<sup>583</sup>

For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to stress that, in Descartes, the concepts of soul and mind are interchangeable. And if the human soul is the human mind, then

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<sup>581</sup> Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 45.

<sup>582</sup> Not only is the understanding of the nature of the relationship between brain processes and mental events unclear, but these brain processes are not completely understood due to their complexity. Edelman and Tononi give as an example, the human “thinking”: “What goes on in your head when you have a thought? Despite the advances in neuroscience, there is no hiding the fact that we still do not know the answer in sufficient detail. Some would even say the answer is: ‘We don’t have the faintest idea.’ William James was perhaps the first to attempt this exercise seriously. Repeating the exercise in the light of our present understanding of the neural basis of consciousness supports the conclusion that an awful lot goes on in the brain every time we have a thought, most of it in parallels and of an awe-inspiring complexity and richness of association. A good deal of it is information having a complexity that is far beyond the capabilities of present-day computers” (Edelman and Tononi, *A Universe of Consciousness*, 201.)

<sup>583</sup> Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 45.



the attributes of one are also the attributes of the other. Descartes uses both Latin terms *anima* and *mens*—“soul” and “mind,” respectively—considering them mostly as synonyms. In order to avoid confusion with the then-dominant Aristotelian and Thomistic religious meaning of the term “soul,” however, Descartes ended up preferring the term “mind” over the term “soul” in some of his texts.<sup>584</sup> The terms “soul,” “mind,” and “I” were all used as synonyms, as can be seen in different editions and translations authorized by Descartes himself. One passage from the Sixth Meditation from the *Meditations on First Philosophy* illustrates the case:

It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand, I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.<sup>585</sup>

This quote expresses Descartes’s way of thinking of the human being as composed of two distinct substances, the *res cogitans* (thinking or nonextended thing) and the *res extensa*

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<sup>584</sup> Paul S. McDonald states that the difference between soul and mind was made for Descartes: “It is not uncommon to hear Cartesian scholars assert that Descartes did not distinguish between mind and soul, that one term can be interchanged with the other without loss of truth. Indeed there are many passages where Descartes does seem to use the two terms as synonyms, but then there are other passages where he goes out of his way to carefully segregate their meanings. In the Second Replies, for example, he says that, ‘the substance in which thought immediately resides is called mind. I use the term “mind” rather than soul since the word “soul” is ambiguous and is often applied to something corporeal’ (CSM II.114). He is even more explicit in his response to Gassendi in the Fifth Replies, where he clearly underlines an ambiguity in the meaning of ‘soul.’ He says that one of the proper tasks of the philosopher is ‘not to change the names after they have been adopted into ordinary use,’ in this case *anima* (soul); rather, ‘we may merely amend their meanings when we notice that they are misunderstood by others.’ He then goes on to speculate about the origin of the concept of ‘soul’: ‘primitive humans probably did not distinguish between, on the one hand, the principle by which we are nourished and grow and accomplish without any thought all the other operations which we have in common with the brutes, and on the other hand, the principle in virtue of which we think. He therefore used the single term “soul” to apply to both.’ If the author had been reflecting on ancient Greek or Hebrew usage of soul-terms then this conjecture is a very good estimate indeed. In contrast with this customary usage the author emphasizes that the term ‘soul’ is ambiguous, and hence should be avoided. ‘If we are to take “soul” in its special sense, as meaning the “first actuality” or “principal form of human,” then the term must be understood to apply only to the *principle* in virtue of which we [humans] think; and to avoid ambiguity I have as far as possible used the term “mind” for this. For I consider the mind not as a part of the soul, but as the thinking soul in its entirety’ (CSM II.246). He makes the same response to the obdurate Father Bourdin in the Seventh Replies, where he reiterates that it was only habit that inclined him to imagine that thinking was an attribute of the soul, as opposed to the principal power of the mind (CSM II.332)” (MacDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind*, 281–82).

<sup>585</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2:54.

(nonthinking or extended thing). It really draws attention, however, to the thinking thing's association with the human being's "self"-perception. Although the human person is considered to be formed by two different substances, the one substance that "is" the person's "self" or "I" is this "thinking thing." This text quoted above is an English translation of the original text in Latin, and it reflects, in the body of the text, in diamond brackets, or in the footnotes, some of the changes contained in the French version of the text, authorized by Descartes himself.<sup>586</sup> Regarding the passage above, instead of having simply "I," the French version reads as follows: "that is, my soul, by which I am what I am."<sup>587</sup> To clarify, the human "I" for Descartes is exactly the same as the human soul, or mind, or *res cogitans*. In a passage that is translated from Latin to English as "puts into *me*,"<sup>588</sup> a footnote points out that the French version says "puts into *my mind*."<sup>589</sup> These examples prove that "I," "mind," and "soul" were interchangeable terms for Descartes.<sup>590</sup>

Different authors have different opinions regarding whether mind and soul have the same meaning for Descartes,<sup>591</sup> but they tend to agree that it is difficult to differentiate between both concepts in his work and between the concepts of mind and consciousness we have today.

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<sup>586</sup> Cf. Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2:1 ("A French translation of the Meditations by Louis-Charles d'Albert, Duc de Luynes [1620–90] appeared in 1647. This is a tolerably accurate version which was published with Descartes' approval; Adrien Baillet, in his biography of Descartes, goes so far as to claim that the philosopher took advantage of the French edition to 'retouch his original work'. In fact, however, the French version generally stays fairly close to the Latin").

<sup>587</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2:54n3.

<sup>588</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2:16.

<sup>589</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2:16. This text comes right before Descartes writes what became the claim of the modern anthropocentric turn in modern philosophical thought: the existence of the "I" who thinks is the first certain indisputable truth. In his words: "If I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed. But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind" (Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2:17).

<sup>590</sup> "when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing" (Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2:59).

<sup>591</sup> A comprehensive discussion and bibliography on this subject can be found in MacDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind*, 281–84.

Although specific epistemological and philosophical differences can be noted, it can be affirmed that the contemporary notion of mind and related notions like consciousness and the mental life or events are related to the philosophical and religious notions of human soul. And although the Catholic understanding of the concept of soul has its specificities,<sup>592</sup> it is basically describing the same phenomena though through different lenses: the human intellectual powers that are manifested in the human mental life or consciousness, the expression of human uniqueness and distinctiveness. Therefore, the modern and contemporary understanding of the human mind is connected to what is contained in the Catholic religious concept of the human soul (especially with its functions of knowledge and will).

With the limited knowledge in biology and anatomy available at his time, Descartes already knew the central role and importance of the human brain for the human mental life and mind. He does not, however, locate the soul within the whole brain; rather, in an attempt to explain how and where the soul acts in the body, Descartes describes the pineal gland as the seat of the soul/mind in the body.<sup>593</sup> With richness of anatomical details, he explains that it is in this gland that the soul is united with the body and interacts with it, receiving the information that comes from the senses through the nerves and also acting through this gland in the body.

Only several centuries later, with the advances of medicine and studies on neurology, has more become known about the real importance of the brain as the physiological structure responsible for all that is related to the mind/soul. As was already said, contemporary neuroscience still has a long way to go to arrive at a full understanding and explanation of the

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<sup>592</sup> The Catholic understanding of the concept of soul is based on elements from the Scriptures, the tradition of the church, and the metaphysical thought of Thomas Aquinas (under the influence of Aristotelianhylomorphism). The understandings of the Catholic Magisterium and of Thomas Aquinas on the theme of the soul were addressed in this dissertation in Chapters Two and Three, respectively.

<sup>593</sup> Although in many places throughout his works, Descartes describes the pineal gland as the place where the soul/mind is especially connected with the body, it is in “The Passions of the Soul” that Descartes explicitly states and explains “[h]ow we know that this gland is the principal seat of the soul” in the body. Cf. Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 1:340–41.

complexity of all the physiological and physiochemical processes in the brain involved with the generation and maintenance of human mental life.<sup>594</sup> There is no doubt, however, that there is a connection between neurological processes and the events of the mind (or the powers and activities of the soul). Therefore, theological anthropology cannot ignore what neuroscience has to say about the human being.<sup>595</sup>

#### 4.2.3. The Importance of Brain Science for Theology

All manifest or observable human behaviors (and what it takes to perform a behavior: the ability to perceive the surrounding world's stimuli and to understand it in such a way that one can respond to it in an appropriate manner) and all unobservable behaviors of the human mental life (thoughts, knowing/understanding, will, memories, feelings/emotions, etc.) are known to be connected to and dependent on the functioning of specific brain structures or substrates. Contemporary psychiatry is able to treat changes in a person's mood and perception of reality with drugs that act on neuronal synapses in the brain.<sup>596</sup> This is especially important since the human abilities to understand, know, and will are comprehended in the Catholic Thomistic tradition as functions of the intellectual soul. The connection between brain states and the functions of the human (intellectual) soul cannot be ignored by theological thought.

Therefore, as was shown above, if the concepts of mind and soul became interchangeable at some point in history even before Descartes,<sup>597</sup> it became unavoidable also to say that discussions about brain functioning and its (causal) relation to the person's mind or to what is

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<sup>594</sup> This is the main argument of the aforementioned Edelman and Tononi's book *A Universe of Consciousness*.

<sup>595</sup> As Michael Arbib says: "I argue that we cannot approach theology (in narrow or broad sense) without some sense of the intricacy of the human brain" (Arbib, "Towards a Neuroscience of the Person," 81).

<sup>596</sup> Cf. Arbib, "Towards a Neuroscience of the Person," 77–81; Michael S. Gazzaniga, ed., *The Cognitive Neuroscience*, 4th ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); Benjamin J. Sadock, Virginia A. Sadock, and Pedro Ruiz, *Kaplan and Sadock's Synopsis of Psychiatry: Behavioral Sciences/Clinical Psychiatry*, 11th ed. (Philadelphia: LWW Wolters Kluwer, 2014).

<sup>597</sup> In Chapter Three, it was shown that in Thomas Aquinas both terms seem to be considered interchangeable.

understood to be the “mental” are also questions related to the human soul. For some scholars like Nancey Murphy, a philosophical theologian who defends so-called nonreductive physicalism, the concept of soul is no longer needed in theological discourse because it was used by Christian theological thought as a philosophical tool to explain and justify in a reasonable way the human being’s higher-level intellectual faculties (such as intellect, memory, will, and moral judgment, etc.). Murphy, in her book *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*,<sup>598</sup> explains that since now there are some (significant though incomplete) scientific explanations in neuroscience for these higher-level intellectual faculties, the conceptual tool of the soul is no longer needed. Her nonreductive physicalism maintains that the human intellectual faculties are the result not only of brain processes but of the interaction of them with social, cultural, and religious factors.<sup>599</sup> Nevertheless, without denying the influence of these factors, it is right to affirm that the intellectual human characteristics that were considered faculties, powers, or functions of the soul are also known to be related to the brain (or as functions or effects of brain activity) even though these features are not yet completely explained in neurological terms. Both theology and science describe the same phenomenon—that is, the human person’s distinctive and unique nature—although through different lenses, perspectives, and categories of analysis. While Catholic theology describes the human being as having an intellectual soul whose powers are explained in metaphysical philosophical terms and categories, science (neuroscience) tries to describe and explain human intellectual capabilities through the laws of nature and study of the

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<sup>598</sup> Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*

<sup>599</sup> “Let me try putting it this way: in the past, the soul served a variety of purposes, one of which was explanation of what we might call humans’ higher capacities. These capacities include a sort of rationality that goes beyond that of animals, as well as morality and a relationship with God. A reductive view would be to say that if there is no soul then people must not be truly rational, moral or religious. What was taken in the past to be rationality, morality, and relationship with God is really nothing but brain processes. The nonreductive physicalist says instead that if there is no soul then these higher human capacities must be explained in a different manner. In part they are explainable as brain functions, but their full explanation requires attention to human social relations, to cultural factors, and, most importantly, to our relationship with God” (Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 69–70).

data from the physical, material world. If Catholic theological anthropological discourse continues to affirm that the human intellectual soul is the seat of the higher intellectual functions of the person, as these functions are correlated to brain activity, however, it is no longer possible to ignore the importance and necessity of the dialogue between theological affirmations and the data offered by neuroscience.

#### **4.2.4. The Case of Phineas Gage as an Illustration of the Possible Problems in the Understanding of the Soul as the Seat of the Self**

As a way of illustrating the relationship between neuroscience and the theological subject of the soul, a famous and emblematic medical case for neuroscience can be helpful. In 1848 a man named Phineas P. Gage suffered a severe head injury while working on the construction of a railroad in Cavendish, Vermont. Gage was responsible for preparing explosions to break the hard rocks in the way of the railroad. While carefully pressing the explosive powder with the help of an iron rod, a sudden accidental explosion projected the iron rod, which pierced Gage's head, entering his left cheek, severing the optical nerve of his left eye, crossing his brain's frontal lobe, and exiting through the top of his head.<sup>600</sup> What followed this horrible accident made it a famous medical case for neuroscience and psychology. He survived even though his head was punctured by a rod that was "three feet seven inches, and one and a quarter inches in diameter" and weighed "thirteen and a quarter pounds."<sup>601</sup> Gage was examined by the famous Harvard surgeon Henry Bigelow, who later described the case and confirmed the amazing survival.

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<sup>600</sup> For a full description of Phineas Gage's accident, see Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 3–7.

<sup>601</sup> Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 6.

What made this case so emblematic was not the fast physical recovery of the man. Although Phineas Gage did not have any physical, cognitive, or perceptual aftereffects or impairment, his personality and character suffered a dramatic change, as Antonio Damasio describes in his book *Descartes' Error*:

Phineas Gage will be pronounced cured [from the wounds of his accident] in less than two months. Yet this astonishing outcome pales in comparison with the extraordinary turn that Gage's personality is about to undergo. Gage's disposition, his likes and dislikes, his dreams and aspirations are all to change. Gage's body may be alive and well, but there is a new spirit animating it.<sup>602</sup>

As Damasio's subtitle for this section suggests, "Gage was no longer Gage."<sup>603</sup> The man recovered from his injuries almost completely (he lost only the sight in his left eye), but as the physician in the case, John Harlow, relates, "The 'equilibrium or balance, so to speak, between his intellectual faculty and animal propensities' had been destroyed."<sup>604</sup> The narrative continues:

The changes became apparent as soon as the acute phase of brain injury subsided. He was now "fitful, irreverent, indulging at times in the grossest profanity which was not previously his custom, manifesting but little deference for his fellows, impatient of restraint or advice when it conflicts with his desires, at times pertinaciously obstinate, yet capricious and vacillating, devising many plans of future operation, which are no sooner arranged than they are abandoned. . . . A child in his intellectual capacity and manifestations, he has the animal passions of a strong man." The foul language was so debased that women were advised not to stay long in his presence, lest their sensibilities be offended. The strongest admonitions from Harlow himself failed to return our survivor to good behavior.<sup>605</sup>

And who was Phineas Gage before the accident?

These new personality traits contrasted sharply with the "temperate habits" and "considerable energy of character" Phineas Gage was known to have possessed before the accident. He had had "a well-balanced mind and was looked upon by those who knew him as a shrewd, smart businessman, very energetic and persistent in executing all his plans of actions." There is no doubt that in the context of his job and time, he was successful. So radical was the change in him that friends and acquaintances could hardly

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<sup>602</sup> Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 7.

<sup>603</sup> Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 7.

<sup>604</sup> Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 8.

<sup>605</sup> Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 8.

recognize the man. They noted sadly that “Gage was no longer Gage.” So different a man was he that his employers would not take him back when he returned to work, for they “considered the change in his mind so marked that they could not give him his place again.” *The problem was not lack of physical ability or skill; it was his new character.*<sup>606</sup>

The impressive and strong claim that “Gage was no longer Gage” expresses well the reality that the man who survived that terrible accident was different from the man he was before the accident, with regard to his personality and personal intellectual characteristics. The loss of brain material did not bring changes in his perception of himself, but it changed dramatically some of the characteristics of his personality. And if important features of his personality changed, was the after-accident Gage the same Gage from before the accident? Although this change in character due to brain damage may not surprise contemporary readers due to basic common knowledge that people have nowadays about the relation between the brain and a person’s personality, it remains important data to be considered by theology in its understanding of the soul and its connection with the person’s intellectual faculties.

The notion of a person’s identity seems to be related not only to the person’s understanding of his or her own self but to features of his or her personality. Gage’s physical capabilities did not change; his speech and memory were preserved; his notion of time and space was not damaged; there was not any physical or intellectual impairment, as usually happens to survivors of accidents that damage the brain. Most important, Gage knew who he was and did not notice a difference in his own personality. There were, however, severe changes in his character, as Damasio describes it, and the cause of this dramatic change in the man’s personality was physical: brain injury. Gage’s body was not the same. The loss of brain matter changed his behaviors and even the way he expressed himself: he started using debased language, something

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<sup>606</sup> Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 8; emphasis added.



he did not do before the accident. The change in his personality made him act like another person.<sup>607</sup>

Gage's case is important for the discussion in this chapter as a way of illustrating how those features that are considered the center of a person's mental life and personality are completely related to and dependent on brain structures and processes. All psychological aspects of a person's character are connected to his or her neuronal structures.

And what about the human soul? If, as Damasio affirms, "Gage was no longer the same Gage" due to the changes in his personality after the brain trauma—and if, therefore, it can be said that characteristics of a person's identity (personality and intellectual features) are changed with brain trauma—what can be said about this person's soul?<sup>608</sup>

No easy answer can be given to this question, and, as the existence of the soul is a matter of faith, people of faith who do believe in the existence of the human immortal soul understand (in accordance with the Church's teaching) that a person's mental life is the expression of the person's soul, or, more accurately, it can be said that the person's self or mental life or "I" is identical with his or her soul. Thomas Aquinas, whose theological thought is foundational for the

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<sup>607</sup> Nowadays it is well known that brain injuries and chemical factors can cause substantial changes to a person's personality or to the mental attributes that constitute a person's identity. If part of a person's brain is lost or if permanent damage happens in microstructures of the brain due to various causes, the personality of this person may not be the same. The same is not true with regard to the loss of other body parts or an organ transplant. This seems obvious, but it is necessary to state that the brain is the seat of a person's mental life (with the features of his or her personality, character, memories, capacities of knowing, deciding, etc.) and identity. The human brain cannot be replaced. It is the seat of the person's self, or, in the religious discourse, of the person's soul. If a person's capacity for understanding and deciding (intellect and will) is lost for good with brain damage, is a feature of the soul lost? Is the person's soul dependent on the brain or identical to it? What if, in a case like Gage's, there were a technology that could be implanted in a person's brain, a computational device, that, with the help of artificial intelligence, would substitute for a lost brain part or a damaged brain to maintain a person's ability to be reasonable and social? As the ability for choice is a feature of the intellectual soul, however, would an AI device implanted in a person's brain restore a feature of the person's soul? Or, as in many science-fiction movies on the topic of preserving a person's self in a computer, what if a person's complex web of neuron and synaptic connections in the brain could be saved in a computer, and the person's self could be perfectly reproduced through this computer, would it be this person's soul?

<sup>608</sup> This can also be thought regarding Alzheimer's disease and other states of dementia (loss of memory and the changes in the personality of the person due to brain degeneration), post-traumatic stress disorders, and some kinds of psychiatric disorders that affect or change some traits of the personality of someone.

Catholic understanding of the human being as the body-soul unity, argues that the principle of life of the human being is the intellectual soul.<sup>609</sup> Although all the functions or operations of life of the human being have their origin and source in this the intellectual principle of life or intellectual soul,<sup>610</sup> the vegetative and sensitive functions or operations of the soul have as their subject the body-soul compound and are therefore carried out through a bodily organ.<sup>611</sup> Nevertheless, the rational operations of the soul, namely, the intellect and the will, have as their subject only the intellectual soul and are not carried out through any organ: “There exists, therefore, an operation of the soul which so far exceeds the corporeal nature that it is not even performed by any corporeal organ; and such is the operation of the ‘rational soul.’”<sup>612</sup>

Aquinas’s argument that the rational operations of the intellect and the will are not executed by body organ, however, seems to contradict the basic contemporary knowledge of the dependence that these operations have in relation to the brain. As shown in Gage’s case, patterns of his personality associated with his understanding and will changed dramatically after the accident and related brain damage.

The ideas that the human being’s mental or intellectual life is the expression or the function of the human soul and that the events of this mental life are not the direct product of the

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<sup>609</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 76, a. 1; 76, a. 2, 76, a. 3. (Hereafter, all citations from the *Summa Theologiae* will be abbreviated as *ST I*, followed by the number of the question, then the number of the article, that is, *ST I*, 76, 1). See <https://spriory.org/thomas/summa/> (Accessed on April 12, 2018). All the quotes in English and Latin from the *Summa Theologiae*, unless otherwise stated, are taken from this web source, which is a translation done by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, published by the Benziger Brothers in 1947. A detailed account of Thomas Aquinas’s understanding of the human soul is given in Chapter Three.

<sup>610</sup> Cf. 76, 5; 77, 2; 77, 5, ad. 1; 77, 6

<sup>611</sup> All the vegetative and sensitive functions and operations of the soul (with the exception of *intellect* and *will*) occur only through a bodily organ. Cf. 75, 2; 75, 5; 76, 5; 77, 8; 78, 1; 78, 3 (the vegetative operations of the soul are *generation or reproduction, growth, and nutrition*); 78, 3 (external senses: *sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste*); 78, 4 (internal senses: *common sense, imagination, the estimative power, and memory*).

<sup>612</sup> Latin: “Est ergo quaedam operatio animae, quae intantum excedit naturam corpoream, quod neque etiam exercetur per organum corporale. Et talis est operatio animae rationalis.” *ST I*, 78, 1. See also: *ST I*, 75, 2, ad. 3; 75, 3; 76, 1; 76, 2. All the functions or operations of the intellectual soul are carried out by the compound body-soul, with the exception of the operations of *intellect* and *will*, which are carried out only by the intellectual soul and without a bodily organ: *ST I*, 76, 8, ad. 4; 77, 5; 77, 8; 78, 1.

physical body (or of a body organ) are not exclusive to Thomistic theological thought but are embedded in our culture. Even the author of *Descartes' Error*, Antonio Damasio, expresses himself in a very dualistic way: “Gage’s body may be alive and well, but there is a *new spirit* animating it.”<sup>613</sup> Maybe the use of the expression “spirit *animating*” in opposition to the body was merely the author’s use of a figure of speech to describe features of Gage’s personality. But even if the author was making a purposeful opposition between what belongs to the soul (from the Latin *anima*) as the personality features and what belongs to the body or brain, there is no doubt that the changes in Gage’s personality were due to the damage that occurred in his brain. Even the most ethereal and metaphysical thought seems to be dependent on, related to, and connected to brain structures.

If neuroscience can affirm that all events of human mental life are related directly to specific bodily or physical (neural) substrates or structures of the person’s brain, it seems to be improper to keep affirming or even thinking about a soul that performs intellectual operations of knowledge and will independently of the brain. Human operations of understanding/knowing and will are events related to a person’s mental life and are completely connected and related to brain activity. If the brain is not at work, there are no thoughts or ideas, no understanding or knowledge, no will or capacity for decision making. All the acts and powers related to the soul are connected and related also to some kind of brain activity. Without it, there is no mental life.

Thomas Aquinas affirms that the immortal soul in its separated state after death can still perform acts of understanding.<sup>614</sup> In its natural unity with the body, Aquinas says that the soul’s act of understanding happens only “by turning to the phantasms”<sup>615</sup> or images produced by the

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<sup>613</sup> Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 7; emphasis added.

<sup>614</sup> CF. *ST I*, 89, 1–8.

<sup>615</sup> “. . . convertendo se ad phantasmata” (*ST I*, 89, 1).

senses and that “are in the corporeal organs.”<sup>616</sup> After death, however, the separated soul, which is in a state that is foreign to its own nature (i.e., being united to a body), can understand only through divine illumination.<sup>617</sup> As this capacity of understanding of the separated soul is a matter that belongs to the realities *post mortem* and therefore to the unknown, not much speculation can be done in this regard. Nevertheless, this idea that the separated soul performs acts of understanding after bodily death should not serve as justification for Aquinas’s view that the intellectual operations of understanding and will are not carried out by any body organ but solely by the rational soul while it is in its natural unity with the body. And as neuroscience shows, there is no act of understanding without the presence of brain activity. Maybe this brain activity is the sense-images (or phantasms) being generated by the body (brain), so that the soul may perform the act of understanding by turning to these phantasms. Even if this is the case, the affirmation that understanding and will are performed solely by the soul seems unconvincing.

Returning to Phineas Gage’s case and seeing it in dialogue with the theological body-soul perspective on the human person, one can conclude that many of the characteristics that could be attributed to Gage’s soul, especially free will, desires, and notions of morality, ended up being changed with his accident, when the rod pierced his brain. He was the same person, knowing who he was and remembering the same people from before (his family, friends and coworkers), but due to the accident, something affected his moral patterns, as if he lost his moral filters (use of debased language, etc.).

What does Gage’s history tell us about those human features that are considered attributes purely of the soul? The first evidence is that these attributes change with the loss and damage of brain matter. Can these attributes still be connected solely to the human soul if they

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<sup>616</sup> “. . . quae in corporeis organis sunt” (*ST I*, 89, 1).

<sup>617</sup> *ST I*, 89, 1, ad. 3.

are, as was shown, completely dependent on brain (physical neurological) structures? What about all the people who never develop those abilities attributed to the soul due to their social, historical, and material-concrete situations? What about people with severe physical and intellectual disabilities and impairments?<sup>618</sup> What about people who die when they are young children or the unborn who have no chance to develop those so-called attributes of the soul?

Maybe there needs to be a reconsideration of the soul as the only seat and source of all those attributes related to intellect and the will. And if the concept of and belief in the human soul is a nonnegotiable tenet of Catholic faith, maybe it is time to rethink, reshape, or reinterpret the understanding of the soul in light of neuroscientific data. One possible way of doing this would be to release the soul from its role as the carrier and producer of the higher-level intellectual faculties. This would not mean the abandonment of the notion of and belief in the soul but the reinterpretation of it so that there is not much space for dubious and dualistic understandings of the person as the body-soul unity.

The problem is that the Catholic anthropological view of the human being depends on Aquinas's theological understanding of human nature and on the doctrinal understanding of the separated soul in afterlife. Aquinas's understanding of the intellectual human faculties and its operations as solely performed by the soul and not through a bodily organ, associated with the Catholic intermediate eschatological understanding of the separated immortal soul in the afterlife and being able to perform acts of intellect and will, may mislead people to imagine and conceive the soul as independent of the body. This way, the theological conceptualization of the soul existing and functioning in its state of separation and independence from its body can become a naturalized idea or notion in the people's mind-set, which can threaten the basic theological

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<sup>618</sup> The way I separate the intellectual from the physical in my text is symbolic—this separation is embedded in my mental schemes or subjectivity.

understanding of the human being as created by God in the body-soul unity. The separated soul in the afterlife is to be rightly conceived and understood as an unnatural and provisory state of existence awaiting its fulfillment and permanent state that will be achieved only with the resurrection of the body. The only natural way of existence of the human soul is in its unity with the body.

### **4.3. Why Does This Discussion Matter?**

Descartes's way of considering the mind/soul as part of nature has impacted the contemporary understanding of what belongs to the "mental." Although contemporary scientific thought considers the human mental states and their elaborations (thought, reasoning, knowing, deciding, etc.) to be products of brain activity, it is not completely clear how this happens. The nature of the mental processes and of their relation to the brain is still a topic of philosophical and scientific speculation and research. Until neuroscience gives a complete account (reasonable causal description according to the laws of physics) of how one thing (the thinking thing) relates to the other thing (the material thing), there will be room for speculation in this regard.

There is still a separation between theological and scientific thought, due in part to the different lenses of analysis in both domains of knowledge. Theology describes reality (considered as material and nonmaterial or spiritual) and the human being based on philosophical-rational and metaphysical speculations, assumptions, and conclusions. Science describes the same reality (considering it only the material, natural world) and the human being based on the laws of nature and on evidence provided by physical and material data. There is a gap. Nevertheless, even if there is no way of bridging this gap, at least a dialogue may be possible and important.

Patricia Smith Churchland, in the conclusion of her work *Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of the Mind-Brain*,<sup>619</sup> argues that both neuroscience and philosophy matter to each other and must be in dialogue toward a unified scientific understanding of the relation between the mental processes and the physical brain.<sup>620</sup> In the same way, Catholic theological thought, while dealing with the subject of the human soul, due to the understanding of it as the seat of all intellectual human faculties, needs to be open and in dialogue with what neuroscience has to say about these intellectual faculties and their relationship with brain processes.

Would the scientific knowledge available today from neuroscience affect the Catholic understanding of the human person as a body-soul unity? It is true that neuroscience does not have all the explanations for how the functions of knowledge and will are generated in the brain structures, and this is in part due to the complexity of brain processes. Neuroscience can show, however, that knowledge and will are completely related and tied to these physical processes, unable to exist without them. This knowledge of the intrinsic deep unity between events of the mental and intellectual life of the human being and their physical correlations in the brain can help, inform, and strengthen the theological discourse on human nature as the substantial unity of body and soul. It may, for instance, *correct* Thomas Aquinas's thought about what he could not know, due to the limitations of his time, about the functions of the intellectual soul and their crucial connection with the brain. By doing so, neuroscience would help theology to understand that there is nothing in the mental life that is not physical and that soul and body cannot be understood separately or as having distinct functions. In this understanding, everything that is considered spiritual or related to the soul can be understood only in the material reality of the physical body. Functions and properties of the body are functions and properties of the soul.

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<sup>619</sup> Patricia Smith Churchland, *Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of the Mind-Brain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

<sup>620</sup> Cf. Churchland, *Neurophilosophy*, 482.

Spiritual and material principles may be distinct elements in the making of the created world. The material and spiritual constitutive elements or principles of the human being can be conceived or thought of as separated from each other only in an exercise of forced conceptual abstraction, which *per se* is obscure and unnatural. There is nothing that belongs to the soul that does not belong also to the body. Therefore, the appropriation into theological thought of the neuroscientific comprehension that mental events are inseparable from brain events may *reinforce* and *reaffirm*, with concrete evidence from science, Aquinas's own intent of upholding theologically the human being as created by God in the indissoluble body-soul unity.

Therefore, this new scientific data may help the traditional Catholic view of the human being to be understood better. It may challenge some concepts and views, such as the existence of the separated soul in the afterlife and the events of the intermediary eschatology. These traditional elements can be reinterpreted and understood in a more symbolic, metaphorical, and therefore broader and more mystagogical dimension. One of the results of this rethinking would be that the salvation of the soul is always the salvation of the body, with no possible divorce. The care for the spiritual soul coincides with the care for the material body. The spiritual well-being of others coincides with the concrete, material well-being of them. All practices of faith need to coincide with concrete actions of bodily transformation of the reality.

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Einstein once said, "Religion without science is blind. Science without religions is lame." His instinct that they need each other was right, though I would not describe their separate shortcomings in quite the terms he chose. Rather I would say, "Religion without science is confined; it fails to be completely open to reality. Science without religion is incomplete; it fails to attain the deepest possible understanding." The remarkable insights that science affords us into intelligible workings of the world cry out for an explanation more profound than that which it itself can provide. Religion, if it is to take seriously its claim that the world is the creation of God, must be humble enough to learn from science



what that world is actually like. The dialogue between them can only be mutually enriching.<sup>621</sup>

If science without religion is incomplete, it is up to scientists, or to scientists who are also theologians, as Polkinghorne is, to judge. Theology, however, cannot close in on itself, denying or being blind to what scientific thought has to say about the human intellectual functions and their connection with brain processes. If theological thought insists that these functions belong *solely* to the soul and are not performed by the brain, it remains confined in itself and can mislead the people into dualistic thoughts. But if these intellectual functions that are taken as belonging to the soul begin also to be understood in terms of their connection with brain processes, then the understanding not only of the soul and its functions but also of what the human being is as a whole can be enriched, amplified, and more comprehensible in the theological discourse.

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<sup>621</sup> John Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk: Science and Religion in Dialogue* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 75.

## Chapter 5. Joseph Ratzinger and Karl Rahner on the Intermediate State

In the postconciliar era, the church's traditional teachings on eschatology were challenged by new insights in anthropology, especially with regard to the ontological unity of the human person, which render the discourse on the survival of the "soul" apart from the body problematic and raise the possibility of an immediate resurrection in death.<sup>622</sup>

Traditional Catholic doctrine asserts that, after death, people who died before the Parousia are in a "state of waiting" between death and resurrection, surviving through their immortal souls.<sup>623</sup> The Church conceives of a two-phased eschatological view: first, the particular judgment of the separated soul with death and, then, the general judgment of all human beings at the Last Day with the resurrection of the dead.<sup>624</sup> In what concerns the first eschatological phase (what happens to the separated soul), Catholic teaching holds that immediately after death the human being, through his or her separated soul, undergoes a particular judgment and receives a reward or a retribution based on the consequences of his or her life in the body. The result of this particular judgment is definitive and will be confirmed in the final judgment at the end of time. Therefore, with death and in accord with the individual works of each human being, there are three possible outcomes for the separated soul before the resurrection of the body and the final judgment: (1) it immediately enters into God's presence to

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<sup>622</sup> Peter Phan, "Roman Catholic Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 219.

<sup>623</sup> As described in Chapter Two, several doctrinal documents of the Church have affirmed the immortality of the soul and the consequent survival of the human soul after bodily death, surviving as the *anima separata*, or separated soul. One relatively recent and emblematic document was the 1979 "Letter on Certain Questions Concerning Eschatology" from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which says: "The Church affirms that a spiritual element survives and subsists after death, an element endowed with consciousness and will, so that the 'human self' subsists. To designate this element, the Church uses the word 'soul,' the accepted term in the usage of Scripture and Tradition. Although not unaware that this term has various meanings in the Bible, the Church thinks that there is no valid reason for rejecting it; moreover, she considers that the use of some word as a vehicle is absolutely indispensable in order to support the faith of Christians." See [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19790517\\_escatologia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19790517_escatologia_en.html) (Accessed on July 17, 2018).

<sup>624</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, "Some Current Questions on Eschatology," 4.1 and 5.1, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_1990\\_problemi-attuali-escatologia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1990_problemi-attuali-escatologia_en.html) (Accessed on July 17, 2018).

eternally enjoy the beatific vision in heaven; (2) it undergoes a process of purification in purgatory and then goes to heaven; or (3) it goes immediately to hell for eternal damnation.<sup>625</sup>

The intermediate state of the separated soul, between death and the resurrection of the body, is a temporal hiatus that is (or can be) thought of as parallel to human history. Although the final and definitive state or mode of existence of the human being is achieved only in the resurrection of the dead, when the original human body-soul unity is restored, in this eschatological phase (the eschatology of the soul) the separated soul becomes the protagonist of human fulfillment in the intermediate state. This intermediate state, however, understood as *the eschatological condition that has the separated soul at its center*, has been and remains a matter of dispute and speculation within the theological arena of Christianity in general and Roman Catholicism in particular.<sup>626</sup>

Chapter Five examines and compares the differing perspectives of two prominent Catholic theologians, Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, regarding the intermediate state.

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<sup>625</sup> This teaching was first affirmed by Benedict XII in the 1336 Constitution *Benedictus Deus*. (DH 1000–1002:302–3; DN 2305–7:1018–19). The beatific vision of the separated souls of the saints was affirmed two years earlier in the retraction issued by John XXII in the 1334 Bull *Ne super his*. (DH 990–991:301). See CCC 1021–37:266–71.

<sup>626</sup> See Stephen Yates, *Between Death and Resurrection: A Critical Response to Recent Catholic Debate Concerning the Intermediate State* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 5–29; Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 104–12; Juan L. Ruiz de la Peña, *La Otra dimensión: Escatología Cristiana*, Colección Presencia Teologica 29 (Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1986), 323–59; Phan, “Roman Catholic Theology,” 223, 226–27; Peter Phan, *Eternity in Time: A Study of Karl Rahner’s Eschatology* (Selinsgrove / London: Susquehanna University Press / Associated University Press, 1988), 116–34; Giovanni Ancona, *Escatologia Cristã*, trans. Orlando Soares Moreira [translation from the original in Italian to Portuguese] (São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2013), 225–30; Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 290–307. As an example from recent years, in the article titled “Intermediate State or Resurrection in Death?” the Italian theologian Mario Pietrobelli defends the position that resurrection takes place in the moment of death, which is not dependent on the immortality of the soul but rather caused by God’s powerful intervention. As an event caused solely by God’s omnipotence, the author sustains the argument that this hypothesis is plausible, convenient, and feasible and that it would eliminate the existent controversies and disputes around the notion of the intermediate state. The intermediate state remains, however, a matter for theological debate. Cf. Mario Pietrobelli, “Stato Intermedio o Risurrezione in Morte?,” *Asprenas* 43 (1996): 27–42. See also other articles published in two volumes of the Italian journal *Vivens Homo* (Rivista di Teologia e Scienze Religiose) dedicated to the subject of the immortality of the soul: volumes 17, no. 2 (2006) and 19, no. 2 (2008).

Rahner's view on the subject is developed in his essay "The Intermediate State,"<sup>627</sup> where he argues that the interim temporal state between death and resurrection of the body is not a *dogma* of faith, and therefore Church teaching can remain open to theological investigation and inquiry. Ratzinger, in his work *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*,<sup>628</sup> argues that the understanding that there is an interim state is an important part of the Church's *doctrine* of the immortality of the soul and therefore cannot be denied. He maintains that the notion of the intermediate state is rooted in biblical texts of both the Old and New Testaments, already present in the Patristic period, and upheld by the magisterial documents of the Church.<sup>629</sup>

As the central concern of this dissertation is the Roman Catholic understanding of the separated soul and the consequences of Church teaching for ministerial practice and faith formation, the description and analysis of these two distinct theological views serve as important points of reference. With regard to the eschatological notion of the intermediate state this comparison and contrast of the positions of Rahner and Ratzinger show how, even in the speculative and theoretical sphere of Roman Catholic theology, the concept remains the subject of ongoing inquiries and continues to be open for discussion.

### **5.1. Rahner on the Intermediate State**

In his essay "The Intermediate State," Rahner presents his theological position on the disputed theological question regarding the period of time between human death and the resurrection of the body at the final consummation of history. Peter Phan highlights that the simple fact that Rahner puts the title of this essay in quotation marks is, *per se*, a hint that it is

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<sup>627</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Intermediate State," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 17, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 114–24.

<sup>628</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*.

<sup>629</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 119–40, 241–45.

a controversial topic, especially because it relies on the notion of the separated soul.<sup>630</sup> He begins his reflection by asking how “dogmatically binding”<sup>631</sup> the concept of intermediate state is. What seems to follow from Rahner’s question is that, if this concept is not a dogma, the faithful are not obligated to accept it as a matter of faith and it can be called into question.

Recalling the apostolic constitution *Benedictus Deus*,<sup>632</sup> promulgated by Pope Benedict XII in 1336, Rahner argues that this document sets forth the idea that the resurrection of the body does not take place concurrently with what happens immediately after death, when the separated soul enters into one of three possible states: the beatific vision, purification, or damnation. Benedict XII’s predecessor, John XXII, had indicated in some of his sermons that the souls of the just after death and before the resurrection of the body only partially enjoy the beatific vision.<sup>633</sup> Therefore, the real claim advanced by *Benedictus Deus* was that the separated souls of the dead indeed receive or face fully their final recompense or retribution from God immediately after death, for example, enjoying fully the beatific vision. Thus, the outcome that occurs immediately after death continues after the resurrection or glorification of the body. And, as the glorification of the body does not occur immediately after death (not being, therefore, simultaneous to the separated soul’s enjoyment of the beatific vision), it is implicitly assumed that there is an interval between what happens right after death and what happens at the

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<sup>630</sup> Peter Phan, “Eschatology,” in *The Cambridge Companion on Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 183. Also, see at Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 117.

<sup>631</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 114.

<sup>632</sup> See the description of the content of the Apostolic Constitution *Benedictus Deus* in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

<sup>633</sup> In the introductory comments to John XXII’s Bull *Ne super his* (1334), Denzinger and Hünermann explain: “Contrary to the already then common theological understanding, John XXII upheld the opinion that the souls of the dead, remaining ‘under the altar of God’ (cf. Rev 6:9), enjoy only the vision of the human nature of Christ and came to enjoy the fullness of beatitude only after the general judgment” (*DH* 301). See also Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 279–91; Candido Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, trans. Mark A. Pilon (New York: St Pauls, 2009), 430–32; Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 136–37; Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch (Charlotte, N.C.: TAN Books, 1974), 475–76; Ruiz de la Peña, *La Otra Dimensión*, 330; Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 116.

resurrection of the dead. As Rahner observes, however, this doctrinal claim about the intermediate state is not a dogma:

My intention here is not to deny the doctrine of the intermediate state. I should only like to point out that it is not a dogma, and can therefore remain open to the free discussion of theologians. We shall leave the question open, whether in our time the doctrine of the intermediate state does not perhaps enjoy a certain merit on kerygmatic or didactical grounds, or for reasons connected with religious instruction, or with the history of thought.<sup>634</sup>

Rahner does not want to reject or refute the notion of the intermediate state. In fact, if this notion is able to communicate the *real truths* of faith, such as the soul's experience of the beatific vision or the glorification of the body, he affirms that "no objection can be levied against it, even today."<sup>635</sup> Nevertheless, he postulates that the intermediate state is no more than an "intellectual framework"<sup>636</sup> or "a way of thinking"<sup>637</sup> that "does not necessarily have to be part of Christian eschatology itself."<sup>638</sup> Peter Phan says that by affirming the notion of the intermediate state as an intellectual or imaginative framework, Rahner is pointing out that this notion intends to "harmonize two apparently contradictory basic truths, namely, the future resurrection of the flesh, that is, the one and total person, and the immediate vision of God after death."<sup>639</sup>

Given that this framework or way of thinking is not a dogma of faith, Rahner states that it is not heretical to affirm that the resurrection and judgment of the whole human being, body and soul, "take place immediately after death" and "in 'parallel' to the temporal history of the world . . . coincide[ing] with the sum of the particular judgments of individual men and

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<sup>634</sup> Rahner, "The Intermediate State," 114.

<sup>635</sup> Rahner, "The Intermediate State," 115.

<sup>636</sup> Rahner, "The Intermediate State," 114, 115.

<sup>637</sup> Rahner, "The Intermediate State," 115.

<sup>638</sup> Rahner, "The Intermediate State," 115.

<sup>639</sup> Phan, "Eschatology," 183. Peter Phan also calls this "intellectual framework" a "cultural framework" (Phan, "Roman Catholic Theology," 223) or "cultural amalgam" (Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 117–18; "Current Theology: Contemporary Context and Issues in Eschatology," *Theological Studies* 55 [1994]: 517).

women.”<sup>640</sup> Rahner does not necessarily uphold this position as his own but simply affirms that if a theologian can “produce good reasons for his [*sic*] view he [*sic*] can go on maintaining his [*sic*] opinion”<sup>641</sup> without being heretical. Rahner’s aim is not to deny the intermediate state but simply “to encourage a further investigation of the question.”<sup>642</sup>

Rahner insists, however, that although this notion or intellectual framework of the intermediate state is not asserted and explicitly declared a dogma by *Benedictus Deus*, it is an assumption that comes from the truths of faith that are declared and defined, that is, “the perfecting of the soul and the glorification of the body.”<sup>643</sup> These are teachings with dogmatic obligatory weight (“binding for faith”), while the notion of the intermediate state, as a claim that is based on those truths, is not binding for faith, as it has not been dogmatically declared.

In developing his argument, Rahner proceeds to examine the scriptural accounts used to support the traditional understanding of the intermediate state in order to ascertain to what degree this assumption “belong[s] to revelation.”<sup>644</sup> For him, when Scripture talks about “the resurrection

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<sup>640</sup> Rahner acknowledges that this is a negative approach and does not give proof that there is not an intermediate state. It is not clear if this theory of the “immediate resurrection in death” is his own theological position on this matter. He says only that his “aim is merely to encourage a further investigation of the question” (Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 115).

<sup>641</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 115. Félix José Palazzi Von Büren says C. F. Schickendantz, by citing Peter Phan, affirms that although Rahner did not consider the thesis of resurrection in death to be a heretical possibility, he did not develop a theological defense for it. See at Félix José Palazzi Von Büren, *La Tierra en el Cielo: Disertación sobre el dogma de la Asunción de la Beata Virgen María según Karl Rahner* (Caracas: Universidad Católica Andrés Bello / UCAB Instituto de Teología para Religiosos – ITER, 2005), 366; cf. C. Schickendantz, *Autotrascendencia radicalizada en extrema impotencia, la comprensión de la muerte en Karl Rahner* (Santiago de Chile, 1999), 275.

<sup>642</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 115. With the affirmation of the plausibility of the thesis of resurrection in death and parallel to world history, Rahner is not saying that the intermediate state can simply be denied. In an earlier essay titled “The Life of the Dead,” he affirms: “Since it cannot be denied that there is an ‘intermediate state’ in the destiny of man [*sic*] between death and bodily fulfilment, unless one holds that what is saved is not what was to be saved, there can be no decisive objection to the notion that man [*sic*] reaches personal maturity in this ‘intermediate state’” (Karl Rahner, “The Life of the Dead,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore/London: Helicon Press/Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 353).

<sup>643</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 116.

<sup>644</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 116.

of the flesh,” it means the final destiny of the “total person who as such *is* ‘flesh.’”<sup>645</sup> The term “flesh,” correctly interpreted, means not just the person’s physical body but the spiritual dimension of the person as well. It refers to the whole and total human being as an indissoluble unity, body and soul, that will be the subject of the final and universal eschatological event of the resurrection of the dead. Rahner goes on to argue that, since Scripture does not compel us to believe in the transformation of the body’s matter, it does not prohibit us from speaking about the resurrection immediately after death.

Rahner also analyzes the expression “being with Christ” (Luke 23:43; John 5:24).<sup>646</sup> For him, the claim only means that death “cannot harm the man or woman who lives through his faith in Jesus Christ,”<sup>647</sup> and it does not serve as a proof for the existence of the intermediate state. The Scriptures do not specify how people who have died are *with Christ*. The Old Testament’s concept of Sheol already provided a foundation for believing that the person who has died does not cease to exist but, rather, that he or she remains the subject of God’s saving act. Yet, for Rahner, the biblical notion of Sheol does not support the idea of an intermediate state, specifically because it cannot be considered as a place/state such as heaven, where the soul enjoys the beatific vision. Rahner goes on to explain that the traditional understanding of the intermediate state as the theological reconciliation of the two scriptural statements cited above—that is, the notions of the “resurrection of the flesh” and of “being with Christ”—“is not in itself New Testament doctrine.”<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 116. See also Rahner’s essay “The Body in the Order of Salvation,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol.17, 71–89.

<sup>646</sup> Luke 23:43: “He replied to him, ‘Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’” John 5:24: “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life.”

<sup>647</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 117.

<sup>648</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 117.



Rahner says that most of the Fathers of the Church who interpreted Jesus' death and resurrection as a liberation of the righteous ones from Sheol understood this liberation "as a *physical* resurrection, not as the freeing of the soul alone for the contemplation of God."<sup>649</sup> Even Benedict XII's definition "does not forbid anyone to teach that the soul may possibly enjoy *greater* blessedness *after* the resurrection of the body."<sup>650</sup> Otherwise, it would appear that the soul in the beatific vision enjoys the definitive fullness of happiness, and, therefore, the resurrection of the body would be superfluous.

For Rahner, the idea of an intermediate state exemplifies "a stage in the history of theology"<sup>651</sup> that appeared as an effort to reconcile the scriptural statements of the collective eschatological event ("resurrection of the flesh") and individual fulfillment (to "be with Christ") as the state of the separated soul between death and the general resurrection. He maintains, however, that in modern times the idea of the intermediate state is a difficult intellectual problem, especially regarding the notion of time. It thus raises the question: "How are we to think of time and the temporality of a departed soul, if on the one hand the soul is already with God in its perfected state, but on the other hand has 'to wait' for the reassumption of its function towards its own body?"<sup>652</sup>

The idea that in this intermediate state the soul remains in an existence separated from its body is a particularly problematic one once the human being is understood as the substantial body-soul unity. In this traditional and doctrinally defined understanding,<sup>653</sup> if the soul is to be considered as the substantial form of the body, the human soul cannot be understood as existing

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<sup>649</sup> Rahner, "The Intermediate State," 117.

<sup>650</sup> Rahner, "The Intermediate State," 118.

<sup>651</sup> Rahner, "The Intermediate State," 118.

<sup>652</sup> Rahner, "The Intermediate State," 118.

<sup>653</sup> The soul was defined as the substantial form of the body in the decree *Fidei catholicae* promulgated by the Council of Vienne, 1312. (*DH* 900, 902: 289, 290).

separated from the body that is informed by it, since “the informing is identical with the soul itself. A denial of this statement would mean the abolition of a real substantial unity of man [*sic*], whether this be admitted or not.”<sup>654</sup>

For Rahner, the act of the soul *informing* (being the form of) the body is identical with the soul itself, and, therefore, there is no such a thing as a soul separated from its body. He recalls his earlier attempt to escape the problem of the existence of the separated soul (which is inconceivable in Thomistic scholastic terms) through his hypothesis that, after death, the soul, the “finite human spirit,”<sup>655</sup> enters into a cosmic relationship with the matter of the material created reality.<sup>656</sup> This way, the soul would still be in relationship with the material reality even though the body is decayed. Peter Phan says Rahner abandoned his theory of the *pancosmicity* of the soul due to numerous criticisms to it.<sup>657</sup> Although later in life Rahner said he was not sure if he would maintain the idea of pancosmicity,<sup>658</sup> he also maintained that it contains an important intuition.<sup>659</sup>

Instead of the idea of *pancosmicity*, Rahner proposes another solution to the problem: that the “enduring relation between spirit and matter is expressed scholastically as the

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<sup>654</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 119. On the human being as the substantial body-soul unity, see Karl Rahner “The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith,” in *Theological Investigation*, vol. 6, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 153–77.

<sup>655</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 119

<sup>656</sup> Ruiz de la Peña says that this notion that, with death, the soul enters deeper relation with the whole cosmos is present in the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Emil Mersch. In Juan Luis Ruiz de la Peña, *El Hombre y su Muerte: Antropología Teológica Actual* (Burgos: Ediciones Aldecoa, S.A., 1971), 163–84, 231–41.

<sup>657</sup> See Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 119; Ruiz de la Peña, *El Hombre y su Muerte*, 261–68.

<sup>658</sup> In an interview in 1980, when questioned about this theory, Rahner responded: “I am not quite sure whether I still think that way. This idea derived simply from the fact that there was a problem in my traditional Thomistic metaphysics. On the one hand, Thomas—unlike the Augustinian tradition—holds with Aristotle that there is a very radical unity of spirit and matter. On the other, as a Christian, he speaks quite naturally, as seems unavoidable, of a ‘separated soul,’ of a soul that death has totally stripped of its body. It seems to me that this presents us with a problem that Thomas has not solved thoroughly enough” (*Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews; 1965–1982*, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, trans. ed. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 244.

<sup>659</sup> Rahner affirmed it in 1982 in a preface he wrote for the work of Silvano Zucal, *La Teologia della morte in Karl Rahner* (Trento: EDB, 1982). See Palazzi Von Büren, *La Tierra en el Cielo*, 270.

enduring ‘informedness’ of the glorified body by the perfected spiritual soul.’<sup>660</sup> Rahner says that some would object to this idea by arguing that “the identity of the glorified body and the earthly body is only ensured if some material fragment of the earthly body is found again in the glorified body.”<sup>661</sup> Rahner responds that, with the knowledge available through science about the nature of matter, it is no longer possible to maintain the idea that identity is preserved by the presence of the same material. Even theologically, “the resurrection of the body as the revitalization of some or all material particles that used to belong to the earthly body” is not conceivable.<sup>662</sup> The glorified body does not need the matter that constituted the earthly body, for the human being’s identity consists of the “free, spiritual subject, which we call ‘the soul’”<sup>663</sup> rather than of matter. Indeed, in this understanding, even the presence of the corpse in the grave is not evidence that the separated soul is in the intermediate state; nor is it proof that resurrection did not already happen for the deceased. For Rahner, this is enough reason to pose the provocative question: “So why should we not put the resurrection at that particular moment when the person’s history of freedom is finally consummated, which is to say at his [*sic*] death?”<sup>664</sup> Therefore, he insists that the eschatological thesis of the resurrection in death is not a problem.

Then, by considering that there may be philosophical arguments against his view that the intermediate state is only a framework for thinking of the afterlife and not binding doctrine, Rahner says that modern philosophical thought considers that the human being is more than matter due to his or her fundamental characteristic, which is his or her transcendent

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<sup>660</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 119–20.

<sup>661</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 120.

<sup>662</sup> Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 119.

<sup>663</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 120.

<sup>664</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 120.

capacity for freedom.<sup>665</sup> Although the human being is philosophically understood to have a spiritual life and, therefore, more than the material body, however, this does not mean that human nature can be philosophically understood as composed of different independent and autonomous substantial realities (body + soul); rather, a being is composed of different “metaphysical elements.”<sup>666</sup> This means that the human being can be understood only as a unity of spirit and matter and that there is no human spiritual act that is not, at the same time, a material one. Thinking about the human being as having a pure spiritual existence would be “simply a process of intellectual conceptualization,”<sup>667</sup> an act of mere abstraction (which, by the way, also depends on the material existence!). Therefore, Rahner argues that, if human immortality can be reasonably conceived in modern philosophical thought, it refers to the whole human being as a “being of transcendence and freedom and of absolute responsibility in hope . . . who, through his own history of freedom, acquires finality before God.”<sup>668</sup> The immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body cannot be distinguished but “can only be grasped as *being one*.”<sup>669</sup> Therefore, for the unity of the human being to be taken seriously, modern philosophical anthropology cannot conceive a human mode of existence that is completely nonmaterial or detached from the material reality. The notion of an intermediate state is only conceivable with “the greatest reservations.”<sup>670</sup>

With regard to “the traditional scholastic doctrine about the *anima as forma in se subsistens*, which can then also exist as *separata*,”<sup>671</sup> Rahner says that this doctrine is not

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<sup>665</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 120. For a more contemporary discussion of this claim, see Paul O’Callaghan, “Soul,” in *The Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Religion and Science*, ed. G. Tanzella-Nitti and A. Strumia, <http://inters.org/soul>.

<sup>666</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 120.

<sup>667</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 120–21.

<sup>668</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 121.

<sup>669</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 121.

<sup>670</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 121.

<sup>671</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 121.

affected by the conclusions mentioned above and that it can be upheld as correct. It seems that Rahner is trying to defend the traditional scholastic teaching of the *anima separata* but only to the extent that it safeguards the claim that death does not involve the destruction of the human being. If the soul as “form” is in itself subsistent, death theoretically would not mean the end/destruction of it; in short, death does not destroy the soul because it is a *forma in se subsistens*. If, however, the purpose of this doctrine is to uphold the claim that the soul remains in existence by itself—in some kind of “temporality”—without its material counterpart (the body), then this is a claim that lacks reasonable proof. Therefore, it can be the subject of debate. Thus, if it is not reasonable to affirm that the soul (as the form of the body) remains in existence *per se* without the body after death (even if conceptually it is correct to say that the soul is a *forma in se subsistens*, which in some way guarantees that death is not the total destruction of the human person), the notion of an intermediate state (in which the soul remains in existence without the body) is not reasonable and cannot “be forced on to a contemporary anthropology.”<sup>672</sup>

Given this assertion, Rahner goes on to examine what seems to be his position regarding the notion of the intermediate state:

For it is not at all certain that in theology this notion was ever more than a conceptual aid, designed to make clear (in the light of existing secular philosophical or vulgarly empirical views) that the Christian may be responsible before God for the final nature of his own free history. At the same time, he would understand from this standpoint, too, that he cannot on his side exclude from this promised finality, *a priori* and platonically, what we know as his specific historical character, which is to say his body.<sup>673</sup>

For Rahner, therefore, the notion of the intermediate state is understood to be an intellectual tool used to help Christians understand their responsibility for their history of

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<sup>672</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 122.

<sup>673</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 122.

freedom before God in death (the notion of being rewarded, purified, or punished after death). Nonetheless, the idea of a nonmaterial state (mode of existence), described as the intermediate state, is no longer an acceptable or defensible position, once it excludes that which makes the human being what he or she is—historical, the materiality of the physical body.

Finally, Rahner states that the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary—being received body and soul into God’s glory<sup>674</sup>—could be used as an argument *against* the thesis of the immediate experience of God’s glory after death in the unity of body and soul, given the dogmatic teaching that she was the only one apart from Jesus to have such a privileged destiny.<sup>675</sup> Although differences may be applied to the unique case of Mary and her role in salvation history, and therefore the justifiable dogmatic establishment of her state of blessedness, Rahner says that the doctrinal statements regarding her Assumption do not deny that other blessed people also could be counted among those experiencing God’s glory in their entire body-soul existence: “The dogma of the Blessed Virgin’s assumption does not tell us that this was a privilege which was reserved to her alone.”<sup>676</sup> Actually, Rahner says that even the defense of this dogma of the Assumption becomes easier if the notion of an intermediate state is considered unnecessary.<sup>677</sup> Although Rahner agrees that texts from Scripture and Tradition could be used to justify the relevance of the notion of an intermediate state (by not considering the glorification of the body immediately after death), he reaffirms his position by questioning whether or not the real intention of such texts is to make the point that the

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<sup>674</sup> The dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary was defined and proclaimed by Pope Pius XII in the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* on November 1, 1950. (*DH* 3900–3904:808–9). For a comprehensive study of Rahner’s understanding of this dogma, see the work of Palazzi Von Büren, *La Tierra en el Cielo*.

<sup>675</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 122.

<sup>676</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 122. Palazzi Von Büren affirms, “Rahner suggests that the question of the intermediate state and its close relationship with the dogma of the Assumption is an open question. We do not consider that our theologian, in the text *Mariologie*, pronounces himself in favor of an immediate resurrection in death that locates the deceased outside the world and immediately in the Parousia” (*La Tierra en el Cielo*, 309; translation mine).

<sup>677</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 122–23.

intermediate state is a belief that must be assented to by the faithful as dogmatically binding. He also questions if these texts from Scripture and Tradition are to be considered revealed truth or the result of an ingenuous assumption influenced by Platonic philosophy and based on the reality of death as experienced by the faithful and the presence of their corpses.<sup>678</sup>

In summary, at the conclusion of his analysis Rahner explains his view by saying that the intermediate state is not a matter of faith. It is, however, a notion conditioned by the intellectual context and worldview of a specific time. Therefore, it requires a proper hermeneutical explanation in order to be understood as a reasonable and suitable claim to be made within a specific historical context. In 2019, this proposal comes as a relief to those who have theological difficulty with this notion. As Rahner observed several decades ago: “For these people it may be a help to say that the idea is not really strictly binding from a theological point of view, and that consequently it is open to the individual believer to follow the theological arguments which he [*sic*] finds convincing.”<sup>679</sup> In this way, it seems that Rahner prefers to open the way for multiple models in understanding this particular aspect of eschatology.

## 5.2. Joseph Ratzinger on the Intermediate State

This section presents Joseph Ratzinger’s understanding of the notion of the intermediate state in *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*. For Ratzinger, the interim state of the separated soul—between death and resurrection—is foundational for the eschatological faith of the Church and cannot be denied or renounced. According to the Spanish theologian Juan Ruiz de la Peña,

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<sup>678</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 123.

<sup>679</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 123.

Ratzinger “criticizes sternly all the theological essays that deny the separated soul and the intermediate state.”<sup>680</sup>

In the foreword of the most recent edition of his book, Ratzinger, having become Pope Benedict XVI, clearly gives expression to his position regarding the theological thesis of resurrection in death. This theological thesis, defended by many theologians, especially after the Second Vatican Council, eliminates the need for a notion of the *intermediate state* once there is no interval between death and resurrection of the body, as it is believed to occur at the moment of death. Against this hypothesis, Ratzinger says:

It is first and foremost the case that the Bible does not offer a definitive anthropological conceptuality but rather utilizes diverse conceptual models. But it is just as clear that the Bible does not recognize the thought of resurrection in death.<sup>681</sup>

Based on scriptural texts, Ratzinger refutes the thesis that resurrection happens in the moment of death,<sup>682</sup> although he recognizes that in Philippians 1:23 it is explicit that, with death, the apostle believed he would “be with the Lord.” Even in this case, however, Ratzinger understands this “being with the Lord” as something that happens between death and

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<sup>680</sup> Ruiz de la Peña, *La Otra dimensión*, 345. Ruiz de la Peña also affirms that, in this work, Ratzinger abandons some of his old views on eschatology. Ruiz de la Peña does not, however, specify what those views are. (The original in Spanish: “La aparición en 1977 del manual de escatología de Ratzinger reavivó la polémica en torno a las diversas alternativas. Abandonando posturas anteriormente defendidas, el actual Prefecto de la Congregación de la Fe crítica duramente todos los ensayos teológicos que rechazan el alma separada y el estado intermedio” [Ruiz de la Peña, *La Otra dimensión*, 345]).

<sup>681</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, xix.

<sup>682</sup> Against the thesis of the immediate resurrection defended in Catholic theology by authors such as Gisbert Greshake and Gerhard Lohfink, Ratzinger says that “to begin with, one can hardly ignore the fact that the message of resurrection ‘on the third day’ posits a clear interim period between the death of the Lord and his rising again. And, more importantly, it is evident that early Christian proclamation never identified the destiny of those who die before the Parousia with the quite special event of the resurrection of Jesus” (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 111). Furthermore, in Ratzinger’s view, the outcome of the theory of “resurrection in death” leads to a more dematerialized understanding of the resurrection, once it has taken place without the need for the actual materiality of the physical body, which remains in the grave. This theory does not take into account the participation of the present world (with its materiality and history) in the new world to come. It denies the unique value of the materiality of the world and over-spiritualizes the future world and the status of the resurrected ones, whose bodies have no relation to the present world. One question that remains: Does Ratzinger take into account that the materiality/bodiliness in the new creation is not the same kind of materiality/bodiliness of the present age?



resurrection. It cannot be interpreted as a proof for the immediate resurrection in death, which, according to Ratzinger, is denied explicitly by the author of 2 Timothy 2:18, a text in which the writer criticizes those who claim “that the resurrection has already taken place.”<sup>683</sup> For Ratzinger, according to the Scriptures, Christian hope is necessarily placed in the future, and thus the intermediate state is implicitly affirmed, in which the human being is already, even before the resurrection of the body, “with the Lord.”

Ratzinger, while supporting the traditional doctrine of the immortality of the soul, defends himself against accusations of Platonism and gives his theological interpretation of life after death: “We live because we are inscribed into God’s memory. In God’s memory we are not a shadow, a mere ‘recollection.’ Remaining in God’s memory means we are alive, in a full sense of life. We are fully a ‘we.’”<sup>684</sup> Unfortunately, he does not explain at length the meaning of his notion of being in God’s memory or surviving because of being inscribed in God’s memory. Although these insights are indicators of his own attempt at offering an interpretation of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and of the intermediate state, Ratzinger simply states that even Jesus pointed to God’s memory while defending the belief in the resurrection against the Sadducees.<sup>685</sup>

With the help of this dialogical interpretation of the human being in relationship with God, as “living in God’s memory,” Ratzinger condenses his understanding of the human soul: “[The] Soul is nothing other than man’s [*sic*] capacity for relatedness with truth, with love eternal.”<sup>686</sup> And because of this capacity for relationship with God, who is eternal, the human

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<sup>683</sup> 2 Timothy 2:18; NABRE.

<sup>684</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, xx; Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Communion Books / Ignatius Press, 1990), 353–56.

<sup>685</sup> “As for the dead being raised, have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God told him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, [the] God of Isaac, and [the] God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead but of the living. You are greatly misled” (Mark 12:26-27; NABRE).

<sup>686</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, xxi, cf. 259.

being participates in God's eternity. In this interpretation of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, Ratzinger maintains the notion of the intermediate state, which is, for him, a *pilgrim state* that will end in the resurrection of the body "with God" always. The question is in what way or sense? Ratzinger proposes:

God's dialogue with us takes on flesh in Christ. Since we belong to the body of Christ, we are united to the flesh of the resurrected one, to his resurrection. . . . Beginning with our baptism, we belong to the body of the resurrected one and are in this sense already attached to our future. Never again are we totally disembodied (a mere *anima separata*) even if your pilgrim state cannot reach its end while history is still in motion.<sup>687</sup>

Regarding the Protestant position that Christianity had mistakenly overemphasized the *immortality of the soul* over the *resurrection of the body*, Ratzinger observes that this specific criticism brought forth significant changes, as evidenced in Roman Catholic liturgical books. In fact, the post-Vatican II edition of the Roman Missal (and some versions of the Order for Christian Funerals) the term *anima* has been suppressed in texts. Ratzinger laments this fact when he questions:

How was it possible to overthrow so quickly a tradition firmly rooted since the age of the early Church and always considered central? In itself, the apparent evidence of the biblical data would surely not have sufficed. Essentially, the potency of the new position stemmed from the parallel between, on the one hand, the allegedly biblical idea of the absolute indivisibility of man and, on the other, a modern anthropology, worked out on the basis of natural science, and identifying the human being with his or her body, without any remainder that might admit a soul distinct from that body. It may be conceded that the elimination of the immortality of the soul removes a possible source of conflict between faith and contemporary thought. However, this scarcely saves the Bible, since the biblical view of things is even more remote by modern-day standards.<sup>688</sup>

His argument is that in the attempt to remove the concept of the immortality of the soul from theological thinking and replace it with the concept of the resurrection of the body, the objective of making Christianity more acceptable to Modernity was not achieved. Furthermore, it

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<sup>687</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, xxi.

<sup>688</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 105–6.

does not solve the problem of what happens between the time a human being dies and the consummation of history, when the resurrection of the body will take place. If there is no soul, how is personal identity of the human being guaranteed? Is the one who is raised one the same human being who lived? Will the resurrection of the body be a kind of *creatio ex nihilo*—a re-creation out of nothing?<sup>689</sup>

To the question of what happens to the human being between death and resurrection of the body, the answer given by Catholic theology has been largely dependent on a medieval systematic formulation, namely, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Although Martin Luther denied such an idea, Ratzinger sees in his use of the biblical expression “sleep of the dead” that there is an implicit reference being made to the content of the intermediate state,<sup>690</sup> for if the human being is sleeping, then he or she is both alive and not yet resurrected; this indicates an in-between transitional state.

Through faith in the risen Lord, the intermediate state and the resurrection are linked to each other in a more thoroughgoing way than could have been the case before. Nevertheless, they remain distinct. In the New Testament and the fathers, all the images generated by Judaism for the intermediate state recur: Abraham’s bosom, paradise, altar, the tree of life, water, light.<sup>691</sup>

Ratzinger insists that the New Testament understanding of the afterlife is in tune with the Semitic intertestamental images for the situation of the dead. Such images were appropriated and understood by the early Christians in light of the resurrection of Jesus. This event is the basis for all Christian anthropological and eschatological presuppositions. This also is the case for the intermediate state, which must be understood in the light of Christian faith:

Starting out from this perception, the patristic age haltingly and the Middle Ages more self-confidently used the instruments provided by Greek thinkers so as to grasp the

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<sup>689</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 106.

<sup>690</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 119.

<sup>691</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 130.

meaning of the statement that we will not be stored up after death in caves and chambers like chattels, but clasped by that person whose love embraces us all.<sup>692</sup>

Ratzinger then reflects on biblical data to affirm that belief in the intermediate state is important and necessary for Christian faith. First, he says that the biblical notion of a “sleep of death” as an unconscious state of the dead is not found in the New Testament:

Paul’s thinking always proceeds on the basis of the Pharisaic and Rabbinical teaching to which he gives a Christological heart and depth without ever rejecting it. That those who have died in Christ are alive: this is the fundamental certitude which was able to exploit contemporary Jewish conceptions for its own purposes.<sup>693</sup>

The texts from the New Testament, especially the Pauline letters, show a gradual change from the preexisting traditions, particularly those of intertestamental Judaism. Ratzinger explains that, in both intertestamental Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism, the guiding images suggest that the just and the unjust are located in separate places and receive different treatment. He says that there are a continuation and evident similarities between these traditions, New Testament writings and the early Christians.<sup>694</sup>

In the Pauline texts, the delay of the Parousia contributed to the conditions that made the notion of the intermediate state more significant. But even in the early Pauline texts, the imminent resurrection with the expectation of Jesus’ coming did not exclude the notion of the intermediate state where the dead in Christ are “asleep,” meaning that they are in communion with him.<sup>695</sup> And even in later texts, such as 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:23, expression is

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<sup>692</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 131.

<sup>693</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 131.

<sup>694</sup> Ratzinger says that in the Synoptic Tradition, only Luke 16:19-31 and 23:43 are relevant to the topic of the “intermediate state” (Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 124). Both texts rely on images of the afterlife from Judaism of the period and the Jewish tradition that influenced the early Christians: the Bosom of Abraham and Hell in Luke 16:19-31 and Paradise in Luke 23:43. In the latter example, the Jewish image of Paradise is understood by the first Christians as “to be with Christ,” and, as Ratzinger quotes Joachim Jeremias, this became the new and specific Christian understanding of the “intermediate state” (Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 124–25).

<sup>695</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 126.

given to the apostle's longing/desire for death, what for him meant the certainty given by faith of "being with Christ."<sup>696</sup>

In his defense of the 1979 "Letter on Certain Questions in Eschatology"<sup>697</sup> issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Ratzinger says that theology's technical language and its proper interpretation must respect the "basic language of faith" and "can only be developed in peaceful continuity with the common life of the praying Church, and which cannot endure sudden ruptures."<sup>698</sup> Theology cannot ignore the tenets of faith by creating other objects of study and discussion, for it has as its task the responsibility to discuss, "to penetrate and develop" the essence of these tenets of the Church's faith, "rather than to change or replace it."<sup>699</sup> In other words, a theological reflection that undermines one of the tenets of the Church's faith, such as belief in "everlasting life," is not valid. Therefore, *if* such approaches to theology deny, for instance, the existence of the soul or of the intermediate state *and thus, as a consequence*, undermine faith in "everlasting life," they do not contribute to an acceptable theology. Given this claim, one might ask: could it thus be affirmed that the denial of the intermediate state is acceptable if it does not undermine the faith?

After presenting the first affirmation of the document, specifically that the resurrection of the dead means the resurrection of the whole person, Ratzinger goes on to the second and more controversial theme, which is the intermediate state and fundamental importance of faith in the resurrection of the soul:

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<sup>696</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 128.

<sup>697</sup> Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to All Bishops, *Recentiores episcoporum synodi*, May 17, 1979, *AAS* 71 (1979): 940–42; *DH* 4650–59:1027–28; or [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19790517\\_escatologia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19790517_escatologia_en.html) (Accessed on June 18, 2018).

<sup>698</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 244.

<sup>699</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 244.

As for the intermediate state “between” death and resurrection, “the Church” affirms “the continuity and independent existence of the spiritual element in man [*sic*] after death,” an element which is “endowed with consciousness and will,” so that the “human I” continues in being. In order to refer to this element, the Church employs the term “soul.” The Roman document is aware that this word “soul” appears in the Bible with varying significations. Yet it insists that “there is no solid reason for rejecting this term. Much more is it considered as a verbal instrument which is simply unavoidable for the retaining of the Church’s faith.” The word “soul,” as a vehicle for a fundamental aspect of the Christian hope, is here reckoned to be part of that fundamental language of faith whose anchor is the faith of the Church. That language is indispensable for communion in the reality in which faith believes, and therefore is not merely something that the theologian can take up or leave alone at his discretion.<sup>700</sup>

Although the document does not use the term “intermediate state” explicitly, as Ratzinger poses, it is entailed in the idea that the immortal soul continues to exist after death. This notion cannot be denied as if this denial were a possible outcome of theological reflection and interpretation, since it belongs to the Church’s fundamental language to express its faith and hope.

Although Ratzinger affirms that the concept of the “soul” is not “clearly”<sup>701</sup> defined in the Scriptures, it is clear in the New Testament, in conformity with the Jewish belief of the time, “that in between the first Easter and our own resurrection human beings do not sink into nothingness.”<sup>702</sup>

The idea of an intermediate state is essentially communicating that the human “I” does not cease to exist with death, but it survives between death and resurrection through the spiritual element called “soul,” which is “with the Lord.” According to Ratzinger, another idea that it communicates is that this state of being “with the Lord” (as a spiritual element) is not identical to the state of the human being in the Resurrection, although the identity is preserved. Christian theological and philosophical understanding of the human being as the body-soul unity is

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<sup>700</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 245.

<sup>701</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 246.

<sup>702</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 246.

credited to Thomas Aquinas. The term “soul” was, however, already a key element of Christian faith and prayer at the time of the fathers of the Church, who used this term to express “the certainty that the human “I” would endure undestroyed, in continuity, beyond death.”<sup>703</sup>

Furthermore, Ratzinger asserts that the ideas of “immortality” and “resurrection,” considered by many theologians as oppositional or competing claims,<sup>704</sup> are instead “complementary affirmations for the single, albeit phased, hope of which Christians were certain.”<sup>705</sup>

The problem, for Ratzinger, is that Catholic theology, under the influence of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, ended up manifesting the crisis of tradition especially after the Second Vatican Council, when “the living subject of tradition”<sup>706</sup> was demoted as something merely belonging to the past as “pre-conciliar.”<sup>707</sup> Viewed in this way, after the council, everything in Catholic theology needed to be thought of in accordance with the spirit of the times. What followed was an effort to overshadow the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. As Ratzinger recalls, this can be seen, for example, in the Dutch Catechism and in the almost complete disappearance of the term “soul” in Catholic liturgical texts.<sup>708</sup>

Therefore, for Ratzinger, this subtle and increasing rejection of the value and importance of tradition was responsible for the tacit abandonment of the term “soul” and of the doctrine of its immortality, which was considered to be a later addendum to doctrine from Greek Hellenism

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<sup>703</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 246–47.

<sup>704</sup> See the famous article from Cullmann, “Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?” 9–53. In this article, the author asserts that the emphasis on the Greek idea of the “immortality of the soul” undermined the genuine Christian (New Testament) belief in the “resurrection of the dead.”

<sup>705</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 245–46.

<sup>706</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 248.

<sup>707</sup> Ratzinger says: “The crisis became manifest after the Second Vatican Council: under the impact of the claims of the wholly new, the earlier continuum of tradition was relegated to the abandoned space of the ‘pre-conciliar.’ The impression arose that Christianity in all its aspects was to be sketched out anew” (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 248).

<sup>708</sup> “It speaks volumes for the speed with which all this happened that within a year of the Council the Dutch Catechism had already put the doctrine of the immortality of the soul behind it, substituting in its place a remarkably obscure anthropology of resurrection-by-stages. Indeed, the Missal of Paul VI dared to speak of the soul only here and there, and that in timorous fashion, otherwise avoiding all mention of it where possible. As for the German rite of burial, it has, so far as I can see, obliterated it altogether” (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 248).

and alien to the teachings of the New Testament. This theological and overly historical-critical posture toward tradition rejected the understanding of the soul and its immortality and, as Ratzinger argues, disregarded the development of doctrine in fidelity to the tradition.<sup>709</sup> As a consequence, the anthropological doctrine that developed over the course of centuries, with its understanding of the human soul, although always faithful to its source even when appropriating elements from philosophy, came under suspicion in the theological realm.

Ratzinger also takes account of an alternative attempt to solve the problem of what happens between death and resurrection by questioning the speculation of those “Catholic theologians who in the last fifty years and especially since the Second Vatican Council . . . [i]n continuity with the ideas of Troeltsch and Barth . . . stress the complete incommensurability of time and eternity.”<sup>710</sup> In their view, “the person who dies steps outside of time”<sup>711</sup> and enters, so to speak, “immediately” into the reality where the events of the consummation of the world happen for him or her: the second coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead:

There is, therefore, no “intermediate state.” We have no need of the soul in order to preserve the identity of the human being. “Being with the Lord” and resurrection from the dead are the same thing. A solution of striking simplicity has been found: resurrection happens in death.<sup>712</sup>

Against this thesis of the immediate resurrection after death is the fact that the body of the deceased human being remains in the sepulcher while this same human being achieves resurrection outside of time. If the human being is not divisible (or composed of two distinguishable and separable elements, i.e., body and soul) and if he or she immediately finds, outside of time, his or her resurrection, Ratzinger questions the nature of this human being who finds experiences resurrection in death. If there is no soul and if the body remains in the grave,

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<sup>709</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 251.

<sup>710</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 251. Ratzinger does not identify who are these Catholic theologians.

<sup>711</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 251.

<sup>712</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 252.



what is it that experience resurrection? Moreover, Ratzinger does not see the use of the term “soul” to describe this subject that is alive after death particularly problematic since the subject has already undergone resurrection, once the subject is altogether distinct and separate from the material historical body in the tomb.<sup>713</sup> Finally, Ratzinger argues that to make the claim that a human being is already resurrected while his or her body remains in the grave is dualism. Furthermore, this theory posits that the present world and the cosmos (with its temporal and historical character) and the world to come (with its eternal character) are two separate realities that exist simultaneously. If this is the case, how are we to understand the future of the present world? For Ratzinger, this way of thinking is dubious and unacceptable.<sup>714</sup> “This is why reference to the word ‘soul,’ that indispensable verbal dwelling-place of the common content of doctrine, is indeed obligatory.”<sup>715</sup> The idea of immortality of the soul does not overshadow the idea of resurrection and presupposes the idea of the intermediate state between death and resurrection.

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<sup>713</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 252–53.

<sup>714</sup> “The true function of the idea of the soul’s immortality is to preserve a *real hold on that of the resurrection of the flesh*. The thesis of resurrection in death dematerializes the resurrection. . . . Denial of the soul and affirmation of resurrection in death mean a spiritualistic theory of immortality, which regards as impossible true resurrection and the salvation of the world as a whole. The doctrine of immortality that tells us that our ‘I’ is, as it were, confirmed in God through Christ’s resurrection and thereby tends expectantly towards the future resurrection—this alone can safeguard the realism of the Bible” (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 267). The problem is, however, that “resurrection of the flesh” is an expression used to express a reality that cannot be explained and even imagined.

<sup>715</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 254–55. As Ratzinger argues, the word “soul” is “indispensable” and “obligatory.” It cannot simply be denied or replaced. When he says that the ideas of the “resurrection of the whole man [*sic*] and of the immortality of the soul” are “realities that belong inseparably with each other” (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 254), he is refuting the accusation, common among theologians after the council, that the idea of the immortality of the soul overshadowed the central element of faith, which is the resurrection. For him, however, this accusation was a misguided and erroneous assumption since both ideas together are needed to safeguard and provide a foundation for the Christian belief in “eternal life.” Of course, with this affirmation, it is implied for Ratzinger that those two ideas require the belief in an intermediate state between death and resurrection. If the human soul is immortal, if resurrection is an event that will involve the whole person (body and soul), and if in the present moment the bodies of the dead are in their graves, there must therefore be an intermediate state for the immortal souls before the resurrection.

According to Ratzinger, even science, in acknowledging the “relative independence”<sup>716</sup> between mind/consciousness/self and body, leaves open for discussion the continuation of the soul/mind/self/consciousness after death. Science itself cannot deny such an idea because it goes beyond its scope.<sup>717</sup>

In his defense of doctrine and his accusation against theologians who propose a dualistic understanding of human nature, Ratzinger observes that the position reached by Christian theological anthropology necessarily “transcends both monism and dualism.”<sup>718</sup> For him, a monistic position is as dangerous as a dualistic one. Relying on the thought of Thomas Aquinas and Greshake, Ratzinger says “that man [*sic*] throughout life ‘interiorizes’ matter”<sup>719</sup> and does not abandon the connection with matter even after death, when the soul “in its continuing existence, retains within itself the matter of its life, and therefore tends impatiently towards the risen Christ, towards the new unity of spirit and matter which in him has been opened for it.”<sup>720</sup> From this, even indirectly, at least something can be grasped about the author’s view of personal existence in the intermediate state: *after death, the soul retains its connection with matter while awaiting resurrection.*

By reflecting on the question of what ensures eternal life, Ratzinger responds by saying that it is “not the isolated I, but the experience of love. Love wills eternity for the beloved and therefore for itself.”<sup>721</sup> He turns the focus from the claim that the soul is immortal in itself to a different claim, namely, that the soul is immortal because it is in a dialogical relationship with

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<sup>716</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 255.

<sup>717</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 255–56.

<sup>718</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 258.

<sup>719</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 258.

<sup>720</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 258.

<sup>721</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 259.

eternal *truth* and *love*.<sup>722</sup> The human being is immortal because he or she is in relationship with God, who is eternal. The capacity of the human being for this relationship is the soul:

Immortality does not inhere in a human being but rests on a relation, on a *relationship*, with what is eternal, what makes eternity meaningful. . . . Soul is nothing other than man's capacity for relatedness with truth, with love eternal. . . . [B]ecause in the spirit and soul of man matter is integrated, matter attains in him to the fulfilled completeness of the resurrection.<sup>723</sup>

Therefore, Ratzinger defines the human soul as that which gives the human being its capacity for immortality.

As was shown earlier, Ratzinger refutes the eschatological thesis of resurrection in death and upholds belief in an intermediate state between death and resurrection. For him, in this intermediate state, the soul preserves the human being's identity until it is finally reunited with its body in the resurrection. If belief in the immortality and survival of the separated soul after death cannot be abandoned, and if the thesis of resurrection in death is not acceptable, the intermediate state of the soul is a necessary belief that resonates with tradition. It can be neither ignored nor denied.

### **5.3. Comparing Rahner and Ratzinger on the Intermediate State**

Karl Rahner does not consider that belief in the intermediate state is necessary; nor does he consider the denial of the intermediate state to be heretical. Joseph Ratzinger, on the other hand, argues that belief in the intermediate state is undeniable and unavoidable, precisely because it is connected with the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.<sup>724</sup> Ratzinger defends

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<sup>722</sup> "Immortality is not something we achieve. Though it is a gift inherent in creation it is not something which just happens to occur in nature. Were it so, it would be merely a *fata morgana*. Immortality rests upon a relationship in which we are given a share, but by which, in sharing it, we are claimed in turn" (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 157).

<sup>723</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 259.

<sup>724</sup> Although we are aware that the intermediate state is connected to and dependent on the belief in the immortality of the soul, a deeper study on this specific matter is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

belief in the immortal soul as the “bearer” of the intermediate state,<sup>725</sup> and, therefore, this notion stems from the belief in the immortality of the soul and its survival as a spiritual element separated from its body between death and resurrection. Even if the temporality of the dead (or of the separated soul) is not the same as historical time, the intermediate state is understood to occur parallel to the events of the present world.

With regard to the use of the terms “immortality of the soul” and “intermediate state,” Ratzinger has expressed concerns about the changes in theology brought about by the Second Vatican Council. He argues that this lack of consideration for the tradition represents a postconciliar change that was carried out by the majority of the bishops of the world under the influence of several major and respected theologians. In Ratzinger’s estimation, these changes are not considered to be a possible a movement or transformation of the “living subject of tradition.” In his opinion, this movement of renewal, instead of trying to reinterpret the old in a new way by being faithful to the truth of the tradition, actually relegated some elements of the tradition to the status of “pre-conciliar” and even obliterated their presence in theological discourse, as if these elements were part of a past that has nothing to communicate to the present. Ratzinger’s criticism seems to be addressing what he perceives to be a dismissive way of dealing with elements of the faith that for him are strongly rooted in tradition, specifically the concept of soul, its immortality, and its survival in the intermediate state.

By way of example, Ratzinger explains that there was a tendency among theologians to deny and/or abandon the traditional doctrinal understanding that the human soul is immortal by suggesting that this belief was the product of Hellenistic thinking that was foreign to the Jewish mind-set of the first century and the anthropology of the first Christians. What Ratzinger does throughout his work is defend the idea that the Christian appropriation of the concept of the

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<sup>725</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 246.

immortality of the soul gave a new and genuine meaning to the soul, as seen in the light of faith and hope in the resurrection. According to Ratzinger, such thinking was in line with Jewish traditions that were foundational for the writings contained in the New Testament. Therefore, he argues, the Christian understanding of immortality is *not* a Platonic one. Rather, the soul is immortal because it is the human capacity for relationship with the *truth* and *eternal love* that is God. After death, the human being is alive because of this capacity for relationship, but in an imperfect and incomplete mode of existence as he or she awaits his or her fulfillment in the resurrection of the body on the last day. Between death and resurrection, although “being with Christ,” the separated soul is in an incomplete mode of existence awaiting the fullness of eternal life that will happen in the resurrection of the body.

In his consideration of an alternative view, Karl Rahner observes that an important theological position that calls into question the immortality of the soul is the “resurrection in death.” Rahner demonstrates an openness to this thesis as long as it is theologically grounded. According to Rahner, there are no scriptural prohibitions to the thesis of resurrection at the moment of death. Mindful of the fact that the logical outcome of this thesis is the abandonment of the notion of the intermediate state, Rahner claims that the thesis is not heretical because in his assessment of the intermediate state, it is nothing more than a framework that tradition used in order to understand what happens to the human being between death and resurrection—and, therefore, is not binding to faith. For Rahner, the notion of the intermediate state is an intellectual tool used to help Christians understand their responsibility for their history of freedom before God in death (the notion of being rewarded, purified, or punished after death). Nonetheless, a nonmaterial state (mode of existence), such as the idea of the intermediate state

suggests, is no longer acceptable once it excludes what makes the human being what he or she historically is, the materiality of his or her physical body.

For Ratzinger, contrary to Rahner, there is no scriptural support for the thesis of the resurrection in death. Ratzinger refutes this idea by saying that it is inconsistent and does not provide convincing answers to questions about the status of the new resurrected body and its relationship with the old physical body that is still lying in the grave. Ratzinger argues that the thesis of the resurrection in death makes resurrection a completely disincarnated or disembodied event, suggestive of a return to the Platonic idea of immortality, disconnected from the present world and unable to participate in the future world inasmuch as it is already taking place. Therefore, if belief in the immortality and survival of the soul cannot be denied or abandoned, and if the thesis of the resurrection in death is not acceptable, the intermediate state of the soul, as previously noted, is a necessary belief in accord with tradition and cannot be ignored or denied. For Ratzinger, the intermediate state is not a mere *intellectual framework* or *way of thinking*, as Rahner affirms. Rather, it is an important notion present in intertestamental Judaism and preserved by the early Christians and by tradition with a new and genuine meaning, transformed and resignified in the light of faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is evident that there is disparity in their interpretations of Scripture regarding some key texts that deal with eschatological notions. An example of this disparity is the treatment that each one gives to the biblical notion of Sheol. For Rahner, it does not support and cannot be related to the traditional idea of the intermediate state because the notion of Sheol (Eccl 9:6, 10; Job 10:21; 26:5) is incompatible with the idea of happiness experienced by those souls that are already enjoying the beatific vision in heaven. On the other hand, for Ratzinger, the Old Testament notion of Sheol (cf. Pss 49:9, 12, 14, 20; 88:3, 5; 89:48) was an important basis for early

Christian belief in the intermediate state as it contains the idea that somehow the dead remain alive after death.

Although Rahner agrees that texts from Scripture and Tradition can be used to justify the pertinence of the notion of an intermediate state, he reaffirms his position that these texts are not sufficient proof to make a binding dogmatic claim. For Rahner, they are the result of an ingenuous assumption influenced by Platonic philosophy and based on the experience of the faithful regarding bodily death and the presence of corpses. Rahner's intention is not to deny the existence of the intermediate state but to make the point that it needs to be understood as an intellectual framework for thinking about human existence after death. Belief in the intermediate state, for Rahner, is not binding to faith and the notion itself allows for ongoing interpretation.

Ratzinger, for his part, wants to preserve the notion of the intermediate state to safeguard traditional doctrinal belief and to protect the faithful from views or interpretations that can lead to deviations and error. Rahner, for his part, wants to assist the faithful in understanding that this notion is not obligatory but only an assumption derived from the belief that somehow the human being faces his or her just recompense after death (beatific vision, purification, or damnation), and, therefore, there is room for theological inquiry and debate.

For the contemporary world, Rahner's position seems to be more appropriate, since one of the purposes of theology is to assist the faithful in dealing with the challenges and new questions that are being raised. For instance, recent scientific findings regarding the human being and new insights have important implications on our understanding of human nature. Theology must take as one of its starting points what is scientifically known about the world instead of disputing it.

Clearly, the notion of the intermediate state is deeply related to the Catholic understanding of the separated soul after death. At the same time, allowing the faithful to consider that this notion is a matter that is open for discussion and inquiry provides for more freedom for theological speculation and reflection on human nature. Such openness makes it possible to engage in a more honest and productive dialogue with contemporary thinkers and the questions that they raise for inquiry and investigation. Ultimately, Rahner's approach to understanding the intermediate state helps theologians and ministers to respond to questions and concerns, both old and new, that are always present and prevalent among the faithful who throughout life ponder the mysteries of death and the afterlife.



## Chapter 6. The Indissoluble Unity of the Human Being in the Present and in the Future: Relocating Resurrection at the Center of Eschatological Discourse

[...] so far as I can tell, *most people simply don't know what orthodox Christian belief is*. It is assumed that Christians believe in life after death, as opposed to denying any survival after death, and that every sort of life after death must therefore be the same kind of (Christian) thing. The idea that "life after death" might include variations embodying significantly different beliefs about God and the world, and significantly different agendas for how people might live in the present, has simply never occurred to most modern Western people. In particular, most people have little or no idea what the word *resurrection* actually means or why Christians say they believe it.<sup>726</sup>

The first part of this dissertation examined a series of examples taken from ministerial practice with the people of God in situations where the death of someone is about to occur or already has occurred. In situations such as these, a need arises for competent theological reflection based upon Catholic teachings about the mystery of death. Such reflection is required during sacramental rites and liturgical rituals as well as during moments of pastoral accompaniment that involve the dying, their loved ones and care-givers, and after death occurs, those who are bereaved, and even later, those mourners who continue to be affected by grief and loss.

During sacramental rites and liturgical rituals, theological understandings of human nature and death are presented in accord with selected biblical texts and liturgical prayers and invitations to prayer. These understandings, which build upon foundations drawn from theological anthropology and eschatology, are explained and expressed by ministers, both ordained and lay, who give voice to beliefs, convictions and interpretations that are informed and influenced by the minister's personal background, theological formation and pastoral insights. The minister's composition and presentation of readings, prayers, preaching, teaching and gestures come up against the preconceptions and beliefs already present in the moral, theological

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<sup>726</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne [An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers], 2008), 12.

and cultural imaginations of those who are faced with the mystery of death and trying to make meaning of the reality. These many dimensions of imagination, even if not well understood, or solidly formulated, since some people resist thinking or talking about death, are the result of multiple religious, cultural, and psychological factors.<sup>727</sup> Rarely, however, do ministers pay attention to the short- and long-term consequences of interpersonal encounters with differing views on human nature and death. Simply put, when the complexities and ambiguities inherent in official Catholic teachings and practices are set side by side with the diverse beliefs, fantasies and misconceptions about death that are sincerely held by average Catholics, it is evident that the efficacy and pertinence of the Church's teachings and traditions regarding death are more confounding than instructive for many contemporary Catholics throughout the world.<sup>728</sup>

Although an examination of the variety of influences claiming to be Catholic and informing how Catholics think about death would be a research topic worth investigating, especially given the power of social media, the present dissertation has focused more narrowly on the notion of the separated soul as it is presented in Church teachings and ministerial practice *and* the reception and appropriation of this notion in popular religious imagination.

Even in the absence of scientific research on what the average Catholic really thinks or has in mind in terms of images and beliefs regarding anthropological and eschatological understandings of death, the state of the human being in the afterlife and the resurrection of the body, it is paramount that those entrusted with the responsibility of ministering to those endeavoring to deal with the mystery of death know what the Church actually teaches. It is

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<sup>727</sup> See Felipe R. Vázquez Palacios, "Older People's Imaginarium about Life after Death," *Journal Kairós Gerontologia* 17no. 7 (May 2014): 37-48.

<sup>728</sup> William Saunders, "Where Does the Soul Go After We Die?" *The Arlington Catholic Herald*, November 11, 1999 <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/where-does-the-soul-go-after-we-die.html>. (Accessed on October 11, 2018).

Marcelo Costa, "#143 Doutrina Católica – O Fogo do Purgatório. O Mesmo Fogo Que Atormenta Os Condenados No Inferno," November 2, 2017, <https://youtu.be/RlzOOKfnv8s>. ; Tradição Católica Deo Grátias, "Os Vários Estágios do Purgatorio," November 14, 2017, <https://youtu.be/r2LchIP-mXI>. (Accessed on February 24, 2019).

critical that they understand the interpretative limitations associated with Church teachings on eschatology and that they are attuned to the imperative challenges required by contemporary thought.<sup>729</sup> If death, the separated soul, the afterlife and the resurrection of the body are to be made intelligible to contemporary Catholics on religious terms, ministers also must have an understanding and appreciation for the demands and challenge of new times.<sup>730</sup>

To this end, the present chapter offers a proposal on how the concept of the human soul that appears in the Church's eschatological assertions can be explained more adequately using a hermeneutic that takes into consideration what the Church aims to communicate. In doing so, this chapter also sets forth a proposal for understanding the Church's eschatological language as being fundamentally metaphorical. Therefore, the Church's eschatological assertions always demand proper interpretation and cannot be understood as literal or precise descriptions of the future.<sup>731</sup> As John Thiel notes, "eschatology requires a special hermeneutics precisely because the objects of its knowledge are unavailable, and unavailable in a way that encourages error in their proper interpretation."<sup>732</sup>

As the concluding chapter of this dissertation, the objective is to make a contribution to the theological formation of ordained and lay ministers on how the eschatological beliefs of the church could be better taught and communicated in ministerial practice, remembering that

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<sup>729</sup> See Karl Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. IV, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press / London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 323-346. In this essay, Rahner proposes specific hermeneutic principles for the interpretation of the Church's eschatological assertions. See also Marie Murphy, *New Images of the Last Things: Karl Rahner on Death and Life After Death* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 52-81. The author explains how the theology of Karl Rahner on death and the afterlife encompasses teaching of the Church while expressing it in dialogue with contemporary thought.

<sup>730</sup> See Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Interpretation of Eschatology," *Concilium* 41 (1969): 44.

<sup>731</sup> See Zachary Hayes, *Visions of a Future: A Study of Christian Eschatology*, New Theology Studies, Vol. 8 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 89-94.

<sup>732</sup> John E. Thiel, *Icons of Hope: The "Last Things" in Catholic Imagination* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 7.

“eschatology always influences and shapes the conduct of life and vice versa.”<sup>733</sup> The primary claim is that all of the Catholic Church’s eschatological affirmations must be interpreted in the light of and within the horizon of belief in the resurrection of the body, which is based on faith in Jesus’ resurrection, and is the central hermeneutical principle for the understanding of Christian eschatological hope.<sup>734</sup> Based on the practical theological observations made in Chapter One and Four and on the systematic theological analyses made in Chapters Two, Three, and Five, Chapter Six argues that resurrection always needs to be at the center of the Church’s teaching on eschatological matters and also at the center of its theologically informed practice.

### **6.1. Structure and Goal of the Chapter**

Given the insights gleaned from the previous five chapters, this chapter affirms that all eschatological and anthropological assertions made in Catholic theology about the human being must be understood as referring to the one “single and total”<sup>735</sup> being which is “an absolute unity.”<sup>736</sup> The human being must be considered as the substantial body-soul unity in its origin, throughout its history, and in its final destiny.<sup>737</sup> In order to advance this integrated view of the human being within eschatological discourse, this chapter focuses on the following points:

a.) It draws attention to the need to examine and take into consideration that Catholic eschatological and anthropological assertions are always inter-connected. They have as their

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<sup>733</sup> Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 26.

<sup>734</sup> Similar arguments can be found in Thiel, *Icons of Hope*, 17-23. See also Anton Grabner-Haider, “The Biblical Understanding of ‘Resurrection’ and ‘Glorification’,” *Concilium* 41 (1969):66-81; Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2011), 144-160; and in Luiz Carlos Susin, “Conclusion: Resurrection: The Heart of Life and Faith,” *Concilium* 5 (2006): 125-130.

<sup>735</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 432 and 434.

<sup>736</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 435.

<sup>737</sup> Karl Rahner, “The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith,” in *Theological Investigations*. Vol. 6, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 153-177.

foundation the Christological claims made about Jesus in the New Testament, especially in light of the paschal mystery. As Jesus' life and death are read through his resurrection, so also Christians understand and make meaning of human life and destiny through the same lens of the paschal mystery.<sup>738</sup>

b.) It proposes Karl Rahner's "hermeneutics of eschatological assertions"<sup>739</sup> as a secure guiding principle for understanding and proclaiming the eschatological assertions of the Church. By following these criteria which are present in the theses that Rahner proposes, it is possible to have a more comprehensive and integrative view of the human being in his/her particular/personal and collective/universal destiny.

c.) It also examines Rahner's particular interpretation of Thomas Aquinas' philosophical and theological description of the human being in the substantial unity as the 'best available' way for understanding the Church's consideration of the human being as body and soul without falling into the danger of dualism, but rather taking the substantial unity seriously in what it radically communicates about the oneness and wholeness of human being. Basically, for Rahner the metaphysical concepts of soul and body are contained in each other and do not describe separable parts or objective elements of the person's constitution, but encompass irreducible and inseparable dimensions of the human being.<sup>740</sup> As a consequence, everything that is said theologically about the human soul is also a discourse about the human body and vice-versa. In this view, for example, the eschatological assertions about the immortal soul (or the eschatology of the soul) express the dimension of personal responsibility of an individual regarding his/her

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<sup>738</sup> See Rahner, *Foundations*, 264-285; PHEME PERKINS, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984); WOLFHART PANNENBERG, *Jesus: God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe, (London: SCM, 1964); and HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990).

<sup>739</sup> Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of the Eschatological Assertions."

<sup>740</sup> Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of the Eschatological Assertions," 340-1; Rahner, "The Body in the Order of Salvation," 77; Rahner, *Foundations*, 432-447.

destiny as a whole human being (body and soul). In the same way, the eschatological discourse on the resurrection of the body expresses the participation of the whole human being (body and soul) in an event that represents the collective and universal fulfillment of all human beings and the whole created reality: the new heaven and the new earth.

d.) Based on this integral vision of eschatological hope, resurrection of the body as human participation in Jesus' resurrection must be understood as the central theme, the horizon, the supporting axis and the foundation of all eschatological assertions made by the Church.<sup>741</sup>

Therefore, faith in the resurrection is to be treated as more than simply one dimension of eschatological hope. Faith in the resurrection also needs to be present in our discourse on the human being's destiny after death. As important as particular judgment and personal responsibility are for the Church, assertions about intermediary eschatology or the eschatology of the immortal soul should not be understood or explained as isolated from the final collective and universal destiny of all human beings that takes place at the resurrection of the body. The resurrection, an embodied final act, is the goal and the reason of what is symbolized or meant by intermediary eschatological assertions.<sup>742</sup> There are two different sets of eschatological assertions that are to be understood as inseparably connected, the personal and the collective. The *personal* eschatological assertions are expressed through the notion of the individual immortal and spiritual soul undergoing the particular judgment, giving emphasis to personal responsibility and freedom. These personal assertions relate to the provisional personal journey toward the definitive end by the use of the metaphor of the immortal soul. The *collective*

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<sup>741</sup> See Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," 335; Thiel, *Icons of Hope*, 17-23.

<sup>742</sup> Thiel says that "[t]he doctrine of the resurrection inscribes the entire network of belief, so that its use as an interpretive rule of faith conveys the authentic values of the tradition." (*Icons of Hope*, 18); and "[t]his central Christian belief can serve as a hermeneutical principle for representing the last things. [...] The continuity that the doctrine of bodily resurrection affirms between the human person in history and the human person in heavenly life warrants theological speculation about eschatological events." (*Icons of Hope*, 20).

eschatological assertions are expressed through the notion of the general resurrection of the body, or of the dead, emphasizing the collective judgment and the universal destiny of the whole creation of which human beings are part. These collective assertions affirm the definitive and final state of reality through the metaphor of the embodied resurrection. Although being part of these collective assertions, resurrection must be present in all discourse about eschatology since it is the expression of the definitive and permanent embodied end that signifies the finality of all things.

## **6.2. Catholic Theological Anthropology and Eschatology in Light of Christology**

“Christian anthropology and Christian eschatology are ultimately Christology, in the unity (where alone they are possible and comprehensible) of the different phases of the beginning, the present and the completed end.”<sup>743</sup>

Faced with the mystery of death and the consummation of the ultimate destiny of the human being, Catholic theologians find themselves at the crossroads of speculation where theological anthropology intersects with eschatology. At death, the Catholic theological anthropology of the human being, understood as the substantial body-soul unity, is challenged by the Catholic eschatological belief in the survival of the immortal soul between death and resurrection.<sup>744</sup> There is a mutual dependency and determination between the anthropological and eschatological discourses. Affirmations regarding the future eschatological reality of human beings are always affirmations about the future of the human being who lives in the present. Such affirmations are revelatory of important aspects of human existence, yet they need to be

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<sup>743</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of the Eschatological Assertions,” 335.

<sup>744</sup> For an analysis of the distinctive differences and scholarly debates between Catholic and Protestant theologians on the question of the immortal separated soul after death, see Juan Luis Ruiz de la Peña, *La Otra Dimensión* (Madrid: EAPSA, 1975), 323-359, and Yates, *Between Death and Resurrection*, 1-29.

understood in a manner that is predominantly symbolic rather than conceptual inasmuch as these affirmations are not objective descriptions of the future.<sup>745</sup>

As Catholic doctrine maintains a two-phased eschatological understanding, two ‘assertions’ are made in the Church’s official teachings: first, the immortal soul receives God’s judgment after death (intermediate eschatology); and second, the destiny of the human being is the resurrection of the body and everlasting life (final eschatology).<sup>746</sup> Foundational to the proper understanding of these assertions is their grounding in the paschal mystery. For this reason, Catholic discourse, informed as it is by both theological anthropology and eschatology, must be based on God’s revelation through the mystery of the Incarnation. Only in the light of the humanity of Jesus Christ is it possible to understand the human being in the present and in the future.<sup>747</sup> And as Christian faith and hope regarding the future is built upon Christological foundations, all that happened to Jesus is the parameter for what will happen to human beings.<sup>748</sup> Everything that can be said theologically about faith and hope in the resurrection and eternal life, as the future proclaimed by the Church’s teaching, is based on Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

It is in this sense, given the purposes of this dissertation, that the hiatus between Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection on the third day is somehow revelatory of what happens between the human being’s death and the resurrection of the dead. In conformity with the Apostles’ Creed, Catholic teaching affirms and professes that after Jesus died and was buried, “he descended into hell” and “on the third day he rose again.”<sup>749</sup> The Church’s Catechism (1994)

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<sup>745</sup> Hayes, *Visions of a Future*, 89-94.

<sup>746</sup> Cándido Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond* (Staten Island, N.Y.: St. Pauls, 2009), 310-323, 346-366, 392-404 (‘Final Eschatology’), 418-434, 463-532 (‘Intermediate Eschatology’).

<sup>747</sup> “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.” *GS 22*, at The Holy See. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) (Accessed on November 17, 2018).

<sup>748</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of the Eschatological Assertions,” 335.

<sup>749</sup> Cf. CCC 631-658:164-171. See also Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent Into Hell*, (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans



basically reaffirms the content of the Catechism of Council of Trent by restating that with Jesus' death, his soul separated from his body and went to the abode of the dead or hell.<sup>750</sup> Although the current Catechism recognizes this creedal formulation serves as an affirmation of Jesus' real death, along with his conquest and victory over death, the text still relates to Jesus' death as separation between body and soul by relying in Scriptural readings that do not justify the affirmation that Jesus' separated soul went to hell.<sup>751</sup> Drawing upon the insight of Gregory of Nyssa, the Catechism affirms that: "as death is produced by the separation of the human components, so Resurrection is achieved by the union of the two."<sup>752</sup>

An omission in the text of the Catechism that is of critical importance to the argument in this chapter is that there is little to no acknowledgment of the symbolic meaning of the expression 'he descended into hell.' While a fuller discussion of the significance of this doctrine,

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Publishing Company, 2007), 9-29; Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Christ's Descent Into Hell: John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger, and Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 115-130; Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Communio Books / Ignatius Press, 2004), 293-310. Alyssa Lyra Pitstick is cited here as a reference and source due to her exposition of the traditional framework of the Church's teaching on Jesus' descent into hell as it is in the Catechism (CCC). However, it must be acknowledged here that her critiques against Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological interpretation of Jesus' descent into hell do not represent the position of the author of the present dissertation, who appreciates and agrees with Balthasar's recognition of the symbolic nature of the theme of Jesus' descent into hell. Her critiques accusing Balthasar's theological reflection as contrary to the Church's teaching fails to acknowledge the symbolism of the affirmation of 'Jesus' descent into hell' and the importance and depth of the interpretation that Balthasar gives to it. For more on this topic, see the discussion between Pitstick and Edward T. Oakes on her position at Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, and Edward T. Oakes, "Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy: An Exchange," *First Things*, 168 (Dec 2006): 25-32; Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, and Edward T. Oakes, "More on Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy," (Letter to the Editor) *First Things*, 169 (January 2007):16-19; Avery Dulles, et al, "Responses to 'Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy'," *First Things*, 171 (March 2007):5-14.

<sup>750</sup> Cf. Lyra Pitstick, *Christ's Descent Into Hell*, 115-121. The 1994 *Catechism* says that "Jesus, like all men [sic], experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead." (CCC 632:164). The text further states that in Jesus' "human soul united to his divine person, the dead Christ went down to the realm of the dead." (CCC 637:165). Other expressions used to describe Jesus' descent into hell are: 'the realm of the dead' (CCC 632:164); 'the abode of the dead' (CCC 633:164); "the depths of death" (CCC 635:165); "the limbo of the Fathers" (Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 2).

<sup>751</sup> 1 Pet 3:18-19; Acts 3:15; Rom 8:11; I Cor 15:20; Heb 13:20. The Catechism of the Council of Trent uses Psalm 15:10 as a literal proof that Jesus's soul went to hell: "but we are firmly to believe that His soul itself, really and substantially, descend thither, according to this conclusive testimony of David: *Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell.*" In <http://www.catholicapologetics.info/thechurch/catechism/ApostlesCreed05.shtml>. (Accessed on February 26, 2019). See also Pitstick, *Christ's Descent Into Hell*, 117.

<sup>752</sup> CCC 650:170. The *Catechism* makes reference to: St. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Christi res*. Orat. I: PG 46, 617B; cf. also *DH* 325:117, 359:129, 369:133-134.

which is established as a tenet of the faith of the Church,<sup>753</sup> is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that the *Catechism* does affirm Jesus' death and resurrection in terms of the separation and *re-union* of his soul and body. However, no symbolic consideration is given to its meaning. The separation and union of body and soul are treated simply with conceptual and factual objectivity, without considering its symbolism. It also is worth noting that while the biblical passages<sup>754</sup> cited in the *Catechism* are used as foundational texts for grounding belief in the descent of Jesus into hell, proper exegetical analysis of what these texts are intended to communicate is lacking with regard to the term soul. Jesus' descent into hell as a tenet of faith is highly symbolic and, therefore, casting it in terms of objective knowledge can be misleading. If the hiatus of three days between Jesus' death and resurrection, which is expressed by the affirmation of his 'descent into hell,' is taken literally, it can be used, for example, as offering support to the doctrine of the separated soul in the intermediate state.

Questions regarding 'what part' of Jesus' humanity went into hell seem to distract from the real symbolic meaning of the event by way of an unnecessary objective oversimplification. Hans Urs von Balthasar, however, adds to the traditional Catholic conception of Jesus' impassible proclamation of the good news to the dead in his descent into hell a component of suffering: Jesus' profound solidarity with human suffering even in death.<sup>755</sup>

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<sup>753</sup> In the first part of a study comparing the Catholic doctrine of Christ's descent into hell and von Balthasar's reinterpretation of it, Alyssa Pitstick describes the Catholic tradition regarding this subject through magisterial texts, scriptural use in the tradition, liturgy and art—these two are in a chapter entitled "*Magisterium and Sensus fidelium: Liturgy and Art*". See Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 1-84.

<sup>754</sup> See Eph 4:9-10 or 1 Pet 3:18-19.

<sup>755</sup> Cf. Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 148-181. See also John R. Sachs, "Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell," in *Theological Studies* 52 (1991): 244-246. Another example of theological treatment of the theme comes from Joseph Ratzinger, who without mentioning that there was a separation between Jesus' body and soul, develops a theological reflection about the meaning of human death by saying what the doctrine of Jesus' descent into hell means for him: "In my view it is only at this point that we come face to face with the problem of what death really is, what happens when someone dies, that is, enters into the fate of death. Confronted with this question, we all have to admit our embarrassment. No one really knows the answer because we all live on this side of death and are unfamiliar with the experience of death. But perhaps we can try to begin formulating an answer by starting again from Jesus' cry on the Cross, which we found to contain the heart of

The Gospel narratives that address the time between the death of Jesus and his resurrection (Matt 27:50-66; Mk 15:37-47; Lk 23:46-56; Jn 19:30-42), treat Jesus as a dead human being: people dealing with procedures for the burial of his body, preparing and placing it into a tomb where it remains until the resurrection. In the scriptures and in tradition, the theological interpretations given to the interval of time between the death of Jesus and his resurrection, including his descent into hell, are post-paschal symbolic understandings that endeavor to explain the salvific meaning of his death by taking into consideration both his divinity and humanity. There is, nonetheless, a hiatus between Jesus' death and resurrection that is shrouded in silence.<sup>756</sup> He was dead and this fact belongs to objective history. As Walter Kasper asserts, Jesus' 'three days' in the tomb points out God's salvific intervention into a real historical event: a human being who was dead and buried, and who was raised from the dead.<sup>757</sup> This Christological data informs theological anthropology and eschatology in what can be known, that the historical situation of a human being, marked by the reality of death, will receive God's intervention. 'Three days' provides a perspective on reality and sets the limits of human death. Because of Jesus human history is salvific history, the dead will rise. But the 'three days' also reveal something about the silent hiatus between the death of a human being and the resurrection of the dead at the end of time: human death as the territory of silence, of no words, of the unknown. This silence about what happens between human death and resurrection is broken by the assertions of the intermediate eschatology. These assertions can be problematic if they are read literally as if describing objective facts. Due to the highly metaphorical nature of these eschatological assertions, they require and demand interpretation. As theology understands

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what Jesus' descent into hell, his sharing of man's mortal fate, really means." (Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 298).

<sup>756</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 49-52.

<sup>757</sup> Cf. Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 146-147.

the totality of human existence, from the beginning of life to its final consummation in the light of the paschal mystery, Jesus remains the main hermeneutical criterion for the interpretation of the mystery of human nature in life and death.

### 6.3. The Challenge of Speaking Rightly about Eschatological Hope

#### 6.3.1. “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements”<sup>758</sup>

In his famous essay “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,”<sup>759</sup> Karl Rahner presents seven theses regarding the correct interpretation of eschatological teaching of the Church. In the first thesis, Rahner affirms that Christian eschatological assertions must be interpreted as assertions about real future events or realities.<sup>760</sup> At the same time such assertions deal with “the Absolute Future,”<sup>761</sup> that belongs to God and “lies beyond control of human knowledge or action.”<sup>762</sup> This future concerns the total and single historical human being who is inseparable from the human community and the world.<sup>763</sup> For Rahner, this absolute future is God.<sup>764</sup>

The second thesis asserts the necessity of taking God’s omniscience seriously. God knows the future events of human history and can communicate them to human beings who are able to understand them.<sup>765</sup> What is possible to be known about the future of human beings and

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<sup>758</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 326-346.

<sup>759</sup> Peter Phan calls Rahner’s article as “one of the most influential essays on the hermeneutics of eschatological statements in the history of Roman Catholic Theology.” (Peter Phan, “Current Theology,” 515). See also Peter Phan, *Eternity in Time: A Study of Karl Rahner’s Eschatology* (Selinsgrove PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1988), 67-76; Peter Phan, “Roman Catholic Theology,” 221-225; John E. Thiel, *Icons of Hope*, 7-12; Edward Schillebeeckx, “The Interpretation of Eschatology,” 44, footnote 1 - Schillebeeckx cites Rahner’s article as the Catholic attempt to make rules for the interpretation of eschatological assertions.

<sup>760</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 326.

<sup>761</sup> Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 69.

<sup>762</sup> Thiel, *Icons of Hope*, 7.

<sup>763</sup> Cf. Rahner, *Foundations*, 444-445.

<sup>764</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 446.

<sup>765</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 326-329.

of the world is not the result of human speculation, but of what has been historically revealed by God. However, Rahner states that knowledge of such things must be understood as an “*a priori* sphere for eschatological assertions, a framework within which they are to be understood”<sup>766</sup> and interpreted.

The third thesis describes a two-part framework. First, since the exact date of the end time has yet to be revealed, all eschatological assertions have an essential “character of hiddenness”<sup>767</sup> and mystery, and, therefore, these assertions do not predict future events, but remain as objects of Christian faith and hope. Second, the eschatological assertions are to be interpreted into the “essential historicity”<sup>768</sup> of the human beings, and therefore, the understanding of these assertions about the future depend on the understanding of the human past and history, individually and collectively. Rahner goes on to affirm that this prognosis or “knowledge of the future,”<sup>769</sup> concerns the salvation of the whole human being (“and not just of some dimensions”<sup>770</sup> of him/her), and his/her self-knowledge in the present.<sup>771</sup>

In the fourth thesis, Rahner states that “knowledge of the future will be knowledge of the futurity of the present: eschatological knowledge is knowledge of the eschatological present.”<sup>772</sup> The present is already deeply touched by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and so, in a very real way, the present already bears and points to the reality and final fullness of our hope.<sup>773</sup> At the same time, eschatological assertions are about the futurity of this present. As such, they

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<sup>766</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 329. See also Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 69.

<sup>767</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 329.

<sup>768</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 330.

<sup>769</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 331.

<sup>770</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 331.

<sup>771</sup> Cf. Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 70.

<sup>772</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 332.

<sup>773</sup> As Phan puts it: “the hermeneutics of eschatological assertions is ultimately the interpretation of the individual’s present self-understanding in terms of his or her future fulfillment; it is, in other words, anthropology conjugated in the future tense. In Christian terms, this would mean that eschatology is the future fulfillment of the salvation already wrought by Jesus Christ and granted by God to human beings.” (Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 70).

maintain the character of hiddenness and mystery. While something of this future can be grasped and known, it remains “impenetrable and uncontrollable.”<sup>774</sup>

The fifth thesis is the central feature of Rahner’s argument.<sup>775</sup> He states that the experience in the present of God’s salvific grace in Christ is the source of all eschatological assertions,<sup>776</sup> which are to be understood as describing the “present situation of salvation transposed into the future mode of fulfillment.”<sup>777</sup> In other words, there is a real way in which the present experience of God’s salvific grace enables believers to infer something of the final fulfillment we look to in hope. Two points must be kept in mind. First, biblical texts should not be read as foreseen reports of future events; and second, the present looks forward to a fulfillment that is still to happen in the future.<sup>778</sup>

In the sixth thesis, Rahner presents five of the consequences of the fifth thesis previously mentioned. First, as eschatological assertions are based on the Church’s experience of God’s saving, victorious action in Jesus, the future possibilities of salvation and damnation for human persons may not be understood as being on the same level or as equally possible or likely alternatives.<sup>779</sup> Because Christian faith professes the God-given freedom of the human person, the Church teaches that eternal loss as the rejection of God is a possibility.<sup>780</sup> However, the central affirmation of Christian hope professed by the Church is “the victorious grace of Christ which brings the world to its fulfilment.”<sup>781</sup> Because of human freedom, and because the future is unpredictable, “true eschatological discourse must exclude the presumptuous knowledge of a

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<sup>774</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 333.

<sup>775</sup> Cf. Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 71; Daniel T. Pekarske, *Abstracts of Karl Rahner’s Theological Investigations 1-23*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 121.

<sup>776</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 336.

<sup>777</sup> Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 71.

<sup>778</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 337. See also Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 71-72; and Phan, “Roman Catholic Theology,” 222.

<sup>779</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 338.

<sup>780</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 338; see also Rahner, *Foundations*, 443.

<sup>781</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 340.

universal apocatastasis.”<sup>782</sup> For the same reason, the Church teaches that no one can know with certainty before death whether one will be saved or damned. At the same time, it is important to note that while the Church does officially declare many persons to be saints, it has never officially declared that a single person is, in fact, damned. Damnation is only a possibility and nothing more can be said.<sup>783</sup> Given this consequence, as outlined by Rahner, it seems that the only reasonable Christian option for the Church and for Catholics is to hope and to pray that all men and women will be saved.<sup>784</sup>

Of particular importance is a second consequence Rahner draws concerning eschatological affirmations about the human being as a body-soul unity. For Rahner, “all eschatological assertions have the one totality of man [sic] in mind, which cannot be neatly divided into two parts, body and soul.”<sup>785</sup> Everything that is said about the future fulfillment of the human being is said about the whole human being. Although all eschatological assertions should be understood as referring to the totality of the human being, Rahner states that it is an indisputable fact that these assertions are “marked by the same two-fold dualism which is unavoidable in anthropological assertions.”<sup>786</sup> Everything that is said eschatologically about the ‘one’ human being, is not said only in regard to one part, component, or dimension of him/her, but about the human being as a whole. Viewed from the perspective of theological anthropology, the human being is at once a spiritual and material individual existence with a personal history who is at the same time part of a larger community/society. Rahner notes the consequences for how we must speak about our final hope:

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<sup>782</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 338. For more on the theme of apocatastasis or universal salvation, see Sachs, “Current Eschatology: 227-254.

<sup>783</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 340.

<sup>784</sup> Sachs, “Current Eschatology,” 253-4.

<sup>785</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 340.

<sup>786</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 341.

It must be a universal and an individual eschatology, because man [sic] is always both individual and member of society and neither can be completely absorbed in the other, nor can everything be said about man [sic] in one statement alone. It must speak of man [sic] as personal spirit and as corporal being and hence express his [sic] fulfilment as spirit – person and corporal being: but the two assertions cannot be adequately reduced to one in which they could be absorbed; and the two assertions cannot envisage objects which are adequately distinct from one another.<sup>787</sup>

It seems that Rahner especially wishes to warn against and avoid the dualism often associated with the term soul. His interpretation and use of Thomas Aquinas's philosophical description of the human being as the substantial unity of body and soul is especially telling:

Man [sic] consists of 'body and soul'. But in Thomist metaphysics, which are perfectly justifiable, one is bound to say that man [sic] consists of *materia prima*, and of *anima* as *unica forma* and *actualitas* of this *materia prima*, so that 'body' already implies the informing actuality of the 'soul' and hence is not another part of man beside the soul. And body and soul, if the doctrine of *anima-forma-corporis* is really understood and taken seriously, are two meta-physical principles of one single being, and not two beings, each of which could be met with experimentally.<sup>788</sup>

For Rahner, the body and the soul, as metaphysical principles, are not parts that can be considered separately from one another. The proper concept of the body implies *prime matter* that is already informed by the spiritual soul in such a manner that there can be no body without a soul. Rahner continues:

However, even if we prescind from all this, we must at any rate affirm that every assertion about the body (as the reality of man) implies an assertion about the soul, and vice versa. [...] If these obvious matters are not borne in mind in all anthropological assertions, 'body' and 'soul' are taken to be two entities which are only subsequently

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<sup>787</sup> Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements," 340-341.

<sup>788</sup> Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements," 340-341 (Footnote 16). Marie Murphy notes "Rahner prefers to speak of the human person as being made up of matter and spirit rather than body and soul." (Marie Murphy, *New Images of the Last Things: Karl Rahner on Death and Life After Death* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 7 and 53). She points out that in his understanding, the human being "is irrevocably anchored in matter by our very nature." (Murphy, *New Images*, 53). Rahner's understanding of the body as the result of the union of the human spirit seeking self-fulfillment in *prime matter* makes the understanding of soul and body as separated inconceivable. This understanding of the human being as the union of spirit and matter, and therefore, as completely related to the material world is present in many of Rahner's works: Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych (New York: Continuum, 1994), 248-254, 323-330, 379-383, 406-408; Karl Rahner, "Reflections on Methodology in Theology," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 11 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 88. See also Karl Rahner, "The Secret of life," 141-152; "The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith," 153-177; "The Body in the Order of Salvation," 71-89.



combined in unity – a unity which cannot then be really substantial; and though one may verbally profess the philosophical and dogmatic doctrine of the soul as the form of the body, one has really lost sight of it, though the soul is the form of the body by its inmost essence and is so, in order to be spirit.<sup>789</sup>

Eschatological assertions about the soul are not concerned with one ‘part’ or ‘component’ of the human being. For Rahner, these assertions are about the whole human being that is always an embodied existence. This view has consequences for the manner in which the afterlife is understood through the images presented through the eschatological assertions about the separated immortal soul. If these assertions are referring to the human being who lived, they contain or are referring to the total embodied human existence. These assertions are not describing objectively the journey of a disembodied part or entity of the human being. Rather, they are communicating metaphorically what needs to be said about the total human being in its multidimensional reality. As already noted, these two kinds of eschatological assertions remain necessary, but mutually dependent, and not implying separable parts. They communicate the complexity of the human being. As Rahner observes:

Eschatology is concerned with the fulfilment of the individual as individual spirit – person which comes with death as the end of the individual history. Eschatology is also concerned with the fulfilment of humanity in the resurrection of the flesh as the end of the bodily history of the world. But in each case, it is concerned in a different way with the whole man. It cannot be read as two sets of statements about two different things, each of which can simply be taken separately. And yet the two sets of statements do not simply mean the same thing, so that one set could be eliminated in favour of the other as being for instance either too mythological or too philosophical.<sup>790</sup>

Therefore, although assertions regarding the intermediate eschatology of the soul and assertions about the final fulfillment of the resurrection of the body are necessary, they cannot be understood separated from one another. Assertions about the soul in the afterlife emphasize the historical personal existence of the individual human being, while assertions about the

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<sup>789</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 341 (Footnote 16).

<sup>790</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 341.

resurrection of the body try to communicate the collective future fulfillment of all human beings. For Rahner, these assertions cannot be understood uncoupled from each other for both are needed for the whole eschatological reality to be explained. Together, they express the complexity of the human being both as an individual and as part of a community. In this sense, the spiritual soul reality is an expression of the individual destiny of the historical person, understood in terms of the immortality of the soul and the particular judgment. The material/embodied reality is an expression of the universal destiny of all human beings, since the resurrection of the body is understood in terms of the collective eschatological fulfillment of the general judgment.<sup>791</sup>

In the sixth thesis on the hermeneutics of the eschatological assertions, as a third consequence Rahner underscores the dual character of the Parousia as immanent in the present yet remaining an expectation for the future. As a fourth consequence (a claim highlighted earlier in this chapter), Rahner remembers that Christology serves as the hermeneutical criterion for that which can be affirmed in eschatology: “Anything that cannot be read and understood as a Christological assertion is not a genuine eschatological assertion.”<sup>792</sup> Christ—and therefore, Christology—is the center and norm for the interpretation of eschatology.<sup>793</sup> Rahner concludes the sixth thesis by affirming, as a fifth consequence, that history and “time will have an end,”<sup>794</sup> when human’s real experience of salvation in Christ will be manifest in the consummation of the world, God’s final victory. This will be expressed as judgment, particular as individual

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<sup>791</sup> Rahner articulates together these two sets of assertions on the individual and collective eschatology in the small, but emblematic chapter on “Eschatology” in *Foundations of Christian Faith*. See Rahner, *Foundations*, 431-447.

<sup>792</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 343.

<sup>793</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 342-3. Peter Phan comments at this point the unity of Christology, Theological Anthropology, and Eschatology in Rahner’s thought: “Further, one can see here the unity and compactness of Rahner’s anthropology, theology, Christology and eschatology, with Christology holding the center. To speak about humanity is to speak about God and vice versa. But one cannot speak about humanity and God except in the true God-man, Jesus. And when this Christ-talk is conjugated in the future sense, eschatology emerges.” (Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 73).

<sup>794</sup> Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements,” 343.

fulfillment and general as the world's fulfillment. "In so far as it is the fulfilment of the resurrection of Christ, it is called the resurrection of the flesh and the transfiguration of the world."<sup>795</sup>

Finally, in the seventh thesis, Rahner highlights the metaphorical nature of eschatological assertions and the difficulty that exists in distinguishing between form and content, between the images and the things represented by these images.<sup>796</sup> However, as it is not possible to describe in an objective manner those realities that are envisioned, images are always necessary in order to give expression to eschatological beliefs. When reformulations are necessary for a better present-day understanding, the new images used are always interpretations of the old eschatological assertions from Scripture and patristic tradition that cannot be disregarded or replaced.<sup>797</sup> New interpretations are to take into account that eschatological assertions are always "assertions of Christology and anthropology in terms of the fulfilment."<sup>798</sup>

Rahner's hermeneutical principles remain important tools for the interpretation and understanding of eschatological assertions as expressions of human fulfillment through Christ *in the present* that serve as a revelation of what *is yet to come*. As Peter Phan states, Rahner

[...] defines eschatology as the transposition of anthropology into its mode of future fulfillment in Christological terms, and hence as a reading from the present into the future rather than a reading from the future into the present as in apocalyptic. Such understanding of eschatology has profound implications for the interpretation of heaven and hell, of the unitary character of human fulfillment, of the presence of the kingdom of God, and for the Christological reduction of the contents of eschatology. Lastly, the interpretation and reformulation of eschatological assertions is not a stripping away of their images but a reclothing in more intelligible, more culturally appropriate images.<sup>799</sup>

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<sup>795</sup> Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements," 343-4.

<sup>796</sup> Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements," 344.

<sup>797</sup> Cf. Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements," 344-6. Cf. Peter Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 74. In another article, Peter Phan describes this seventh thesis by saying that "eschatological assertions need to be re-expressed in images and languages appropriated to each age." (Peter Phan, "Roman Catholic Theology," 223).

<sup>798</sup> Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements," 346.

<sup>799</sup> Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 75.

### 6.3.2. Rahner's Interpretation of the Soul as an Expression of the Unity of the Human Being

Among the hermeneutical criteria proposed by Rahner in his interpretation of eschatological assertions, his unified understanding of body and soul prevents interpreters from falling into dualisms that tend to separate the human being into different parts. In his famous essay "On the Theology of Death," while not denying the Church's traditional description of death as the separation of the body and the soul, Rahner recognizes the problematic character of asserting that the human soul continues to exist after death.<sup>800</sup> For him, this description of death fails in asserting death as an event that affects in a decisive way the whole human being, including the soul.<sup>801</sup> Mindful of the soul's unity with the body, Rahner contends that the soul is somehow united with the whole material reality or universe. In doing so, he proposes that the relationship between the soul and the material world does not cease with death, but gains a new dimension as the soul becomes *pancosmic*, or fully open to the whole universe, once it is no longer limited by the structure of its body.<sup>802</sup>

As discussed in Chapter Six, later in life Rahner abandoned this notion of the *pancosmicity* of the soul after death. The important point to be made here is that Rahner's hypothesis regarding the soul's pancosmicity was his reaction to the traditional notion of death as the separation between body and soul, in which the human soul is understood as becoming

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<sup>800</sup> Cf. Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961 [1969 - 8<sup>th</sup> impression]), 16-17. Cf. David Albert Jones, *Approaching the End: A Theological Exploration of Death and Dying. Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 189.

<sup>801</sup> Cf. Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, 18.

<sup>802</sup> Cf. Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, 19-26. This hypothesis when applied to Jesus' death, affirms the effects of redemption: "In this way—by using his 'pancosmic' theory of the separated soul—Rahner is able to give an explanation as to how the death of Christ actually effects a real change in the world: metaphysical anthropology sheds light on soteriology. Yet soteriology reflects back on anthropology: the death of a Christian cannot be considered separately from the death of Christ, for it has been transformed by Christ's death." (Jones, *Approaching the End*, 159). For Rahner's concept of pancosmicity of the soul, see also Murphy, *New Images*, 13-18.

*acosmic*.<sup>803</sup> For Rahner, this traditional understanding was influenced by a Neoplatonic notion, according to which, people were lead to believe that when the human soul is disconnected from the world, it is nearer to God.<sup>804</sup>

As David A. Jones suggests, Rahner's conviction that death affects the *whole* person did not change in his later writings. However, he observes that *if* the traditional understanding of death - as separation of the body from the soul - was considered as acceptable "among many possible descriptions,"<sup>805</sup> Rahner, while acknowledging this understanding, upheld his conviction that 'the resurrection of the body' is a "useful mythology to express what cannot be expressed in simple univocal terms."<sup>806</sup> Jones says that in interviews done in 1980, towards the final years of his life, Rahner affirmed the impossibility of knowledge about the realities after death and that his understanding of "the radical unity of matter and spirit"<sup>807</sup> in the human being led him later in life to abandon "any conception altogether that involved a separation of soul from body."<sup>808</sup> Although images can be used to describe the reality of death and the afterlife, it is always necessary to have in mind that the reality these images describe is more mysterious than any other reality.<sup>809</sup>

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<sup>803</sup> By *acosmic*, Rahner means that the soul separated from the body is in a state of non-relationship with or "totally out of the world" (Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, 19). He also says that "[t]he separation of the soul and body is usually taken almost as a matter of course to imply that the spiritual soul becomes *acosmic*. This conception prevails because instinctively or, to speak more precisely, under the persistent influence of a Neoplatonic mentality, we tend to assume that the appearance of the soul before God, which, as faith teaches, takes place at death, is a contrary concept to the soul's belonging to the world, as though lack of relation to matter and nearness to God must increase in direct ration." (Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, 19). See also Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 83-85.

<sup>804</sup> Cf. Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, 19.

<sup>805</sup> Jones, *Approaching the End*, 151. See also Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 83-84.

<sup>806</sup> Jones, *Approaching the End*, 171.

<sup>807</sup> Jones, *Approaching the End*, 171.

<sup>808</sup> Jones, *Approaching the End*, 172.

<sup>809</sup> Cf. Jones, *Approaching the End*, 185-6.

#### 6.4. The Centrality of the Resurrection of the Body in Eschatological Discourse

The transfigured corporeality of which revelation speaks seems to indicate that the body not only obtains a perfect plasticity in relation to the spirit of man as supernaturally perfected and divinized by grace, but also that corporeality does not necessarily coincide with the exclusion of localization in any other place. A corporeality which is the actual expression of spirit, though concrete, remains open for maintaining or entering into free and unhampered relations with everything. In this way the glorified body seems to become the perfect expression of the enduring relation of the glorified person to the cosmos as a whole.<sup>810</sup>

The eschatological affirmation of the resurrection of the body expresses the participation of the whole human being (body and soul) in an event that represents the fulfillment of all human beings and the whole created reality: the new heaven and the new earth.

Although the resurrection of the body is the expression of God's salvific intervention in the concreteness of human death, according to Rahner: "Death simply *is* more mysterious than other more mundane realities that human beings encounter."<sup>811</sup> Therefore, even given the fact that the Church's eschatological assertions are highly metaphorical and allegorical, this dimension of the mystery and incomprehensibility of death is a further factor that must be taken into consideration in any discourse about the afterlife.<sup>812</sup> Such assertions express deep human realities concerning faith and hope through images that are not meant to be objective descriptions of the afterlife. For this reason, it is important to have a critical understanding of why the resurrection of the body must be the central criterion for the interpretation of eschatological assertions.

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<sup>810</sup> Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, 25-26.

<sup>811</sup> Jones, *Approaching the End*, 186.

<sup>812</sup> See Hayes, *Visions of a Future*, 89-94; Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements," 344-5; Phan, *Eternity in Time*, 74.

#### **6.4.1. The Centrality of the Resurrection of the Body in Christian Life: Challenging the Denial of Death**

The reality of human death and the complexity of the experience as lived out by those who approach death or those who lose someone to death, demand of Catholic theologians and ministers alike an approach that contemplates and integrates both the theological understanding of death and such complexities. Each person's death is experienced in a different way depending on the many factors which are associated with the experience: relatedness to the one who is deceased (relationship, personal knowledge, emotional attachment, responsibility, etc.), the conditions under which death occurred (age of the deceased, causal and contributing factors such as age, illness, organ failure, accident, suicide, homicide etc.), personal and psychological factors (degree of physical well-being of survivors, general mental health conditions, capacity for resilience, etc.), support networks, cultural understandings of death, and finally, the religious understanding of death.

The capacity to empathize with the dying as well as with those related in some way to the dying or the deceased (or at the very least, to acknowledge with respect the complexity of the situation) is a requirement for those ministers who deal with the reality of death on a daily basis.<sup>813</sup> Their role and responsibility is not to minimize or suppress the pain that is experienced by those who find themselves in such situations. Rather, the presence and accompaniment of the minister, along with that of a community of faith, is the initial and, often the most important witness, to the power and mystery of Christ's triumph over death. By taking into consideration the specificities of each situation (and the general complexity of how people anticipate their own

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<sup>813</sup> See Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1978), (especially 157-181, 245-268); Renold Blank, *Escatologia da Pessoa: Vida, Morte e Ressurreição (Escatologia I)* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2000), 34-41.

death and deal with the death of loved ones and others), ministerial presence and pastoral accompaniment contribute to an experience of eschatological hope.

Christian faith affirms that bodily death is not the absolute end of life (1 Cor 15:55-57). Indeed, there are revealed truths in the Scriptures that are taught, believed and handed on, but not necessarily in the immediacy of death situations. The tenets of faith that are professed are highly symbolic and do not offer specific, precise, meaningful or satisfactory responses to existential questions regarding the fate of the person who has died, questions such as *Where is he? What has happened to her?*<sup>814</sup> The eschatological teachings of the Church give expression to the possibilities of what happens after death, such as the particular judgment and subsequent outcomes for individuals, but these teachings are not meant to give ‘information’ and may not be the best way to provide comfort and consolation.<sup>815</sup>

#### **6.4.1.1. A Consideration of the *Realidade Brasileira*: Ecclesial Responses and Resistance to the Eschatological Vision of Vatican II**

The General Instruction of the adapted Portuguese translation of the *Order of Funeral Rites (Ordo Exsequiarum)* prepared and adapted to the Brazilian reality and culture by the Brazilian Conference of Catholic Bishops,<sup>816</sup> states that on December 4, 1963, the Second Vatican Council, through the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, set forth a new liturgical direction by declaring that funeral rituals should emphasize the paschal character of Christian death. Pope Paul VI determined that this conciliar document should follow the orientations set forth by the theologians who helped to

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<sup>814</sup> See Renold Blank, *Creio na Ressurreição dos Mortos* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2014); Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning: The Life of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 108-116.

<sup>815</sup> See Melissa Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); Thomas J. Long and Thomas Lynch, *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief and the Community of Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

<sup>816</sup> Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil, also known as CNBB.



develop the new funeral ritual.<sup>817</sup> The adapted translation of the ritual, prepared for the Brazilian context with the permission of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 1971,<sup>818</sup> contains a contextual peculiarity. It does not take into consideration a funeral mass, and it explicitly says in the instruction that it was prepared which the thinking that a non-ordained minister would serve as the celebrant. The document does not explain the reasons for this decision, but the situation of the Church in Brazil may explain it. Within the Brazilian context, a lack of ordained ministers in many parts of the country, the number of parishioners and the frequency of daily burials, and the fact that burials need to occur within 24 hours of death, and often sooner, makes the planning of individual funeral masses (Liturgies of Christian Burial) rarely possible. Precisely for this reason, it is a common practice to celebrate memorial masses on the seventh day, thirty day, and one-year anniversary of the death.<sup>819</sup>

This post-Vatican II emphasis on the paschal mystery that is present in the prayers of the 1969 new ritual (*Ordo Exequiarum*) continues to be criticized by some Brazilian bishops and priests. Such complaints revolve around the complete silence of the new ritual on traditional themes based upon the intermediate eschatology of the *quattuor novissima* (the Four Last Things) as the particular judgment, purgatory, heaven and hell, as well as the almost complete absence of the word soul in the text.<sup>820</sup> In fact, in many places in Brazil, when a funeral mass is celebrated, which occurs on the occasion of the death of a priest, a religious or a non-ordained

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<sup>817</sup> CNBB, *Nossa Páscoa: Subsídios para a Celebração da Esperança*, 2 ed. (São Paulo: Paulus, 2004), 11. It quotes the Second Vatican Council Constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium*, n.81: “The rite for the burial of the dead should express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death, and should correspond more closely to the circumstances and traditions found in various regions. This holds good also for the liturgical color to be used.” In Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* (December 4, 1963) § 81, at The Holy See, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html) (Accessed in November 17, 2018).

<sup>818</sup> CNBB, *Nossa Páscoa: Subsídios para a Celebração da Esperança*, 12.

<sup>819</sup> See more in Noemi Dariva, *Lembrando nossos mortos: Celebrações para velórios, 7º e 30º dias, finados e outras datas* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2017).

<sup>820</sup> The absence of the word soul after the Second Vatican Council in the new Roman Missal and in the Ritual of Funerals is criticized by Joseph Ratzinger in *Eschatology* as already mentioned in this dissertation. Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 105, 248.

minister, these liturgies are not referred to as a “Mass for the Dead,” but rather, as a “Mass of the Resurrection” or a “Mass of Easter” celebrated for that particular person. Other masses commonly celebrated some days after the burial are referred to as “Memorial Masses,” also commonly referred to as “Masses of the Resurrection.” It is important to note that even in the title of the Brazilian-Portuguese translation of the ritual, “Our Easter,” the emphasis on the ‘paschal mystery’ persists. However, an ecclesial dilemma also exists as a number of priests continue to criticize these post-conciliar changes, specifically in the prayers and in the theological/pastoral discourse regarding the Christian view of death and the afterlife, are only partially faithful to the Church’s teachings. Through their words and actions, they mislead the people and create confusion as they bear witness, with absolute certainty, to things that are in reality unknown and impossible to know.

Although belief in Jesus’ resurrection and hope in the resurrection of the dead are foundational for Christian faith, Catholic doctrine does not present the claim that upon death the resurrection of the human being immediately takes place. Even though, as Rahner states, resurrection in death is a possibility and a speculative claim that has been theologically defended, it does not mean that everyone is saved, or that there is certainty about the fate of the dead. Even when the Church proclaims that “the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God” (Wis 3:1-9) this biblical claim does not deny the fact that the resurrection of the body remains a hope, an expectancy that envisions what is yet to be fully realized, even for those who are already enjoying the beatific vision in heaven. Prayers and preaching about death that associate the dead with the paschal mystery, giving emphasis to Jesus’ death and victory over death through the resurrection do not necessarily deny the dimension of expectancy and hope of Christian faith. Neither do they deny the importance of human responsibility and the consequences of the present

embodied life for the future that is to come.<sup>821</sup> How meaning is made in the minds and hearts of the faithful depends in large measure on how death and Christian hope are addressed by those entrusted with responsibility for communicating the faith of the Church effectively and in truth. It is only natural that the living may want to hear that the dead are well and be assured that they are in heaven. Nonetheless, in death, the participation of the faithful deceased in the paschal mystery must be in continuity with what began at Baptism and was enacted throughout a Christian life. Human destiny is not independent of the life lived and entails personal responsibility. Understood in this way, this association of personal death with the paschal mystery communicates a sense of eschatological hope that depends on the life lived, not a certainty of salvation or relief from anxieties of death.

However, this affirmation of personal responsibility, accountability and freedom does not put salvation and damnation on the same level. As God is the only definitive fulfillment of human existence, it is pastorally important that believers are helped and encouraged to trust in the mercy of God. God already accomplished human salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection. Therefore, based in God's love and grace, people must be encouraged to hope in the salvation of the deceased ones. Such an encouragement to trust in God's mercy does not eliminate or discourage personal and communal responsibility. On the contrary, as Christian hope, it demands and reinforces engagement in a way of living that is the expression of the salvation that is hoped for.<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>821</sup> 2 Cor 5:10 - "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil" (NABRE).

<sup>822</sup> See Sachs, "Current Eschatology," 252-4.

#### 6.4.1.2. A Consideration of the Ecumenical Reality of the World Church: The Need for a Coherent Vision of Christian Eschatology

In the first part of his book *Surprised by Hope*, N. T. Wright, the renowned New Testament scholar and retired Anglican bishop, strongly criticizes Christian funeral practices (prayers, homilies, songs, etc.) that fail to emphasize the Christian vision of a “sure and certain hope in the resurrection of the dead.”<sup>823</sup> Instead, such funeral practices present what he describes as a “vague and fuzzy optimism that somehow things may work out in the end.”<sup>824</sup> For Wright, these practices reinforce an erroneous and non-biblical view that the dead are alive and fulfilled in a heaven that is a kind of Platonic other world.<sup>825</sup> This view confuses people with regard to the foundations of Christian faith in the past and present, and a vision of Christian hope for the future. According to Wright, two key insights from the Scriptures draw us beyond ourselves. They include: 1) the resurrection of the body as an embodied future life, and 2) the new creation as the renovation / transformation of the present world, not as a replacement of it, and which entails the importance of human action and responsibility as part of the present reality that will be transformed. Wright goes on to argue that Christian belief in an immortal soul as a part of the person who survives bodily death and goes to heaven has “minimal support in the Bible.”<sup>826</sup> The word soul refers to the whole person or personality, and the notion of immortality belongs only to God. It is not an intrinsic characteristic of the human soul.<sup>827</sup>

Wright is clear in affirming the fact that while making such judgments, his real focus is his own Anglican Christian tradition. Over time, his criticisms have become more pertinent to the work of this dissertation. In effect, they serve analogically in ways that get people thinking

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<sup>823</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 25.

<sup>824</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 25.

<sup>825</sup> Cf. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 3-30.

<sup>826</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 28.

<sup>827</sup> Cf. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 28, 152.

about distinctive Catholic beliefs in the afterlife. He goes on to explain that a certain change occurred that turned a once robust belief in the resurrection on the part of the primitive Christian community that believed the present world was in continuity with a future one, to a distorted and disembodied view of the afterlife as “mere spiritualized survival.”<sup>828</sup> Wright’s critique upholds and advances the centrality of the resurrection for all Christians, and for Christian discourse about death. He observes:

What we say about death and resurrection gives shape and color to everything else. If we are not careful, we will offer merely a ‘hope’ that is no longer a surprise, no longer able to transform lives and communities in the present, no longer generated by the resurrection of Jesus himself and looking forward to the promised new heavens and new earth.<sup>829</sup>

Theological discourse on eschatological realities needs to communicate in accessible and effective ways a view of the afterlife that is radically connected with present reality and promotes the active engagement of individual Christians and Christian communities with the risen Christ in the transformation of the world. Christian hope in the resurrection entails participation in Jesus’ resurrection in the present. It is a hope that should be manifested in our embodied lives and in the material world, a world that is part of a cosmos that, St. Paul reminds us, will one day be transformed with us after the pattern of Christ’s own resurrection into a new creation – a new heavens and a new earth. Christian faith in the resurrection as it is expressed in 1 Cor 15, entails the eternal ‘embodiedness’ of the new creation even though that ‘embodiedness’ will be something new and different from the present ‘embodiedness.’

Therefore, the centrality of hope in the resurrection and the association of a person’s death with the paschal mystery, must not serve as license for spiritual detachment from the

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<sup>828</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 26.

<sup>829</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 25.

world. As Wright affirms, what is said about death and resurrection has an impact on every other aspect of life that is related to faith, especially on the way that life is understood and lived.

#### **6.4.2. The Centrality of the Resurrection of the Body for Eschatological Discourse**

The center of the Church's faith is Jesus' resurrection and because of his resurrection, so too the resurrection of human beings is affirmed as the ultimate hope and fulfillment of human beings in God at the end of time. To declare, as Karl Rahner does, that "God is absolute mystery," gives a new meaning to the anticipated final consummation and fulfillment understood as "absolute nearness to God," and remains a "mystery of unspeakable *bliss*."<sup>830</sup> Although an objective description is impossible to provide, the mystery of fulfillment is enunciated throughout the Scriptures and through the faith of the Church. This is done through the Church's use of very embodied metaphors, such as resurrection of the 'flesh,' that is viewed as synonymous with resurrection of the body and resurrection of the dead. Through this embodied metaphorical expression, the Church proclaims that the totality of the human being will be the subject of God's salvific intervention at the end of time. As Rahner writes, this salvific intervention will be "a fulfilment of human existence in which, even though in an unimaginable manner, the one whole man [*sic*] composed of spirit and matter reaches his [*sic*] perfection."<sup>831</sup> This notion of resurrection entails the idea of immortality,<sup>832</sup> which is not an attribute of one part of the human being, but rather, the result of God's action.<sup>833</sup> And although Church teaching

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<sup>830</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Life of the Dead," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 352.

<sup>831</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 6, Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 160.

<sup>832</sup> Andrés Torres Queiruga, *Repensar a Ressurreição: A Diferença Cristã na Continuidade das Religiões e da Cultura*, trans. Afonso Maria Ligorio Soares and Anoar Jarbas Provenzi, second edition, (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2010), 275.

<sup>833</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 15:53 – "For that which is corruptible must clothe itself with incorruptibility, and that which is mortal must clothe itself with immortality." See also Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 52-54.

asserts the “immortality of the soul” and its survival after death, Rahner is correct in pointing out that the Church’s confession of faith in the resurrection of the flesh (or of the dead) concerns the whole human being in its unity.<sup>834</sup> The distinction between the body and soul may be necessary, or at least helpful, in order to express the complex and multidimensional nature of the human being. Nonetheless, when speaking about the immortality of the soul in assertions regarding intermediate eschatology or the eschatology of the soul, one must always call attention to the unity and totality of the human being.<sup>835</sup>

#### **6.4.2.1. Resurrection of the Body – Immortal soul: A Challenge to Avoid Dualism**

The use of body-soul language in both theological anthropology and eschatology remains a source of distorted dualistic misunderstandings of the reality of the human being. The description of the human being as material and spiritual led to misguided views that divided the human being in ways that obscured or ignored the fundamental unity of the human being. As we have already seen, understanding the soul as the substantial form of the body makes the mere thought of the soul existing objectively separated from the body a serious problem. This is because, as Rahner poses, “*informing* is identical with the soul itself.”<sup>836</sup> The human soul ‘is’ while informing. The doctrinal eschatological assertions about the separated soul after death should be understood as metaphors expressing the dimension of personal responsibility, always in reference to a human life that is always embodied. The radical unity of the human being drives the understanding and interpretation of eschatological assertions about the immortal soul, even when, metaphorically speaking, the notion of the separated soul is affirmed. Unfortunately, however, literal and descriptive interpretations of eschatological assertions regarding the

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<sup>834</sup> Rahner, “The Life of the Dead,” 352.

<sup>835</sup> Cf. Rahner, “The Life of the Dead,” 352; Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 54.

<sup>836</sup> Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 119. See more in Bernard P. Prusak, “Bodily Resurrection in Catholic Perspectives,” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000): 86.

intermediate state have prevailed. In the process, they have captured the imagination of the faithful with regard to the afterlife.

The theoretical implications and practical consequences of such interpretations are serious. As John R. Sachs observes:

History shows that the body/soul framework, if not in theory, certainly in practice, has often led to the denigration of the body (particularly sexuality), to a notion of grace which lost any contact with experience, to an attitude of disdain or neglect of 'worldly things,' to a view of salvation which meant escape from the body and the world, and to a notion of the Kingdom which had little to do with this world and our responsibility to it.<sup>837</sup>

The effects of such a view cannot be ignored. If what is meant by salvation truly refers to the whole person and the whole world, these notions must be challenged and overcome. Sachs further explains that the "body/soul language [...] was developed as a way of combating dualistic and reductionistic views of the human person."<sup>838</sup> Yet, if such language remains a source for distorted views or understandings, it needs to be addressed and corrected with new and more adequate and appropriate interpretations. Contradictions must be pointed out, and if old images do not communicate properly the message of salvation of the whole human being and of the material world, these images need to be replaced with new images so that imagination can have a greater influence on practice. Mindful of the fact that in Catholic discourse there is still an historical over-emphasis on the salvation of the soul, ministerial practice needs to place greater emphasis on the embodied resurrection of the human being. The unity of the human being in all dimensions - spiritual and material, soul and body, individual and part of a collective reality - must be affirmed and stressed in all representations, images, and metaphors that are used to make discursive assertions with regard to the present life and the future consummation.

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<sup>837</sup> Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 57.

<sup>838</sup> Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 57.



At the outset of this research, a quotation was cited from an emblematic article of Oscar Cullmann entitled “Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?” In this article, Cullmann states that the average Christian thinks of the afterdeath as the immortality of the soul.<sup>839</sup> By following Cullmann’s line of thinking, and viewing his initial hypothesis analogically, it can be said that the majority of Catholics, when imagining the afterlife, think about the dead as separated immortal souls being rewarded in heaven, or in purgatory on their way to heaven, or being punished in hell, as the definitive state of being.<sup>840</sup>

Added to this view of the afterlife as the journey of the immortal soul towards God, it can be said with N. T. Wright, that “most people have little or no idea what the word *resurrection* actually means or why Christians say they believe it.”<sup>841</sup> For the majority of Catholics, the dead are alive and fulfilled in their disembodied existence as souls. When the notion of resurrection comes to mind, if it does, as when it is professed in the creed, it seems not to say much about the afterlife. What else does a soul need if it is believed to be living in God’s presence or heaven? If the soul is blessed enough to be in God’s presence, it seems that nothing else could be possibly added to its eternal happiness. Although Catholic doctrine professes faith in “everlasting life” along with the resurrection of the body, the embodied character of the hoped-for future existence does not seem to be part of the imagination of the average Catholic. With the development of the Church’s doctrine of intermediary eschatology in which the soul of the deceased can

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<sup>839</sup> Cullmann claims that the notion of the resurrection of the dead is a Hebrew belief present in the Scriptures, while the philosophical Greek notion of the immortality of the soul is not in the Scripture. Contemporary biblical scholars as well as theologians who claim that the notion of immortality of the soul is indeed present in the Hebrew Scriptures criticize his position. From the perspective of biblical scholarship, one critical approach to Cullmann’s emblematic article can be found in George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity*, Harvard Theological Studies 56 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 219-223; from a Catholic theological standpoint, see the critiques of Joseph Ratzinger in *Eschatology*, 51-55.

<sup>840</sup> This is an affirmation from my personal experience in the practice as a priest who see as pertinent the assertion of O. Cullmann. Similar comment is made by John R. Sachs in *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 83.

<sup>841</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 12.

immediately after death enjoy the beatific vision, belief in the resurrection of the body seems to have lost its importance for Christian hope. Christians are more concerned about the salvation that their souls will enjoy after death.<sup>842</sup>

Nonetheless, resurrection remains the central hope of Christian faith: it is the symbol of God's final saving act as the restoration of all things in Christ. Resurrection is "the central metaphor used in the NT"<sup>843</sup> to express what happened to Jesus and also to express what will happen to all human beings. As Moltmann says, resurrection is a symbol for God's "new creative action"<sup>844</sup> and for the beginning of a new world which is the present "world renewed as the new creation of all things."<sup>845</sup> It is important to remember that the community of believers already begins in the present to participate in Jesus' risen life.<sup>846</sup> However, the resurrection of the body is the symbol that expresses the central eschatological hope to share finally and fully in that life.

Paul Tillich affirms the importance of understanding that the language used to describe the eschatological concept of resurrection is symbolic. For him, a human being's "participation in eternal life beyond death is more adequately expressed by the highly symbolic phrase 'resurrection of the body.'<sup>847</sup> In referring to the resurrection of the body Saint Paul speaks of the 'spiritual body,' a very paradoxical expression which at first glance reminds one that we are speaking of something that remains a mystery. Paul intends to highlight the goodness of the whole, embodied reality of human beings, transformed as a new creation by the same divine

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<sup>842</sup> See Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 83.

<sup>843</sup> Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 89.

<sup>844</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 169.

<sup>845</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Resurrection of Nature: An Aspect of Cosmic Christology," in *The Resurrection of the Dead*, ed. Andrés Torres Queiruga, Luiz Carlos Susin and Jon Sobrino, Concilium 5 (London: SCM, 2006), 87; Cf. Henry L. Novello, *Death as Transformation: A Contemporary Theology of Death* (Surrey, U.K.: Ashgate, 2011), 221.

<sup>846</sup> Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 89.

<sup>847</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1963), 412.

Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. According to Tillich, the language of resurrection means that the totality of the human being participates in God's Kingdom.<sup>848</sup> The symbol of the resurrection of the body expresses the idea that the same human being who existed is the one who will be transformed.<sup>849</sup> Tillich emphasizes this symbolic dimension of the risen body as a 'spiritual body,' by saying that it "is a body which expresses the Spiritually transformed total personality of man [sic]."<sup>850</sup> Beyond this, concepts fail and one must rely on "poetic and artistic imagination" in order to be able "to speak about the symbol 'Spiritual body'. "<sup>851</sup> The expressions 'spiritual body' and 'resurrection of the body' come together as symbols of the new reality that concepts cannot describe. Poetic language based on these symbols appeals to the imagination and may try to express what words (with their objective meaning) cannot do. This is an invitation for an eschatological discourse that is better connected with metaphorical imagination and uses a more embodied language to talk about the human being.

Walter Kasper reminds us that in scripture, the "body is God's creation and it always describes the whole man [sic] and not just a part."<sup>852</sup> It represents "the whole man [sic] in his relationship to God and his fellow man [sic]. It is man's [sic] place of meeting with God and his fellow man [sic]. The body is the possibility and the reality of communication."<sup>853</sup> Keeping this in mind, he insists that the Pauline expression 'spiritual body,' as interpreted from the perspective of Jesus' resurrection, does not mean a body made of some miraculous spiritual substance. Rather, it refers to the whole, embodied human being in a new existence completely immersed in God's divine dimension, but without leaving the present world.<sup>854</sup> In regard to

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<sup>848</sup> Cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 412-13.

<sup>849</sup> Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 414.

<sup>850</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 412.

<sup>851</sup> Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 412.

<sup>852</sup> Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 150.

<sup>853</sup> Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 150.

<sup>854</sup> Cf. Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 151.

questions that may arise on the nature of the risen, spiritual body, or on comparisons between the present earthly body and the future glorified body, Kasper looks to 1 Cor 15:35-44, and states that the risen or ‘spiritual body’ is the human being in his/her connection with other persons and the world, completely “penetrated by the love of God.”<sup>855</sup>

Therefore, resurrection of the body does not refer to a revival and reassembly of the atoms that composed the earthly body. It refers to the whole, human, earthly existence of the person, especially as regards the human capacity to relate to others and to the whole created reality, as finally transformed by God’s grace.<sup>856</sup> Thus, the expression “resurrection of the body” should be understood as a way of expressing Christian faith in the “fundamental unity of spirit and matter by their very origin, in their history and in their final end.”<sup>857</sup> The resurrection of the body expresses the definitiveness of this true unity of the human being.

Viewed in the light of what the resurrection of the body really means, namely, the fundamental unity of the human being, other assertions associated with intermediate eschatology can be interpreted without the risk of falling into dualisms that may undermine Christian life in the present and the anticipation of what is to come. The eschatological assertions of intermediate eschatology need to be interpreted through the hermeneutical lens of what resurrection of the body really means. This way, an expression such as the ‘separated soul’ can never be understood as an objective description of the reality of the dead. The challenge remains to find more appropriate metaphors to express the concreteness of human death without denoting a separation from matter that denotes a-cosmic existence that contradicts the fact that the human being is

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<sup>855</sup> Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* 152.

<sup>856</sup> Cf. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 89-90;

<sup>857</sup> See Karl Rahner, “The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 6, trans. Karl-H and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 153-177.

united to the destiny of the world.<sup>858</sup> Rahner considered the intermediate state of the soul to be an ‘intellectual framework’ for thinking about the afterlife<sup>859</sup> that is in need of more appropriate embodied metaphors if it is to be faithful to the essential unity of the being. The body-soul unity is the only manifestation and possibility of the real existence of the human being. And it is this real existence of the whole human being that will be brought to completion and perfection through the resurrection.<sup>860</sup>

Literal and objective interpretations of traditional intermediate eschatology, in which the separated soul enjoys God’s presence before the resurrection, cause this central notion to lose its significance as a metaphor for Christian eschatological hope. Theological claims that with the resurrection, the joys already experienced by the separated soul would be increased or intensified by the embodied existence, although accepted by some, remain problematic and unsatisfactory explanations.<sup>861</sup> Viewed from a non-literal theological approach, Rahner sees the human being as a unity possessing different dimensions that allow for different eschatological assertions, but always in reference to the unity of being:

And so, when we Christians profess our belief in the ‘resurrection of the body’, what then do we really mean by it? What is the least we mean by it? ‘Body’ (*Fleisch*) means the whole man in his proper embodied reality. ‘Resurrection’ means, therefore, the termination and perfection of the *whole* man before God, which gives him ‘eternal life’. Man is a many-sided being which in (and despite) its unity stretches, as it were, through several very different dimensions—through matter and spirit, nature and person, action and passion, etc. And so, it is not surprising that the process of man’s perfecting and the entrance into this perfection is not in itself a simple and identical quantity in every

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<sup>858</sup> Cf. Karl Rahner, “The Resurrection of the Body,” in *Theological Investigations*, v. 2, trans. Karl-H. Kruger, (Baltimore / London: Helicon Press / Darton, Longman & Tood, 1963), 211.

<sup>859</sup> See Karl Rahner, “The Intermediate State,” 115.

<sup>860</sup> Cf. Karl Rahner, “The Resurrection of the Body,” 211.

<sup>861</sup> See Ruiz de La Peña, *La Otra dimensión*, 331-332 (Ruiz de La Peña affirms that even Thomas Aquinas ended up abandoning in the *Summa theologiae* the thesis of ‘intensive increase’ of the blessedness with the resurrection of the body, that Aquinas affirmed at his *Commentary to the Sentences*) and Candido Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, 268-269.

respect. And it is not surprising that the ‘moment’ of completion of such a stratified being is not simply the same for every one of these dimensions.<sup>862</sup>

While not disagreeing with the doctrine that the soul after death already enjoys God’s presence, Rahner interprets this teaching as an expression of one dimension of human existence, as “the continuing reality of the personal spirit” that “can already reach the direct communion with God by the event and moment which, looked at from its intra-mundane side, we experience as death.”<sup>863</sup> However, for Rahner, this continuing reality of the human being who died is not separated from the worldly reality in which human life took place. Although this unity of personal spirit after death with God and with the material world cannot be expressed in ‘comprehensible statements,’ Rahner insists that the dead remain united to the reality of the world:

The deceased remain therefore (despite the *visio beatifica*) united with the fate of the world. This world in its totality has a beginning and a history; it goes on towards a point which is not the end of its existence but the end of its unfinished and continually self-propagating history.<sup>864</sup>

Therefore, according to Rahner’s interpretation, the separated soul of the tradition is actually the ‘personal spirit’ that continues united to the fate of the world until its conclusion, when the resurrection of the dead will take place. It seems that Rahner understands that all the deceased are participating in the destiny of the world and will experience resurrection as the fulfillment and perfection of themselves and of all reality.<sup>865</sup>

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<sup>862</sup> Rahner, “The Resurrection of the Body,” 210-211. In *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner also defines resurrection as the completion of the human being: “According to the revelation of scripture, this eternity brings the temporality of the single and total person into its final and definitive validity, so that it can also be called the resurrection of the flesh.” (Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 441).

<sup>863</sup> Rahner, “The Resurrection of the Body,” 211.

<sup>864</sup> Rahner, “The Resurrection of the Body,” 211.

<sup>865</sup> If the dead are ‘with God,’ does this not immediately imply a direct and intimate connection with the world? For God is in no way ‘separate’ or removed from the world. God is not the world but God cannot be apart from the world. Therefore, ‘being with God’ must entail ‘being with the world’ in some way.

Following Rahner's hermeneutical principles of interpretation of the eschatological assertions of the Church, the blessed dead are those who are already experiencing the "mystery of ineffable happiness."<sup>866</sup> They cannot be understood simply as separated immortal souls, because the fundamental body-soul unity is contained in all eschatological assertions, none of which can be read as literal descriptions of facts. The eschatological statements of intermediate eschatology need to be understood as expressions of human participation in some manner in what will be completely fulfilled at the resurrection and the transformation of the world.<sup>867</sup>

### **6.5. Conclusion:**

As this chapter outlines in detail, the eschatological realities that are the subject of Christian faith belong to the realm of mystery and cannot be objectively known. Therefore, they need to be expressed using symbols and metaphors that suggest something about realities that are unknown. In this sense, assertions regarding intermediate eschatology need to be read in the light of the present reality, always considering the unity of the human being in his/her multiple dimensions. Above all, the resurrection of the body – precisely as the resurrection of the whole human person – needs to be taken as the central metaphor through which all the eschatological assertions of the Church must be interpreted and understood.<sup>868</sup> Every eschatological affirmation describes a reality that is happening parallel to the events of the present world. They are but images that point to the future consummation of the history of the present concrete reality of this world. Therefore, given the metaphorical and symbolic character of eschatological affirmations, along with their place within theological discourse, they communicate something important about the future of the present world.

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<sup>866</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 441.

<sup>867</sup> Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 91.

<sup>868</sup> See also Thiel, *Icons of Hope*. The author also defends the position that the 'resurrection of the body' must be the central hermeneutical rule for the eschatological assertions.

If these abstract assertions describe the hoped future of the present reality, they cannot be considered or understood outside of the parameters of the present reality they represent. Therefore, they need to respect and take seriously whatever is non-negotiable within the understanding of this reality. In the specific case of this dissertation, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, with regard to the Catholic understanding of human nature, it is necessary to guarantee and safeguard—in discourse about the eschatological reality of the human being after death—the intrinsic and constitutive unity of human nature. This unity of body and soul must appear and be present in all eschatological assertions.

Placing resurrection at the center of Christian life and practice means understanding and engaging actively in the mission of the Church and in the lives of all Christians. It means assuming responsibility for one's own life and whatever is to come. It is safeguarding a space where, upon the occasion of one's death, the Christian message of resurrection will be proclaimed. It is a call to the living to 'perform in the flesh' one's own human material embodied existence that will be completed in the resurrection of the dead. It is understanding that what was inaugurated by Jesus, through the mystery of his resurrection, is a hope that continues to be accomplished in the life of the Church and of each of its members. This way, the death of one human being becomes an event where Jesus' death is proclaimed through faith and the resurrection of the one who died is expected in hope. Additionally, death becomes an opportunity for the living, through love, to provoke and advance the breakthrough of blessed resurrection, the final goal of all creation.

[...] also, the life of the immortal soul and the communion with the Lord before the final resurrection must be considered in relation to the risen Christ. No aspect of Christian



eschatology can be seen independently of this central point of our faith, the only one in which all our hope is rooted.<sup>869</sup>

Paul Tillich criticized the conceptual use of immortality. In his view, making immortality a natural attribute of the soul may lead people to Platonic and superstitious views of the afterlife. For Tillich, the word immortality is to be used as a symbol of eternal life, but not as a concept or attribute of the soul.<sup>870</sup> He says “it would be wise in teaching and preaching to use the term ‘eternal life’ and to speak of ‘immortality’ only if superstitious connotations can be prevented.”<sup>871</sup> Although Catholic doctrine asserts immortality as a natural attribute of the soul, Tillich’s recommendation of a careful use of the term in teaching and preaching is pertinent. Additionally, understanding the expression ‘immortality of the soul’ as symbolic and metaphorical is helpful to aid others in their own growth in understanding. It is closely identified with Rahner’s proposition that eschatological assertions about the immortal soul are to be interpreted as addressing the whole reality of the human being, stressing and communicating the idea of the human being’s personal responsibility with regard to his or her destiny, understood as an embodied fulfillment. This broad symbolic way of understanding the ‘immortality of the soul’ takes into consideration the wholeness of the human being as an inseparable unity.

As noted above, Rahner considers the primary criterion of interpretation for all eschatological assertions is the body-soul unity of the human being. Therefore, assertions on the immortality of the soul are to be understood as symbolic expressions, a dimension of the particular journey of each human being who is always understood only in body-soul unity.

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<sup>869</sup> Luis. F. Ladaria, *Introducción a la Antropología Teológica*, (Estella, Navarra, España, 2011), 188. [Original in Spanish: “[...] también la vida del alma inmortal y la comunión con el Señor antes de la resurrección final han de considerarse en relación con Cristo resucitado. Ningún aspecto de la escatología Cristiana puede verse independientemente de este punto central de nuestra fe, el único en que radica toda nuestra esperanza.” (Luis. F. Ladaria, *Introducción a la Antropología Teológica*, (Navarra, España: Estella, 2011), 188.)]

<sup>870</sup> Cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Volume Two: Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1976), 409-412.

<sup>871</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Volume Two*, 412.

Rahner also affirms the Church's teaching in regard to the immortal soul, while interpreting it in a symbolic way that encompasses human bodiliness. However, if due to cultural and religious factors, affirmations on the 'eschatology of the soul' may reinforce already present "over-spiritualized" images of the afterlife, as if the spiritual souls of the dead are perfect and complete in the beyond, it would be wiser to use better metaphors that encompass the importance of embodied existence for human beings in the present and in the hoped for future. Tillich, for example, proposed to use the language of 'eternal life' instead of immortality. In Catholic settings, a good way to proceed would be to emphasize the importance of the present embodied material life and choices made in preparation and anticipation of eternal fulfillment in the life to come, with the resurrection and the new world. Another way would be to put the emphasis on the dialogical loving relationships between human beings and the immortal and eternal God; a relationship initiated and communicated by God through Jesus' human embodied life. This is a relationship that, because of God, cannot be broken with death, but is brought to fulfillment in the mystery of the resurrection of the body.

If the language of the immortality of the soul leads to a false dualism or leads to disengaged Christian practice in the world, it should be avoided. If it is to be used, care should be taken to speak of it in a way that acknowledges the fundamental unity of the whole person and the world we live in, and reminds believers of the hope we have in the risen Christ in facing the great mystery of death. Eschatological assertions need to be interpreted as expressing the multidimensional understanding of human beings. As Rahner claims, these assertions always refer to the whole human being, considered from the perspective of individual history, of personal responsibility and spiritual freedom, but also connected and in relationship with other human beings and with the whole world.

In any case, the affirmation of the ‘resurrection of the body’ as the center of Catholic eschatological hope is more appropriate as an embodied language that does not easily exclude the spiritual and whatever may belong to the sphere of soul language. Religious language that emphasizes, for example, the ‘salvation of the soul’ without understanding the metaphorical broad meaning of it, has justified disengaged Catholic practices and have driven Catholics to ignore their role and responsibility with the transformation of the present physical reality. The body language seems to be more appropriate to express the inner connection between the human being and the created world—the whole human community and all physical reality. Perhaps using language about the ‘person’ instead of the ‘soul’ would also be worth considering since the language of soul often leads to dualistic interpretations.

Responding to Cullman’s question at the title of his essay “Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?” – and taking the same stance as the Catholic tradition – it seems that there is no need to make a choice between one or the other. Catholic doctrinal belief in the immortality of the soul is not antagonistic or contradictory to faith in the resurrection of the dead. Catholic belief in the immortality of the soul was not simply passive assimilation of Platonism into doctrine. Rather, it was an active appropriation of a concept/belief from Hellenism, already present in texts of intertestamental Judaism, and considered in the perspective of – and the hope in – the resurrection of the dead.<sup>872</sup> Both beliefs were united in the Catholic tradition and are present in the Church’s doctrine. Nonetheless, it is essential that a good balance must be preserved so that belief in the immortality of the soul, with its consequent concerns about the salvation of the soul, or the soul’s journey in the intermediate state, does not weaken the centrality of the belief in the resurrection of the dead.

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<sup>872</sup> See Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity*, 51-55 and 104-161.

## CONCLUSION

In the Christian doctrine proposed by the Church of the ‘immortality of the soul’ and of the ‘resurrection of the flesh’ the whole man [*sic*] in his unity is always envisaged. This affirmation does not deny or call in doubt that there is a differentiation intrinsic to the definitive state of man [*sic*] which corresponds to the justifiable distinction of ‘body’ and ‘soul’ in his [*sic*] makeup. But if as cannot be doubted, the ‘resurrection of the flesh’ in the creed of the Church means the definitive salvation of man [*sic*] as a whole, then the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, being a truth of faith and not just a philosophical tenet, is also concerned in fact with such a life, such a ‘soul’ as for instance Jesus placed in the hands of his Father as he died. Hence this assertion is also directed to the whole reality and meaning of man [*sic*] as he [*sic*] depends on the creative and life-giving power of God [...]<sup>873</sup>

In Chapter One the problem addressed in the present dissertation was laid out, i.e., that while professing belief in the resurrection of the body, everyday Catholics may actually have a view of the afterlife as the disembodied permanent existence of the separated immortal soul. It was claimed that this belief is reinforced by a literal and one-sided interpretation of biblical texts and liturgical prayers, especially in the liturgy of the dead. The preaching and teaching at the celebration of Catholic funerals may be a source of confusion and misinformation if centered on the contents and topics from the Church’s intermediary eschatology. It was proposed that a more rigorous understanding of the metaphorical character, not only of biblical texts and liturgical prayers, but also of the Church’s teachings and assertions on eschatology is necessary, on the part of both ordained and lay ministers alike. The delicate situations of loss and mourning require from ministers’ sensitivity, discernment, and sound theological reflection that takes into account what the Church’s doctrine wants to communicate with its eschatological assertions. A learned, thoughtful, and informed ministry can help the people of God to focus on the central Christian hope: Jesus’ resurrection and the resurrection of the body at the end of time.

Although Catholic doctrine declares that in death, there is a separation between body and soul, ministers need to be aware of the metaphorical character of these assertions and of the

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<sup>873</sup> Karl Rahner, “The Life of the Dead,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4 (Chapter 14), 352.

terms that are used within them. Even though some of the formulations in the Church's doctrine may be the result of literal readings of biblical texts, contemporary biblical scholarship has shown that the terms used to portray the human being in the Scriptures are not meant to give objective descriptions of separable human parts or components, but are expressions of dimensions of the whole human being. For example, the biblical Hebrew term *nephesh* or the Greek term *psyche*, which are usually translated as the English term *soul*, do not mean a separable part of the person's composition, but communicate the idea of the person's life or of the whole human being.

Since the Bible does not contain a univocal anthropology, scriptural texts require from ministers thorough and mindful exegesis and interpretation. Through such careful work, the message is not distorted or adapted to serve and reinforce dualistic views of the afterlife that portray the souls of the dead as having an existence independent from their bodies. Ministers also need to be aware that this dualistic view of the human being in the afterlife may already be present in people's imagination under the influence of, for example, religious pieties and popular culture. A sound interpretation of biblical texts based in solid exegesis may help the people of God to have an understanding of the human being as an inseparable unity, not reinforcing views of a disembodied afterlife that may diminish the value of the present embodied life. As the resurrection of the body is the central Christian eschatological hope, the present embodied existence may be valued and lived with personal engagement with other human beings and with the rest of creation.

This Catholic understanding of the afterlife is manifested especially in the liturgical texts proposed by the Roman Missal and by the Order of Christian Funerals. Although the post-Second Vatican Council contemporary liturgical texts underscore the centrality of the paschal

mystery and highlight the tension of the dual eschatology and of the mystery of the realities described, they may still be a source of confusion and reinforce dualistic views. It is up to the ministers who lead funeral services to interpret the language of these prayers and their metaphorical nature while avoiding dualistic understandings about the human being wherein the spiritual and material realities are opposed. The unity between the spiritual and the material experienced in the present life is the whole reality saved by God in Jesus' death and resurrection. Human beings' union with Jesus in the paschal mystery is what is celebrated and represented in the prayers of the liturgy of the dead. If the religious language of the 'salvation of the soul' is used, it needs to be expressed in a way that makes evident the importance of the whole body-soul human existence that will be saved. The resurrection of the dead cannot be thought of as an accessory event that adds 'only' a body to the 'saved soul' of the dead which is already in God's presence in heaven. Resurrection is the hoped-for fulfillment of the dead and of the whole creation.

After having stated the problem of the contradiction between the Church's central belief in the resurrection of the body, and the possible reinforcement in the liturgy of the dead of a dualistic understanding of the human being, and the consequences it has in the practice of the faith, Chapter Two provided a description of the historical development of the Church's teaching on the human soul. This historical depiction showed that the first magisterial documents that describe the human nature in terms of body and soul were declarations on the true humanity of Jesus. In such documents, Jesus' humanity is construed as the Word of God assuming a complete human nature, body and soul, in order to safeguard human salvation. In the first centuries, other terms were used to affirm Jesus' humanity like body, flesh, soul, mind, sensibility, and rational soul, demonstrating an evolution of the anthropological understanding of the Church. Only in the

scholastic period (in the thirteenth century) are declarations on intermediate eschatology and the survival of the separated soul first made. Finally, it was in the fourteenth century that human nature was declared, in Thomistic terms, as the substantial unity of body and soul. This remains the official teaching of the Church. More recent documents, although reaffirming the fundamental unity of the human being, still maintain the Church tradition of the survival of the immortal soul after death.

Building on the fact that the Church kept within its doctrine the scholastic theological contribution offered by Thomas Aquinas' understanding of the human nature as the body-soul in substantial unity, Chapter Three described the content of his 'treatise on the human nature' in the *Summa Theologiae*. Through his own appropriation of Aristotle's hylomorphism, Aquinas states that the intellectual or rational soul is the form of the human body, i.e. its principle of life and organization, which is described as self-subsistent and therefore being able to survive bodily death. Aquinas asserts that the rational soul possesses powers or functions that are not produced in any body organ, such as the human capacity of understanding and will. Although intellect and will are functions only attributed to the intellectual soul, it needs the body-sense images, or phantasms that are generated by the organs of the senses, in order to function. Aquinas' view is particularly challenged by contemporary neuroscience that associates and locates all the intellectual functions to the organic brain. Therefore, even those two functions that Aquinas attributed solely to the rational immaterial soul are associated intrinsically with a body-soul unity as demonstrated in brain activity.

Aquinas affirms that after death, through a special illumination from God, the separated soul maintains the two functions, namely intellect and will. However, Aquinas maintains that since the human being is a body-soul unity, the separated soul after death cannot be described as

a human being. This is pastorally relevant since, in practice, many Catholics actually think and speak of ‘souls’ after death by imagining real (human) persons, like a ghost-like facsimile. However, the separated souls of the dead are neither to be conceived of as complete human beings, nor is their state as separated from their bodies to be considered as definitive. The human being is the body-soul unity that will be restored in the fulfillment at the resurrection of the body. It is necessary to acknowledge the difficulty in conceiving the separated soul or a substantial form that is not informing something, that is separated from the prime matter with which this soul ‘forms’ the body. The separated soul is an unnatural state of existence that remains with its inclination towards its union with the body.

Chapter Four reflected upon some possible consequences of the traditional anthropological and eschatological view of the Church in the practice of the faith. The first part of Chapter Four considered the way people think and imagine the afterlife, especially under the perspective of the survival of the separated immortal soul. These reflections were taken from the experience of the author who understands that the traditional view of the Church in its intermediate eschatology may (mis)lead people towards a dualistic understanding of human existence. This dualistic understanding may have consequences in the practice of the faith. This is especially manifest through a spirituality that is only concerned with the salvation of the soul, but disconnected from the necessary Christian participation in the community of faith and disengaged from the transformation of the concrete present reality.

In the second part of Chapter Four, I have shown that Catholic theological anthropology must be in dialogue with scientific thought, especially in view of recent findings in neuroscience. The philosophical thought of Descartes has influenced both modern scientific method and the current popular understanding of the human being as being composed of two different



substances, the material and the mental. Descartes' dualism of substances reinforced the understanding that the human mind is separable and independent from the physical body. His concept of mind as the human immaterial substance of 'thought' became the modern more scientific replacement for the religious concept of soul.

This dualistic understanding has been challenged by neuroscientific findings in the past century which have associated everything that is considered as 'mental' to neurophysiological activity in the brain. Although there is a fundamental philosophical difference between the Church's understanding of the soul as the substantial form of the body and the dualism of substances of Descartes, both consider the higher intellectual functions as not belonging to the body. The Church's Thomistic understanding of human nature is not dualistic as the Cartesian conception is, but rather sees body and soul as intrinsically united. However, as stated in Chapter Three, the Church's understanding of the higher functions of the intellect and will, as attributed solely to the rational soul rather than happening through the body, is challenged by neuroscience. A more engaged dialogue between theological anthropology and neuroscience may help the church to confirm and reinforce its unified vision of human nature, wherein the spiritual and material elements of the created reality are fundamentally united in the embodied human existence.

The aim of the fourth chapter of this dissertation is not to break with the Church's tradition on its understanding of human nature, neither is it simply to deny or abandon some fundamental tenet of Christian faith regarding the belief in the immortal soul and the teachings on the intermediate eschatology. However, new times demand new interpretations of old truths. Today, scientific evidence shows the connection between material/physical structures in the brain and those faculties that were considered by faith as belonging to and being performed by

the spiritual soul (faculties of understanding and will). A reinterpretation of this understanding does not need to deny that these functions belong to the soul.

Under the light of scientific evidence, it is emphasized with even more clarity and seriousness how profound and intrinsic is the union between the spiritual and the material. The substantial unity of body and soul entails an intrinsic and deep connection. To remain with the theological understanding that those functions of the soul (understanding and will) are performed only by the soul, it must also be acknowledged that these functions are deeply related to one specific body organ, the brain. If those functions are not performed by the work of this body organ (brain), it cannot also be affirmed that they are performed without it. If, in Thomas Aquinas's time, there was no available knowledge to understand the importance of the brain in the higher intellectual functions, theology today needs to acknowledge that the brain is deeply associated with these intellectual functions of the soul. The main thrust of Chapter Four has been to uncover the important fact that they may be functions of the soul, but they do not happen without the brain.

Chapter Five showed how the Catholic doctrine on the survival of the separated soul after death was indirectly present in the post-Vatican II theological debates on the intermediate state. The different approaches to the theme by two major Catholic theologians, Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, were examined and compared. Rahner sees the intermediate state as an 'intellectual framework' to think of human existence in the afterlife. Therefore, for him, this notion is not a dogma of faith, but remains open for theological speculation and can be reinterpreted. Ratzinger, on the other hand, sees the intermediate state as an important and unrenounceable part of the Church's doctrine of the immortality of the soul and its survival after death.

Rahner's position of openness to new theological interpretations of this notion from the Church's intermediary eschatology does not dismiss the importance of human personal responsibility and accountability that are present in the notion of the survival of the immortal soul that is subject to God's judgment after death. However, the affirmation that the notion of the intermediate state is not obligatory for the faithful (binding to faith) allows theology to develop new arguments and interpretations for the Church's intermediary eschatology that may be more intelligible and acceptable to contemporary believers. Rahner's understanding of the Church's doctrine on the intermediate state as an intellectual framework that can even be replaced/represented by new and more adapted images of the present can be helpful for a less dualistic and more integrative understanding of what the intermediate eschatological affirmations of the Church try to communicate.

This leads to Chapter Six, where I have affirmed that part of the solution to the problem of dualistic understandings of the human being in the afterlife (and its consequences in the present life) is found in Rahner's proposal of hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of all the eschatological assertions of the Church. In his approach, the doctrinal affirmations on eschatology are understood as metaphors of the hoped-for future fulfillment of the present reality, and not as objective descriptions of what will happen. As a fundamental criterion for the interpretation of Christian eschatology, Rahner's interpretation of the Thomistic understanding of human nature helps to avoid any possibilities of dualism: body and soul are metaphysical concepts that express the totality of the human being. Therefore, eschatological assertions about the soul or the body express metaphorically the futurity of the present and of the totality of the human being in the distinct aspects and dimensions of his/her existence. It is not about what will happen to different parts of the human being.

In Chapter Six, therefore, it is shown that Catholic theology, in its efforts to address eschatological questions and reflect upon eschatological themes, must rely upon theological imagination and the languages of metaphor and allegory. As a consequence, ministers must be very clear while preaching or teaching that eschatological assertions advanced by Catholic theology are not to be interpreted as factual depictions of the afterlife. Given their hidden character and the limits of language, it is impossible to describe what is unknown using temporal and spatial parameters. In Chapter Six, Rahner's hermeneutical principles were presented as important criteria for the interpretation of the assertions of eschatology. These assertions are to be understood as affirmations about the future fulfillment/consummation of the present reality as the experience for human beings of God's saving grace through Jesus' death and resurrection. And again, the human being as *always* considered in its wholeness of body and soul.

### **Final Words**

What is the pertinence of discussing the Catholic understanding of the human soul and of the eschatological questions concerning the soul in the afterlife? Even academic theologians may question the relevance of a research project on the subject of the human soul and its journey in the afterlife in a time when so many really important problems need to be addressed by theological thought. For example, issues regarding human dignity, social justice, and the role of the Church's moral authority in the world all make a strong case for being addressed.

Is there still room for a discussion about the human soul and its functions, or about its nature and conditions in the afterlife? Why would it be important for theology? Why does it matter at all? The fact of the matter is that the understanding that the Church has about the human being is present in its religious discourse and informs the way Catholics think about themselves as individuals and as communities. The notions of the afterlife and the future

contained in Catholic teaching may have a direct impact and influence on the way people understand their own embodied lives, their choices, their relationship with the others and with the world.

At the end of this research, it must be affirmed that the human being can only be understood as a unity, a unity that is represented by the body, and everything related to human embodied existence. Based on this premise, it is important to affirm that the eschatological assertions of the Church have something important to be communicated about the human being and about the future. This is accomplished through images and metaphors that are not describing objectively the reality that is to come, but communicating important truths about the future that is hoped for. All that is said about this future must be seen as an attempt to express a reality that is a mystery, yet also open to our understanding as the fulfillment of the present through God's salvific act in Jesus' death and resurrection. The Church is concerned with a present that is an experience of God's grace through human embodied existence and a future that will be experienced as the fulfillment of the present embodied existence in the resurrection.

Eschatological assertions about the separated soul can be a source of confusion as they reinforce dualistic views of the human being and of the reality of the world. However, they cannot be understood as being objective descriptions of the reality. As Rahner points out, these assertions regarding the intermediate eschatology are expressing the complexity of human personal responsibility and spiritual freedom. But they are always talking about the whole human being. Literal readings of God's judgment upon the separated souls in the afterlife may lead the faithful to a schizophrenic understanding of his/her own embodied existence in the present, with the consequent disconnection between faith and life.

Lay and ordained ministers who deal with the people of God must be aware of the possibility of dualistic interpretations of the Church's doctrine on anthropology and eschatology. However, the human being must be affirmed as an absolute unity of spirit and matter in an embodied existence in the beginning, in the present, and in the future. It is this embodied existence that was the expression of God's desire in human creation, redemption through Jesus, and consummation in the resurrection of the body. Therefore, the human body as the symbol of the whole human existence as God desired must present in the proclamation of faith and in the interpretation of all theological assertions on anthropology and eschatology.

Creation. The Spirit gives us the creation, sacrament, garden. She gives humans as body, naked body, male body, female body, bodies that need hide nothing, everything was good, the eyes were good, image of God. Body, gift of God, destined for eternity. A pain that touches the body touches also the apple of God's eye. God senses through human bodies. She needs us. And God walks through the garden, in the evening breeze, appearing in the colorful, friendly spaces of the sacrament world. And she assumes body, is born of woman, hungers, thirsts, weeps, walks, sleeps, dies.

'And God saw that everything was very good.'

And what God wishes should be destined forever.<sup>874</sup>

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<sup>874</sup> Rubem Alves, *I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 47-8.

## APPENDIX I. Comments on Selected Biblical Readings for Funeral Masses

### A. Scriptural Readings Proposed for the Masses for the Dead: Comments and Insights

Several Scripture texts are proposed as choices for readings for the Masses for the Dead in the official Catholic *Lectionary for Mass*.<sup>875</sup> This section offers some brief comments on the seven texts from the Old Testament that are proposed as possible options for the first reading of the Liturgy of the Word outside the Season of Easter.<sup>876</sup>

The first text is from the book of Job (19:1, 23-27a),<sup>877</sup> which falls into the category of Wisdom Literature. It describes part of Job's response to Bildad the Shuhite, one of those who were tormenting him by calling into question his sufferings. Job responds to the tormenters by expressing his trust in God's power to deliver him with very embodied and physical language and images: "Whom I myself shall see: my own eyes, not another's, shall behold him; and from my flesh I shall see God; my inmost being is consumed with longing." Not Job's spirit or soul but his whole physical embodied existence will see the victory of God. It is important to note, however, that at the time this book was written, there was not yet an established belief in the resurrection of the dead.<sup>878</sup>

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<sup>875</sup> *Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4: Common of Saints, Ritual Masses, Masses for Various Needs, Votive Masses and Masses for the Dead (Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 2002).

<sup>876</sup> *Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4, 1085–89.

<sup>877</sup> Full text of Job 19:1, 23-27a: "Job answered Bildad the Shuhite and said: Oh, would that my words were written down! Would that they were inscribed in a record: That with an iron chisel and with lead they were cut in the rock forever! But as for me, I know that my Vindicator lives, and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust; Whom I myself shall see: my own eyes, not another's, shall behold him; And from my flesh I shall see God; my inmost being is consumed with longing" (*Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4, 1085).

<sup>878</sup> In a footnote for this text in *The Catholic Study Bible*, it says that the Vulgate's version of this text seems to show Job indicating the belief in the resurrection of the dead, "but the Hebrew and the other ancient versions are less specific" (*The Catholic Study Bible*, 626). *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* is more incisive in denying the presence of the belief in the resurrection of the dead in Job: "But we must not (as did Jerome in the Vg) read into the text any idea of an actual 'resurrection of the body,' even if limited to Job's unique case" (*The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 478).

The second example is from the book of the Prophet Isaiah (25:6a, 7-9),<sup>879</sup> where it is affirmed that God “will destroy death forever” and that “the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces.” This reading speaks about the final victory of God over death, also using physical, embodied images: the *tears* that will be wiped away from *faces* when death is destroyed. Although this text is not connected to any kind of hope or idea of a future resurrection, it uses embodied images to express what is hoped for the future.

A third reading, from prophetic biblical literature, is from the book of Lamentations (3:17-26).<sup>880</sup> This text affirms that, even though the person is lamenting the pains and sufferings of his or her present situation, his or her hope is in God’s saving power to help. In this reading, the Lectionary’s English translation uses the term “soul” four times: “My soul is deprived of peace”; “leaves my soul downcast within me”; “my portion is the LORD, says my soul”; “to the soul that seeks him.” It is important to note, however, that this term is used to describe the person’s “I” or “self.” The New Jerusalem Bible,<sup>881</sup> for instance, translates the same passages using, respectively: “I,” “my heart,” “I,” and “all.” Therefore, even though the translation used for the Lectionary in the United States, the New American Bible (NAB),<sup>882</sup> uses the English

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<sup>879</sup> Full text of Isaiah 25:6a, 7-9: “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples. On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; he will destroy death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces; the reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth, for the Lord has spoken. On that day, it will be said: ‘Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! This is the Lord for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!’” (*Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4, 1088.)

<sup>880</sup> Full text of Lamentations 3:17-26: “My soul is deprived of peace, I have forgotten what happiness is; I tell myself my future is lost, all that I hoped for from the Lord. The thought of my homeless poverty is wormwood and gall; remembering it over and over leaves my soul downcast within me. But I will call this to mind as my reason to have hope: The favors of the Lord are not exhausted, his mercies are not spent; they are renewed each morning, so great is his faithfulness. My portion is the Lord, says my soul; therefore will I hope in him. Good is the Lord to one who waits for him, to the soul that seeks him; It is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord” (*Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4, 1088–89).

<sup>881</sup> *The New Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 1392–93.

<sup>882</sup> The USCCB website explains that: “Since May 19, 2002, the revised Lectionary, based on the New American Bible is the only English-language Lectionary that may be used at Mass in the dioceses of the United States, except for the current Lectionary for Masses with Children which remains in use.” See <http://www.usccb.org/bible/leiturgy/index.cfm> (Accessed on August 22, 2018).



rendering “soul,” the text is describing the whole person, not making reference to some nonmaterial element present in the person’s constitution, as Catholic doctrine affirms that the person’s immaterial soul is.

The next proposed optional Old Testament readings are from the literature of Second Temple Judaism. These readings share in common the belief in the resurrection of the dead. In the face of the tragic early and brutal death of the righteous ones, these readings give responses by affirming that there will be a resurrection for the just ones.

The fourth text is from 2 Maccabees (12:43-46)<sup>883</sup> and affirms belief in the resurrection of the dead and justifies the need of prayers and actions of atonement on behalf of those who have died: “to provide for an expiatory sacrifice”; “he had the resurrection of the dead in view”; “expecting the fallen to rise again”; “to pray for them in death”; “to make atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin.” It talks about the actions the living can take to help those who have died, never forgetting that these actions are taken because of the faith that the dead will be resurrected.

In the same way, the fifth text, from the book of the Prophet Daniel (12:1-3),<sup>884</sup> professes faith in the resurrection of the dead: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever . . . and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever.” This is among the first texts in which belief that the resurrected life appears as

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<sup>883</sup> Full text of 2 Maccabees 12:43-46: “Judas, the ruler of Israel, took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be free from this sin” (*Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4, 1085).

<sup>884</sup> Full text of Daniel 12:1-3: “In those days, I, Daniel, mourned and heard this word of the Lord: At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; It shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace. But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever” (*Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4, 1089).

substantially superior to the present one. According to *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, “This passage is remarkable as the earliest clear enunciation of belief in the resurrection of the dead.”<sup>885</sup> Sleeping is a metaphor for the state of those who are dead, while the expression “shall awake” is a euphemism for the return to life of the dead.<sup>886</sup> The image of the dead as those who are “sleeping in the dust of the earth” communicates the idea that they are not in another dimension or out of the world; rather, they are in the present material reality of this world.

The sixth and the seventh optional texts are from the book of Wisdom (3:1-9 and 4:7-15).<sup>887</sup> Both communicate the assurance that although the righteous/just ones died at a young age, they are well and safe: “the just man, though he die early, shall be at rest”; “for his soul was pleasing to the LORD”; “The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them”; “their hope [is] full of immortality.” Up to the book of Wisdom, “the Hebrews did not conceive of humans as constituted of a material body and a spiritual soul.”<sup>888</sup> The understanding of the human being in this bipartite constitution begins to appear in the book of Wisdom, which, under the influence of Hellenistic thought, made use of the concept of soul. In this book, “soul

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<sup>885</sup> *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 419.

<sup>886</sup> Cf. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 419.

<sup>887</sup> Full text of Wisdom 3:1-9: “The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are in peace. For if before men, indeed, they be punished, yet is their hope full of immortality; Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace, he proved them, and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself. In the time of their visitation they shall shine, and shall dart about as sparks through stubble; they shall judge nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord shall be their King forever. Those who trust in him shall understand truth, and the faithful shall abide with him in love: Because grace and mercy are with his holy ones, and his care is with his elect” (*Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4, 1086–87).

Full text of Wisdom 4:7-15: “The just man, though he die early, shall be at rest. For the age that is honorable comes not with the passing of time, nor can it be measured in terms of years. Rather, understanding is the hoary crown for men, and an unsullied life, the attainment of old age. He who pleased God was loved; he who lived among sinners was transported—Snatched away, lest wickedness pervert his mind or deceit beguile his soul; For the witchery of paltry things obscures what is right and the whirl of desire transforms the innocent mind. Having become perfect in short while, he reached the fullness of a long career; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore he sped him out of the midst of wickedness. But people saw and did not understand, nor did they take this into account” (*Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4, 1087).

<sup>888</sup> *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 513.

(8:19; etc.) and spirit (15:16; etc.) are used interchangeably for the vital principle.”<sup>889</sup> This soul or life principle of the person was believed to survive bodily death, but not because the soul is immortal. Although affirming that the hope of the righteous dead is “full of immortality,” this immortality was not considered to be a natural characteristic of the soul but a gift from God to the just who are in relationship with him. Having a Jewish mind-set, the author of the book of Wisdom “does not conclude to immortality from the nature of the soul, but from one’s relationship to God, for immortality in Wisdom is a gift of God to the righteous.”<sup>890</sup> Although these texts affirm that the soul or life principle of the person survives bodily death, the future hope of the just ones is not about life somewhere outside of the present world. These texts, while affirming the hope of the just ones, talk about them in an affirmative and also material way: “they shall judge nations and rule over peoples.” Not their souls or vital principle, but *they* will judge nations and rule over peoples. Therefore, despite the influence of Greek thought, these texts actually represent a Jewish appropriation of it, since the fate of the dead is described not in the world of ideas but in the material world.

To avoid an overly lengthy Appendix, the selection of New Testament readings—for the first reading during Easter Season, the second reading, and the gospel—proposed for funeral Masses have not been addressed. Therefore, in the readings mentioned above, there is no clear mention of Jesus’ resurrection as the foundation of Christian hope in the future resurrection of all human beings. Even without mentioning Jesus’ resurrection, the Old Testament texts proposed by the Lectionary for funeral Masses have a message that gives hope for the future in a way that is connected to the present material-physical reality and not an out-of-this-world reality. Even the first three texts (Job 19:1, 23-27a; Isa 25:6a, 7-9; Lam 3:17-26), which are from a time when the

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<sup>889</sup> *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 513.

<sup>890</sup> *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 511.

idea of physical resurrection was completely foreign to and absent from the Hebrew mind-set, describe the hope in terms of God's intervention on behalf of his faithful ones in the present world.

Therefore, when ministers meditate, reflect, and preach on the subject of human death with the help of Sacred Scripture, even with the texts from the Old Testament, it seems that there is not much room to reflect on or think about the life of the dead only through the lenses of what is happening to them in the intermediate state between death and resurrection. A discourse about the separated souls of the dead that is completely disconnected from their past and future embodied realities seems to be lacking in significance, risking being mere speculation about unknown realities to satisfy the anxious desire of the living to know something about those who have died. This is not to say that affirmations of Catholic doctrine such as what may be happening to a separated soul in the intermediate state, like purification in purgatory, need to be completely absent. One of the proposed readings, 2 Maccabees 12:43-46, even mentions topics like the offering of sacrifices for the expiation of the sins of the dead. Even in this reading, however, the sacrifices offered are in view of the future life in the resurrection. Therefore, it is important that the discourse not focus completely on the unknown realities of the intermediate state of the separated soul and fail to stress the central Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection in the body and our hope in sharing in that bodily resurrection together with the whole creation at the end of time.

**B. Some final words regarding the readings of the New Testament proposed by the Lectionary for the Masses for the Dead and the curious case of John 12:23-26**

The large majority of the texts from the New Testament proposed by the Lectionary for the Masses for the Dead speak directly about or make reference to Jesus' death and/or his

resurrection, the central tenet of Christian faith. Many of these texts present the conviction that the mystery of human life and death are associated with and find meaning in the mystery of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, pointing to the core Christian hope that is our own resurrection in the resurrection of the dead.<sup>891</sup>

One curiosity, however, is that none of the proposed New Testament texts for use in Masses for the Dead have the word "soul" in them. The only proposed text that contains the Greek term *psyche* is John 12:23-26: "Whoever loves his *life* will lose it, and whoever hates his *life* in this world will preserve it for eternal life."<sup>892</sup> In this case, even though the term used is the Greek *psyche*, the English "soul" is not considered the best option for translation.<sup>893</sup> In this text, Jesus gives the conditions for true discipleship: the person who wants to follow him needs to deny his or her own *psyche*. The common translation here is "him- or herself" or "his or her life," and this "is used in the sense of 'true self.'"<sup>894</sup> These words of Jesus about the conditions for true discipleship are present in the four gospels, always using the Greek *psyche*.<sup>895</sup> The term *psyche*

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<sup>891</sup>Examples of the NT readings proposed: Matt 25:31-46; Mark 15:33-39; 16:1-6; Luke 23:33, 39-43; Luke 23:44-46, 50, 53-53; 24:1-6a; Luke 24:13-35; John 5:24-29; 6:37-40; John 11:17-27; John 12:23-28; John 14:1-6; John 17:24-26; John 19:17-18, 25-39; Acts 10:34-43; Acts 10:34-36, 42-43; Rom 5:5-11; Rom 5:17-21; Rom 6:3-9; Rom 8:13-23; Rom 8:31b-35, 37-39; Rom 14: 7-9, 10c-12; 1 Cor 15:20-28; 1 Cor 15:51-57; 2 Cor 4:14—5:1; 2 Cor 5:1, 6-10; Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 4:13-18; 2 Tim 2:8-13; 1 John 3:1-2; 1 John 3:14-16; Rev 14:13; Rev 20:11—21:1; Rev 21:1-5a, 6b-7 (*Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4, 1090-1093, 1102-1112, 1114-1135).

<sup>892</sup>*Lectionary for Mass*, vol. 4, 1133; emphasis is mine.

<sup>893</sup>It is one example of use of the Greek term *psyche* in the New Testament that does not refer to the "soul" in the way it is understood by Catholic doctrine. The Greek term *psyche* (ψυχή), commonly translated with the English term "soul," may have different and nuanced meanings when used in the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and in the New Testament. It may simply signify the life of the human being, the principle of life or vital force of the human being; it can signify the person's self, but it may also refer to the person's natural or earthly life, meaning a way of living that is not under the action of God's spirit. For more on this theme, see N. T. Wright, "Mind, Spirit, Soul and Body: All for One and One for All Reflections on Paul's Anthropology in his Complex Contexts," – Main Paper presented in the *Society of Christian Philosophers*: Regional Meeting, ForDHam University (March 18, 2011). <http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/mind-spirit-soul-and-body/> (Accessed on January 12, 2019).

<sup>894</sup>*The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 614 (commentary on Mark 8:37).

<sup>895</sup> - Matthew 10:39: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

- Matthew 16:25-26: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?"

in these passages denotes simply the person's own self or life, not the person's soul. What needs to be denied is the person's earthly self-centered existence, which is actually a denial of Jesus.<sup>896</sup> In John 12:25, the term *psyche* is used only to represent the "earthly life," and so it does not appear at the end of the verse when the evangelist is talking about "eternal life."

One footnote offered by *The Catholic Study Bible* for this passage (John 12:25) is especially enlightening with regard to the subject of this dissertation: "*His life*: the Greek word *psyche* refers to a person's natural life. It does not mean 'soul,' for Hebrew anthropology did not postulate body/soul dualism in the way that is familiar to us."<sup>897</sup> This affirmation calls into question the direct association that may be easily made in homilies between the biblical use of the term "soul" and the doctrinal affirmations about the human soul, especially with regard to its separated state after bodily death.

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- Mark 8:35-37: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? What could one give in exchange for his life?"

- Luke 9:24-25: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?"

<sup>896</sup> "Life seen as mere self-centered earthly existence and lived in denial of Christ ends in destruction, but when lived in loyalty to Christ, despite earthly death, it arrives at fullness of life." *Catholic Study Bible*, p. 81. (Footnote for Mark 8:34-35; see also the footnote for Matthew 10:39 on p. 24).

<sup>897</sup> *The Catholic Study Bible*, 169 (footnote for John 12:25).

## APPENDIX II. Comments on Selected Liturgical Texts for Funeral Masses

### A. Texts from the *Order of Christian Funerals*: Comments, Analysis and Insights

While it can be difficult enough to establish communication in normal circumstances, it is even more so in a funeral liturgy. The liturgy is called upon not only to communicate an intelligent and doctrinal message but also to convey words of comfort and solace to the grief-stricken.<sup>898</sup>

Having reflected in the second part of Chapter One on some aspects of the prayers from Masses for the Dead in the 2011 English translation of the *Roman Missal*, **Appendix II** presents selected the texts of the *Order of Christian Funerals*, the use of which is mandatory in the dioceses of the United States of America since All Souls Day, November 2, 1989.<sup>899</sup> As was presented in Chapter One, a reflection on the reappearance and use of the term “soul” in the new English translation of the *Roman Missal*, from the beginning, it is noteworthy that the word “soul” does not occur frequently in the *Order of Christian Funerals*, especially when compared to the use of other terms that refer to the person like “brother/sister,” “your servant,” and personal pronouns (he/she, his/hers, him/her).

The first prayer in the *Order* where the term “soul” is used says:

Lord God, in whom all find refuge, we appeal to your boundless mercy: grant to the *soul* of your *servant N. a kindly welcome, cleansing of sin, release from the chains of death, and entry into everlasting life*. We ask this through Christ our Lord.<sup>900</sup>

This prayer is an intercession asking God to do everything necessary for the soul of the deceased (“servant N.”) to enter into “everlasting life.” There is no mention of the hope in the

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<sup>898</sup> Vincent Owusu, “Funeral Rites in Rome and the Non-Roman West” in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, vol. 4: *Sacraments and Sacramentals*, ed. Anscar J. Chupungco (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 355–80, at 367.

<sup>899</sup> See the Decree from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States of America, in *Order of Christian Funerals*, v. The first English translation of the 1969 *Ordo Exsequiarum* in the United States was released in 1970 as *Funeral Rites* and it was used until 1989, when the second edition, the *Order of Christian Funerals*, was released. This is the version of the text used in this dissertation. For more on the development of the English translation, see Rutherford and Barr, *The Death of a Christian*, 115–22.

<sup>900</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 43.

resurrection. The prayer is not asking God to give to the soul the enjoyment of the beatific vision before the day of resurrection. If the soul enters into everlasting life, what else would be necessary? It seems there is no space for the hope in the resurrection of the dead. This is option A for the Concluding Prayer of the Vigil for the Deceased with Reception at the Church. Option B asks God to give comfort, courage, and faith to the mourners in that moment of sadness. These are two different options for prayers with two completely different theological views.

The prayer for the deceased person after death says:

Holy Lord, almighty and eternal God, hear our *prayers for your servant N.*, whom you have summoned out of this world. Forgive his/her sins and failings and grant him/her *a place of refreshment, light, and peace*. Let *him/her* pass unharmed through the gates of death to *dwell with the blessed in light*, as you promised to Abraham and his children for ever<sup>901</sup>. *Accept N. into your safekeeping* and *on the great day of judgment raise him/her up with all the saints* to inherit your eternal kingdom. We ask this through Christ our Lord.<sup>902</sup>

This is a more comprehensive prayer, expressing all the mysteries and ambiguities in the human understanding of death. Even though it does not use the term “soul,” preferring instead the name of the person, this prayer asks God to keep the person (immortal soul?) safe and also asks about the future hope in the resurrection of the body.

The prayer for when people are Gathering in the Presence of the Body says:

God of faithfulness, in your wisdom you have called your servant N. out of this world; release him/her from the bonds of sin, and *welcome him/her into your presence*, so that he/she may *enjoy eternal light and peace* and *be raised up in glory* with all your saints. We ask this through Christ our Lord.<sup>903</sup>

In this prayer, God is asked to give to the person, who is implied to be in the state of a separated soul, everything that seems to be possible after the resurrection of the body, like being “raised up in glory.” This is an example of a prayer that could make people question the

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<sup>901</sup> Note that the texts of the *Order of Christian Funerals* use the expression “for ever” instead of “forever.”

<sup>902</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 53.

<sup>903</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 60.



advantages of or the need for the resurrection of the body since everything that is to be expected for the future is already being enjoyed by the person/separated soul.

There is an interesting example of a litany in the Transfer of the Body to the Church or to the Place of Committal, with prayers that comprehensively summarize the realities believed in a way that does not deny the existence of the immortal soul but expresses the hope in the future action of God. In the first prayer, while facing death and the dissolution of the body into the earth, the prayer remembers God's promise of eternal life and asks for mercy.

- Word of God, Creator of the earth to which *N. now returns*: in baptism, you called him/her to eternal life to praise your Father for ever: Lord, have mercy.

The intercessions continue:

- Son of God, you raise up the just and clothe them with the glory of your kingdom: Lord, have mercy.

- Crucified Lord, *you protect the soul of N.* by the power of your cross, and on the day of your coming *you will show mercy to all the faithful departed*: Lord, have mercy.

- Judge of the living and the dead, at your voice *the tombs will open and all the just who sleep in your peace will rise* and sing the glory of God: Lord, have mercy.

- All praise to you, Jesus our Savior, death is in your hands and all the living depend on you alone: Lord, have mercy.<sup>904</sup>

These intercessions mention hope in the resurrection of the body while not mentioning or speculating about the present state of the separated soul.

At the beginning of the Funeral Mass, in the Sprinkling with Holy Water, the minister says: "In the waters of baptism N. died with Christ and rose with him to new life. May *he/she now share with him eternal glory*."<sup>905</sup> Here, the belief that the person who died can now experience "eternal glory" is explicit. Is it through the separated soul? Or in some way does this express the belief in the resurrection of the death?

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<sup>904</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 66.

<sup>905</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 81.

During the Funeral Mass, there are four Opening Prayer options with different theological meanings. Here are the parts of the prayers that express these views:

Prayer A: “Grant that through this mystery your servant N., who has gone to his/her rest in Christ, ***may share in the joy of his resurrection.***”<sup>906</sup>

Prayer B: “command that he/she be carried safely home to heaven and come to enjoy your eternal reward.”<sup>907</sup>

Prayer C: “we pray to you for our brother/sister N., whose body we honor with Christian burial, that he/she may be delivered from the bonds of death. Admit him/her to the joyful company of your saints and raise him/her on the last day to rejoice in your presence for ever.”<sup>908</sup>

Prayer D: “strengthen our belief that your Son has risen from the dead and our hope that ***your servant N. will also rise again.***”<sup>909</sup>

While prayer A mentions the resurrection, prayer B seems to be talking about only the fate of the separated soul, as if it represents the whole person, with a definitive tone that this person/separated soul will enjoy the “eternal reward.” Prayer C is complete, as it takes into consideration the intermediate eschatological reality of the separated soul and the hope of the resurrection of the dead. Prayer D, for use during the Easter Season, relies on Jesus’ resurrection as the hope of the deceased’s future resurrection without treating any element of the intermediate eschatology.

The General Intercessions at the Funeral Mass are an example of good prayer that does not provide certainty about things that are mysteries, like the state of the separated soul, since the result of God’s judgment of the deceased cannot be known. The consolation of the faithful must come from Jesus’ victory over sin and death and from the promise of future resurrection, not from affirmations that the deceased is with God in everlasting joy. This does not deny that there

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<sup>906</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 83.

<sup>907</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 83.

<sup>908</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 83.

<sup>909</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 84.

can be consolation in the fact that Jesus' victory over sin and death gives hope that the deceased are somehow with God. The resurrection, though, is the core source of the Christian hope. As the final intercession for option A states:

We are assembled here in faith and confidence to pray for our brother/sister N.  
***Strengthen our hope so that we may live in the expectation of your Son's coming.*** Lord,  
in your mercy.<sup>910</sup>

A prayer like this expresses the faithful's feelings and desires in the form of an intercession for the person who died without making affirmations about the place or state of the deceased. Or maybe this way of expressing our hopes about the unknown, precisely because of its unknowability, should display the signs of its own ambivalence, as in the following prayers of intercession from option B:

- For N. who in baptism was given the pledge of eternal life, that ***he/she may now be admitted to the company of the saints*** [present situation]. We pray to the Lord.

- For our brother/sister who ate the body of Christ, the bread of life, that ***he/she may be raised up on the last day*** [future event]. We pray to the Lord.

- For those who have fallen asleep in the hope of rising again, that ***they may see God*** [future event] face to face. We pray to the Lord.<sup>911</sup>

These prayers express distinct realities believed and desired for the person who died: that he or she is already "now" enjoying the *convivium* of the saints and, at the same time, that this person will be resurrected in the end. The same ambivalence is demonstrated in prayers that declare that the person is in the peace of God, enjoying eternal happiness and peace, but, at the same time, is awaiting what is to come, either in the enjoyments of heaven or in the sleep of death in the tomb. This tension between the present situation and the future expectation is a

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<sup>910</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 86.

<sup>911</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 87. Clarification in square brackets is mine.

characteristic of the Church's eschatological assertions and thus can be expressed only in this ambivalent way.

In the Prayer of Commendation, right after the Prayer after Communion, this eschatological tension appears again in the way the petition is directed to God:

Into your hands, Father of mercies, ***we commend our brother/sister*** N. in the sure and certain hope that, together with all who have died in Christ, ***he/she will rise with him on the last day*** [future event]. Merciful Lord, turn toward us and listen to our prayers: ***open the gates of paradise to your servant*** [present situation: paradise now?] and help us who remain to comfort one another with assurances of faith, until we all meet in Christ and are with you and with our brother/sister for ever.<sup>912</sup>

In the other prayer option, instead of commending the "brother/sister," the prayer commends the soul of the person:

To you, O Lord, ***we commend the soul*** of N. your servant; in the sight of this world, he/she is now dead; in your sight may he/she live for ever. Forgive whatever sins he/she committed through human weakness and in your goodness grant him/her everlasting peace.<sup>913</sup>

These two options of prayers offered for the Final Commendation entrust the person who died to God by referring to him or her in different ways: "brother/sister N." and "the soul of N." Are these two different types of treatments of the person who died expressing different realities or the same reality? Probably they are expressing the same reality by using different expressions. These terms communicate different understandings of the afterlife, however: in the first, the "brother/sister" is the subject who will be received by God and who will have the "gates of paradise"<sup>914</sup> open for him or her; in the second, the soul of the deceased is the subject. In both cases it seems that the texts are about the whole reality of the human being, as these prayers always use personal pronouns (he/she, him/her, his/hers) and not the impersonal pronoun "it."

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<sup>912</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 90. Clarification in square brackets is mine.

<sup>913</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 91.

<sup>914</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 90.

The questions that remain, however, are these: what do people think, imagine, and understand when they hear the word “soul” in a prayer? Do they think about the whole human being or just the “spiritual element,” what they believe to be the innermost and more important part of the person because it is immortal and therefore survives bodily death? My thesis is that the second option is the popular one in the minds of a majority of the people who are present at a funeral service.

Maybe it is not what the prayer is trying to express, but it becomes a kind of confirmation of what people may imagine about personal existence of the dead in the afterlife. The prayers can be interpreted as always saying something about the whole human being who died. It is important to take into account, however, what these different prayers may suggest for the hearers of them. And following this logic, it does not matter if the texts use or do not use the term “soul,” because the idea about the person’s existence in the afterlife is that of an immaterial and spiritual existence. Therefore, pronouns, designative words (your servant, our brother/sister), and even the name of the person are now (after bodily death) designations to a person who is a soul, a pure spiritual and nonphysical, nonmaterial being.

Of course, the very use—though rare—of the term “soul” to designate the person (and sometimes to designate the whole person) in the texts helps to reinforce this vision that people may have of the pure spiritual existence of the person in the afterlife. And this is not only because of the prayers or the use of the term “soul” but because of the pre-Vatican II eschatological images that are present in the people’s imagination and that make them

understand the future events in the perspective of the four last things: death, judgment,<sup>915</sup> heaven (or purgatory then heaven), and hell.

Even though the prayers in the *Order of Christian Funerals* do not mention the four last things directly (with the exceptions of words referring to death and of metaphors about judgment and heaven—without any reference to hell), it is very difficult to redirect people’s attention when they still hold fast to the legacy of the four last things. It is both a theological and pastoral challenge to assist them in expanding their theological horizons in order to appropriate the post-conciliar eschatological assertions and hopes about the future, namely, the resurrection of the body, the fulfillment of the kingdom of God, and the restoration of the whole creation. These eschatological hopes are what should guide and shape the lives of the people.

There was a change in the tone and in the language of the Church about eschatological issues at the Second Vatican Council, but this change was not necessarily accompanied by a change in people’s minds and their images about the afterlife; sometimes, that change did not even reach the preaching of the ministers. Not that the four last things should be forgotten. They are part of the Church’s teaching on the afterlife, but the emphasis on the eschatological hopes should be at the center of preaching.

Unfortunately, however, many people are just concerned with the preservation and salvation of the soul of the deceased. This could be due to a psychological need that the human being has to elaborate on and accept death by holding on to the idea that something of the person survived, which can be a denial of death.<sup>916</sup> And even though in the invocations deacons or priests can use to invite the assembly to begin the Procession to the Place of Committal it is

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<sup>915</sup> The judgment is twofold: particular judgment at death and last judgment at the end of the world, with the insertion of the possibility of purgatory in the interim state for those who will go to heaven but who need purification.

<sup>916</sup> Although the person died, something of him or her is alive. Can the belief in and idea of the immortality of the soul be sometimes be a way of denying death? This theme of denial is discussed in chapter four.

implied that the grave and cemetery are the “place of rest”<sup>917</sup> of the person who died, which connects the place of the person with the place of resting of this person’s dead body, the antiphons proposed right after these invocations express a desire that the deceased may be led “into paradise” or “to the bosom of Abraham.”<sup>918</sup> While the deacon or priest says, “In peace let us take our brother/sister to *his/her place of rest*,”<sup>919</sup> another message about the location of the deceased is expressed in the antiphons that may be sung while the priest and assisting ministers leave the church, preceding the casket that is followed by the people who attended the service:

May the angels lead you into *paradise*; may the martyrs come to welcome you and take you to the holy city, the *new and eternal Jerusalem*.

Or:

May choirs of angels welcome you and *lead you to the bosom of Abraham*; and *where Lazarus is poor no longer may you find eternal rest*.<sup>920</sup>

Where is the brother/sister who died? In the grave/place of rest, or being led into paradise or to the bosom of Abraham by angels and being welcomed by martyrs into the new and eternal Jerusalem? Although these biblical images and metaphors are used without any pretension to explain the location of the dead, there still is an ambivalence in the liturgical language about the person in the afterlife. This ambivalence is due to belief in the subsistence of the immortal soul and the unknowability of the eschatological realities.

In the Rite of Committal there is another example of this ambivalence in language that can lead people to confusion. The Invitation to Prayer suggested in the Rite says:

Our brother/sister N. has gone to *his/her rest in the peace of Christ*. May the Lord *now* welcome him/her to the *table of God’s children in heaven*. With faith and hope in eternal life, let us assist him/her with our prayers.<sup>921</sup>

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<sup>917</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 91.

<sup>918</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 91.

<sup>919</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 91.

<sup>920</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 91.

It asks that God receive the deceased “now” at the “table of God’s children in heaven.”

The words express our desire and expectation that the person is, at the present moment, with God in heaven, but then we have the following three options for the Prayer over the Place of Committal that contain the same ambivalence described above:

Option A: Lord Jesus Christ, by your own three days in the tomb, you hallowed the graves of all who believe in you and so made the *grave a sign of hope* that promises resurrection even as it claims our mortal bodies. Grant that *our brother/sister may sleep here in peace until you awaken him/her to glory*, for you are the resurrection and the life. Then *he/she will see* you face to face and in your light *will see light and know* the splendor of God, for you live and reign for ever and ever.

Option B: You sanctify the homes of the living and make holy the *places of the dead*. You alone open the gates of righteousness and lead us to the *dwellings of the saints*. . . . Almighty and ever-living God, remember the mercy with which you graced your servant N. in life. *Receive him/her, we pray, into the mansions of the saints*. As we make ready *our brother’s/sister’s resting place*, look also with favor on those who mourn and comfort them in their loss.

Option C: Almighty and ever-living God, in you we place our trust and hope, in you the dead whose bodies were temples of the Spirit find *everlasting peace*. As we take leave of our brother/sister, give our hearts peace in the firm *hope that one day N. will live in the mansion* you have prepared for him/her *in heaven*.<sup>922</sup>

Prayer A is straightforward in stating that the person will be in the grave (a location/place) until he or she is awakened as a future action when the person will enjoy (in the future tense) the beatific vision. Prayer C also talks without ambiguity about the hope that “one day” (in the future) the person will be in heaven. On the other hand, Prayer B has the abovementioned ambivalence since it talks about God’s power both of making holy the graves (as the physical places of the dead) and of leading people to the “dwelling of the saints” (as a representation of spiritual heaven?). This same prayer asks God to receive the person into the “mansions of the saints” (another metaphor for heaven) while the person will at the same time be in the physical “resting place” (metaphor for the grave, the physical place where the corpse is

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<sup>921</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 113.

<sup>922</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 114–15.



deposited). This prayer again gives ambivalent information about the place/location of the deceased person.

In some other places, as in the Final Commendation of the Funeral Mass of a Baptized Child, the words in the Invitation to Prayer are straightforward in affirming the duality or ambivalence of the Catholic eschatological faith, which believes at the same time that the body of the deceased will rise one day and that the person (or his or her separated soul) is already enjoying God's presence in heaven: "***The body we must now bury will one day rise again to a new and radiant life*** that will never end. Our firm belief is that *N.*, because he/she was baptized, ***has already entered this new life.***"<sup>923</sup>

Another of these texts that express more clearly the separation between body and soul in death is Option A of the Prayer over the Place of Committal for a Child: "As we ***bury here the body of N., welcome him/her into your presence, that he/she may rejoice in you with your saints for ever.***"<sup>924</sup> Here is one of the only examples of texts where there is a clear distinction between the body of the person and the person him- or herself. In the majority of the other texts, the person is left in the grave, not just his or her body. Here, the body of the person is buried, while the person (or the separated immortal soul of the person) is enjoying God's presence forever. This permanent state of eternal joy of the deceased does not leave room for a further hope or expectation in the resurrection of the dead. On the contrary, it can give rise to interpretations of the afterlife that are almost Platonic.

These are just some examples of the ambiguities in the language of the prayers in the *Order of Christian Funerals* that can lead to confusion among the people. Again, although the

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<sup>923</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 159.

<sup>924</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 182.

term “soul” is almost absent throughout the prayers in the *Order of Christian Funerals*, the idea of the separated immortal soul already enjoying heaven is present, sometimes even without the notion that this is not the permanent state of such a soul.

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