

Chrtc 390 Module 6 Class Notes by Paul Flaman

Does a Human Person Continue to Exist after Death?

Discussion Questions

1. Why have some philosophers and religions concluded or believed that the human soul is immaterial and immortal?

2. How should we interpret biblical data with regard to bodily resurrection (Jesus' and ours)—as a myth, metaphorically, early Christians' hallucinatory experiences, historical events, events that transcend history, and/or events that are both historical and transcendental? If you believe in Jesus' real bodily resurrection, where is Jesus including his risen body now? If you also believe in Mary's bodily assumption (see Catholic teaching), where is she now?

3. What do you think of the theological traditions on heaven and hell, and the Catholic view of purgatory? What determines "where" one goes when one dies?

4. Do you believe in both an individual judgment when a person dies, as well as a last general judgment by God? Do you believe in the Second Coming of Jesus and God's establishing a "new heaven and earth"? If so, how do you understand these?

5. Do you believe in praying for the dead? Can deceased human beings (e.g., saints) pray for us? Do you think that miracles related to the canonization of a saint confirm not only his or her sanctity but also that he or she is now conscious and can intercede (pray) for us? Do such miracles confirm the immateriality or transcendence of the human soul, that is, that it survives death of the body including the brain?

6. What is the best way to interpret the scientific data with regard to “near death experiences”—merely a product of the brain, evidence that consciousness and memory can be independent of the brain, or other?

7. Is there any realistic basis to hope that one can continue to exist as a person after death, including the total and irreversible cessation of all one’s brain functions?

8. How should we interpret the claims of mediums who say they often contact the dead / “spirits”? Is it ethical to try to do this?

9. Are there any other paranormal phenomena such as “ghosts” that support belief in life after death?

10. Do you think plants and/or animals go to heaven and/or will there be plants and animals in the “new heaven and earth”?

Introduction

From a biological perspective the death of living organisms involves a cessation of life functions. Death is a central feature of the cycle of life. It is necessary for ecological integrity from bacteria and algae to complex organisms. If various kinds of life kept reproducing and none died, then the planet earth would soon become overly crowded to say the least. Is the theological concept of the death of human beings as a consequence of the fall identical with bodily or biological death (see Gen 2-3; Rom 5; and the previous chapter of this book)? Does the death of a human person involve the separation of an immaterial immortal soul from the material body? If the human soul is immortal as held by mainline traditional Christianity, then why does traditional Christianity also believe in bodily resurrection? We can note here that some non-reductive physicalist Christians do not think we humans have an immaterial immortal soul, but that the human being is ontologically only physical. In their view, when the body dies

the person ceases to exist but with the general resurrection of the dead in the future God will reconstitute human persons (see, e.g., Brown, Murphy and Malony 1998).

The New Testament in 1 Cor 15:42-44 affirms that our present bodies are perishable but that with the resurrection we will have “spiritual” bodies that are imperishable. The theme of the resurrection of the body is central in the New Testament: Jesus has already been raised from the dead and we human beings will be raised from the dead at some time in the future. Will our “spiritual” bodies also be material in some sense? If so, will this be a new kind of “materiality” if these bodies are imperishable?

Science

As we have considered in this book, empirical science is restricted to studying the properties of physical matter and energy, that is, what is measurable and observable. The scientific method is not equivalent to either scientism or materialism (see Ch. 1 above). Can we obtain “evidence” for nonmaterial existence, for consciousness functioning with a flat EEG? If we consider quantum physics and so forth, we realize that we do *not* fully understand the properties of matter, energy and the cosmos. Physical reality (e.g., the floor) seems “real” and “solid” but from modern physics we understand that it is mostly empty “space”. Are electrons—consider also light—waves or particles? Consider the role of an observer in “creating” reality: if we observe electrons or light one way they act as “particles,” but if we observe them in another way they act as “waves.”

Scientism is a dogmatic commitment to materialist explanations. For example, any evidence or observations that lend themselves to an interpretation involving immaterial entities (not forms of physical energy), the existence of consciousness apart from a physical body—consider some reported Near-Death Experiences (NDE) and Out-of-Body Experiences (OBE)—

must be interpreted as hallucinations, “nothing but” brain states, etc. It is important to recognize the role of assumptions, worldviews, *a priori* beliefs and commitments in the interpretation of data. There are basically two camps regarding the interpretation of the data of NDE and OBE, materialist and transcendent. The latter holds that there is a reality, a dimension beyond the physical or material.

With regard to “scientific evidence,” what “counts” as evidence from a scientific perspective? In this area, there are anecdotal reports of the experiences of many individuals? These include near-death experiences and contact with spirits of the dead including many people reporting visitations by deceased relatives. A colleague of mine has a friend, a palliative care nurse who shared that some people who are physically away from a person who is dying sometimes experience the presence of the person with them and discover later that this was shortly after they had died. Along these lines, St. Benedict (of Nursia, 480-547 A.D.), the founder of the Benedictine religious order, reported that when he was in his own cell and not physically with his sister, St. Scholastica (480-543 A.D.), he had a vision of her soul ascending to heaven. She lived as a hermit and when he sent some of his religious brothers to get her body, they brought it to the monastery and buried it (see the *Liturgy of the Hours*, Feb. 10 Office of Readings). A survey in Canada in 2001 found that 5.8 percent said they have “seen” an angel and 6.3 percent say they have seen a ghost (Canadian Press). In every culture there exist accounts of people reporting their experiences of having encountered the spirit or ghost of a deceased person. See, for example, Jo-Anne Christensen’s several collections of such accounts, beginning with her *Ghost Stories of Saskatchewan* (1995). One of these accounts concerns the Esterhazy Tabor Light (100-108), reportedly seen by many people around a Bohemian cemetery in 1938. It was even reported at the time in the City of Regina’s newspaper, *The Leader Post*.

Appearances of this mysterious light stopped after a priest prayed at a young girl's grave whose father did not allow her to be baptized. Many of these reported experiences are by credible people who are not mentally ill or otherwise delusional.

Jody Long on the website "After Death Communication Research Foundation," reports that "Surveys of adults from around the world consistently find 20% - 31% of the respondents answer affirmatively when asked if they had ever felt they had contact with someone who had died." This "contact" is experienced in various ways from a knowing sense of the presence of the deceased person to seeing, hearing (may be external or internal, a one or two-way conversation), feeling and/or smelling them. The person experiences this as very real and meaningful and not as imaginary (Retrieved 3 June 2019 from: https://www.adcrf.org/brief_overview_adc.htm).

Some people with near death experiences (NDE), as verified by others, later report accurate observations of some things that occurred while others considered them clinically "dead," to be deeply unconscious with a flat EEG (electroencephalogram), that is, with no brain waves or functions. Consider the case of Pam Reynolds. She was a singer and songwriter who in 1991 at the age of 35 had surgery to repair a grossly swollen blood vessel (aneurism) in her brain stem. During the procedure she was brought to a point of "clinical death"—her body was cooled to 60 degrees Fahrenheit (well below the normal of 98.6 degrees), her heart and breathing stopped, her EEG brain waves flattened completely, and her brain stem and cerebral hemispheres became unresponsive. Her blood was drained from her head, her ears were plugged with devices which produced a steady clicking sound to prevent stimulation which might trigger a seizure, and she was in a profoundly inactive state. When she recovered, she reported having had an out-of-body experience that included her hovering above the operating table during the surgery. For

someone knowing nothing of surgical practice she accurately described the Midas Rex bone saw used to cut open her skull and what happened during the operation including discussions of the doctors. And this happened at a time when she was “clinically dead” and fully monitored by medical instruments. Among other things, Pam Reynolds reports encountering her deceased grandmother and a deceased uncle during her NDE.(See Beauregard and O’Leary 2007, 153-66; and “Pam Reynolds’ Near Death Experience”: retrieved 29 May 2019 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bu1ErDeQ0Zw>)

Studying paranormal experiences such as out-of-body (OBE) and NDE empirically is not without difficulty. The initial evidence of NDE was anecdotal but there have been a number of systematic studies of them including the prospective study by Pim van Lommel et al. of cardiac survivors in the Netherlands (2001). A systematic prospective study involves controls and is carried out over time. Lommel et al. note that the content and effects on patients with NDE “seem similar worldwide, across all cultures and times. The subjective nature and absence of a frame of reference for this experience lead to individual, cultural, and religious factors determining the vocabulary used to describe and interpret the experience.” They state that “people who have had an NDE are psychologically healthy” and “do not differ from controls with respect to age, sex, ethnic origin, religion, or degree of religious belief.” There are several theories of the origin of NDE including a lack of oxygen to the brain, a psychological reaction to approaching death, and that NDE are “linked to a changing state of consciousness (transcendence), in which perception, cognitive functioning, emotion, and sense of identity function independently from normal body-linked waking consciousness.”(2039)

The study of Lommel et al. involved 344 Dutch patients who were successfully resuscitated after cardiac arrest and clinical death (all experienced a period of unconsciousness as

established mainly by electroencephalogram). Of these patients 18 percent reported NDE: 6 percent superficial; 5 percent moderately deep; 5 percent deep; and 2 percent very deep. Lommel et al.'s article includes the report of a nurse of one man who a week later when he became conscious described having had an OBE and accurately explained what happened to his dentures while he was in a deep coma and in the process of CPR. Subjects were interviewed within a few days of resuscitation and those who survived and accepted to be interviewed again were at about 2 years and 8 years following resuscitation. All subjects who had NDE were able to recall their experience years later almost exactly. People "who had NDE had a significant increase in belief in an afterlife and decrease in fear of death compared with people who had not had this experience." VanLommel et al. found that the "process of change after NDE tends to take several years to consolidate." They also found that: "No medical, pharmacological, or psychological factor affected the frequency" of NDE, although subjects "younger than 60 years had NDE more often than older people." It seems that good short-term memory may be essential to remembering NDE. Among other things, they note that OBE induced by "electrical stimulation of the temporal lobe ... during neurosurgery for epilepsy" or by psychedelic drugs such as LSD result in "fragmented and random memories unlike the panoramic life-review that can occur in NDE. Further, transformational processes with changing life-insight and disappearance of fear of death are rarely reported after induced experiences." They encourage research especially of certain elements of NDE "such as out-of-body experiences and other verifiable aspects," and conclude in part that "the theory and background of transcendence should be included as a part of an explanatory framework for these experiences."(2041-44)

Regarding NDE see, for example, also Kirkey's article, "Does Consciousness Continue After the Brain Dies,"(2019) which focuses on Dr. Sam Parnia's research; and the largest NDE

website in the world (<https://www.nderf.org>) on which there are posted more than 4,600 NDE in 23 languages. This website also provides references to and summarizes many research papers. Those reporting NDE often experience positive emotions, sometimes negative emotions, and very rarely encountering malevolent beings. More often those experiencing NDE report encountering deceased persons and moving through a tunnel towards a bright light which some interpret as God or Jesus.

Not everyone interprets NDE as a sign that we have a spiritual immaterial mind or soul that can be conscious when the brain is inactive. For example, Steven Pinker, a cognitive psychologist and materialist, interprets NDE as “symptoms of oxygen starvation in the eyes and brain” (2007, 48). Susan Blackmore in her *Dying to Live* (1993) book tries “to show that we can account for all of the major features of the NDE without recourse to such ideas as a spirit, a soul, or life after death.”(Blackmore’s response in Blackmore and Stone 2019) She interprets NDE as the brain constructing a reality based on memory and sensory input. She points out that memory constructions normally take a “bird’s eye view” of a scene. OBE do not only happen with some clinically dead persons who have been resuscitated (see, e.g., St. Paul’s account in 2 Cor 12:2-6 of an extraordinary vision which he thought could have involved an OBE). In her view an OBE adds inferences and inputs such as what an operating room is supposed to look like, and what people would have said. The “tunnel and bright light” which are often part of NDE could be due to increasing random activation of the visual cortex which can produce these patterns which are similar to migraine auras. In response to some NDE reports of encountering deceased persons and/or a “being of light,” sceptics such as Blackmore may interpret this as a combination of visual cortex activity and memory.

In his critique of Blackmore's book, Greg Stone points out that she has neither scientifically proved her "dying brain hypothesis" nor the non-existence of the spiritual contrary to some interpretations of her book. He says she merely dismisses evidence in support of the spiritual with her conjectures and materialistic bias which are not based on evidence. Stone concludes that "The evidence points very clearly in the direction of a consciousness that can exist outside the body and which survives body death."(Stone's response to Blackmore's response in Blackmore and Stone 2019) Professor of neurosurgery Charles Probst affirms that while accounts of NDE "should always form the subject of a critical analysis In general, scientific attempts at explanation (lack of oxygen, endorphins etc.) are insufficient in the majority of cases." Among other things, he shares about the case of someone he knew:

.... [A] Catholic priest, who, following a cardio-respiratory arrest ... while in a deep coma, was able to observe the doctors and nurses attempting to resuscitate his body from above, and later recounted the scene accurately. An interesting feature of this case lies in the fact that the patient perceived the scene visually and was delighted to do so as he had been blind for several decades. We should emphasize that the possibility of hallucinations can be ruled out here with absolute certainty; although in a sense incomprehensible it was indeed reality which the patient witnessed. Hallucinations are sensory illusions without a real object...

.... NDE are signs of the existence of higher spiritual functions independent of cerebral activity as well as perceivable reality beyond normal sensory perception.(1999, 32-33)

I think that any interpretation of NDEs must account for *both* physiology (even if they involve the person's mind, self or soul perceiving reality when their brain is profoundly inactive, when the person later reports their experience this necessarily involves their brain and parts of their body involved in the reporting) and the transformative power of NDEs. Are NDE really reflective of passing "over the brink," glimpsing life after death, and coming back to tell the tale? Is "life after death" necessarily the sort of thing one could glimpse, return from, and report in terms comprehensible to us now? If NDEs are phenomena of a "dying" brain and/or of the

human soul, does this tell us anything useful about what happens *after* death? Neurosurgeon Probst concludes that NDE support the view of an individual conscious life after death but says:

We should, however, remember that the individuals concerned were only in a near death state, which precludes any hasty conclusion as to the afterlife. Such NDE allow us to state the following: if there exists a conscious “element” in a human being, capable of operating in a largely autonomous way in relation to the brain during life, one can suppose that this “element” is in some way able to continue to exist after death.(1999, 33)

An Historical Overview Including the Christian Tradition

Many humans have believed in life after death for tens of thousands of years as exemplified, for example, in early human burials where the deceased is buried with food, hunting weapons, and so forth. Many people today continue to believe in an afterlife, not only those of the traditional Christian faith, but also many Muslims and Jews, as well as those of Eastern religions who believe in reincarnation. A survey of Canadians in 2001 reports that more than 57 percent believe in life after death and angels (Canadian Press). In 2011 sociologist Reginald Bibby reports that among Canadians adults, 65 percent believe in life after death, 62 percent in Heaven and Angels, 48 percent in Hell, and 46 percent in spirit world contact. Among Canadian teenagers, 75 percent believe in life after death, 61 percent that good people are rewarded, 60 percent in Hell, and 46 percent in spirit world contact.(171-2) Belief in life after death among select countries varies from 26 percent in Russia to 100 percent in Pakistan.(180)

Materialist philosophy excludes an immaterial spiritual dimension of the person surviving bodily death. For example, Karl Marx (1818-1883) considered religion to be “opium of the people.” Some other philosophers, however, have advanced arguments for the human soul being immaterial and immortal. For example, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato held that the soul is naturally immortal: we know only of things ceasing to exist which have parts but the soul has no parts. The medieval theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) argued that the

human soul is naturally immortal: it is able to understand eternal truths and have contact with God. Also, we desire to live forever and it is impossible that a natural appetite be in vain.

The German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) affirmed that we are obliged to act morally. In his view, this only makes sense if we, our souls, will continue to live forever. Related to this consider also the view of karma which is held in a number of Eastern religions including Hinduism and Buddhism which believe in reincarnation: karma “refers to the spiritual principle of cause and effect where intent and actions of an individual (cause) influence the future of that individual (effect). Good intent and good deeds contribute to good karma and happier rebirths, while bad intent and bad deeds contribute to bad karma and bad rebirths.” (“Karma,” WFE, retrieved 4 June 2019) These views relate to a sense of justice—much that happens can seem to be unjust such as a good person suffering and dying young if there is only life in this world.

Jewish Thought with Regard to What Happens to the Dead

Jewish thought as presented in the Jewish Scriptures on what happens to the dead developed over time and there were some different points of view. The abode of the dead in the Jewish Scriptures is called Sheol. It is generally pictured as a resting place. Some texts “suggest that inactivity and perhaps even unconsciousness are the lot of the departed.” (see, e.g., Job 3:13, Ecclesiastes 9:10 and Psalm 88:10-12) Some other texts, however, “suggest that at least on occasion the inhabitants of the underworld are conscious and active.” (see, e.g., Isaiah 14:9-10) The practice of consulting the dead through mediums which was widespread in the ancient Middle East indicates belief in an afterlife. So does the forbidding of such practices in Jewish scriptures (e.g., Leviticus 19:31), since there would be no need to warn against such practices “if the Israelites did not believe the dead existed or that they could be consulted.” Some later texts

in the Jewish scriptures also express the hope that the dwellers in Sheol would be reunited with their bodies in a future resurrection (see, e.g., Ezekiel 37; Daniel 12:2; and Isaiah 24-27). Between the time that the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament were written, there were some Jewish writings that are often referred to as intertestamental or Jewish apocryphal literature. Within this literature one sees some developments as well as a diversity of views with regard to the afterlife. For example, some of these writings express the view that within Sheol there is a place of punishment for the wicked called “Gehenna,” whereas the righteous are taken to “Paradise.” At the time of Jesus, one group of Jews, the Saducees, did not believe in resurrection of the dead, angels and spirits, whereas another group of Jews, the Pharisees, as well as Jesus and the early Christians believed in all three (See Cooper 2000, Chs. 2-4: the quotes are from pp. 55-59; compare also Mt 22:23-30 and Acts 23:6-8, McKenzie 1965, and Flaman 2008).

Christian New Testament Teaching on the Resurrection of the Dead

With regard to the bodily resurrection of Jesus, there are several accounts in the New Testament of a number of disciples encountering the Risen Jesus alive after his death (see the last parts of each of the 4 Gospels and Acts 9:1-9 regarding Saul who was later called Paul). For example, in Jn 20:19-21 and 24-29 Jesus appears to those of the Twelve disciples who were in a house with locked doors and he shows them his hands and his side. Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not present at the first encounter and did not believe the other disciples’ report. A week later Jesus appears to them again and he invites Thomas to place his fingers in the marks of the nails in his (Jesus’) hands, and his hand in his (Jesus’) side which had been lanced. There is a continuity of the body of the crucified Jesus with his risen body (the marks of his wounds remain), but the risen body of Jesus has some properties which a normal human body does not have such as being able to appear suddenly within a locked house. When the risen body of Jesus

ascends to heaven, the disciples are informed that Jesus will return (consider his Second Coming), but at a time set by God the Father and unknown by any human (see, e.g., Acts 1:6-11). The New Testament also teaches that there will be a future General Human Resurrection of the dead. As was the case with Jesus, there will be some continuity between our present mortal perishable bodies and our risen spiritual immortal imperishable bodies (see 1 Cor 15). The Apostle Paul, speaking of those persons who are living a genuine Christian life, in Phil 3:21 states that the Lord Jesus Christ “will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.”(NRSV)

How are the New Testament texts with regard to bodily resurrection from the dead to be understood? Possibilities include: a fabricated story, sincere accounts but illusions or hallucinations, myth, symbolically, and that in the case of Jesus it really happened and concerning the rest of us will really happen at some undisclosed time in the future.

Early Christian writers as well as mainline Christian denominations today, including Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic, affirm that the bodily resurrection of Jesus really happened and in our case will happen. This is a central tenant of the historic Christian faith. Consider, for example, the following text by the Apostle Paul:

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ.... But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.(1 Cor 15:12-15 and 20 NRSV)

Supporting arguments for Christian faith in bodily resurrection from the dead include the following. While we do not have any direct empirical evidence of bodily resurrection, we do have testimonial evidence which is one of the forms of evidence used in our legal system. With

testimonial evidence one of the main things to be considered is the credibility of the witnesses. The disciples of Jesus who witnessed the Risen Jesus and the New Testament authors who report several of these accounts taught and lived the highest moral standards. For example, Rom 3:8 teaches that we should never do evil, even to try to achieve good. Similarly, 1 Th 5:15 and 21-22 exhorts “always seek to do good to one another and to all,” and “test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.” God including Jesus and the Holy Spirit are presented in the New Testament as “love” and “truth” in an absolute sense (see, e.g., 1 Jn 4:7-8; and Jn 14:6). New Testament morality includes always loving God, others and oneself as Jesus loved (Jn 13:34-35 and 15:12-13), according to the truth, which sets one free (Jn 8:31-32), by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth (Jn 16:13). Among other things, Christians are exhorted not to lie to one another (Col 3:9). Those who testified that they had encountered the risen Jesus faced much opposition and persecution, and many of them including the Apostle Paul were tortured and killed for their refusal to deny the truth they had witnessed. They believed that Jesus had brought them the Good News, salvation from human evil and sin of every kind, the best of all good news, and they awaited their final reward after death.

The authors of the New Testament, including the writers of the Four Gospels, were completely consistent in their teaching with regard to who Jesus was and is (that he was fully human and fully divine), the main themes of what he taught and did, and of his rising from the dead. They, however, seemed unconcerned with harmonizing all of the minor details (see, e.g. a close parallel reading of the resurrection accounts in the four Gospels). With regard to this we can note that human witnesses each experience events from their own limited perspective. If one compares, for example, honest eye witnesses to a car accident, in general their separate testimonies will be consistent on the main points but there will be some minor differences in the

less significant details. When two or more people make up a story to try to convince others, they typically check with each other to try to make sure that all the details of their accounts are the same. On the other hand, in the case of honest witnesses who do not collaborate on their accounts, whether in the case of an automobile accident or in the case of encounters with the risen Jesus, the lack of concern about harmonizing small details supports the authenticity of the accounts.

Christian teaching with regard to Jesus' resurrection is that he is still alive and continues to be present to his followers in a number of ways: he abides within and reveals himself to those who keep his commandments and love him (see, e.g., Jn 14:15-24), he is present spiritually in the midst of 2 or more who meet in his name (Mt 18:20), that is, when each tries to love the other as Jesus loves. Among other ways, Jesus also comes to humans who are open to him through the sacraments including Baptism and the Eucharist. For many Christians throughout the centuries and still today, their personal relationship with Jesus who is alive, is more real than any of their other relationships (see, e.g., Lubich 2007, Part 2). Mainline historic Christian denominations generally believe that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist (cf., e.g., Mt 26:26-30; Jn 6:22-71; and 1 Cor 10:16-17). According to Catholic teaching, the whole Jesus Christ our Lord including his body, blood, soul and divinity, is truly, really and substantially contained in the Eucharist (see CCC, nn. 1373-81)

There are a number of miracles of the Eucharist which provide some physical evidence in support of Catholic teaching that the Eucharist is really the body and blood of Jesus. For example, in the eighth century A.D. when a priest who doubted the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist said Mass, the host turned into "living flesh" and the wine into "living blood". These have been kept to this day in a Church in Lanciano, Italy. There have been a number of official

ecclesial investigations into this over the centuries which recognized it as a miracle. In 1970-71 and again in 1981 “there took place a scientific investigation by the most illustrious scientist Prof. Odoardo Linoli, eminent Professor in Anatomy and Pathological Histology and in Chemistry and Clinical Microscopy. He was assisted by Prof. Ruggero Bertelli of the University of Siena.” The scientific investigations were done with precision and documented with microscopic photographs. These analyses sustained the conclusions that the flesh and blood are real human flesh and blood. They have been well-preserved over centuries without preservatives which in itself is “miraculous”. The flesh consists of muscular tissue of the heart and the blood is type “AB (Blood-type identical to that which Prof. Baima Bollone uncovered in the Holy Shroud of Turin).”(“Eucharistic Miracle: Lanciano, Italy 8th Century A.D.,” retrieved 4 June 2019 from: <http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/mir/lanciano.html>).

With regard to the Shroud of Turin mentioned in the last quotation above, it has been studied more scientifically than any other historical relic. Many, including some scientists who have studied it for years, are convinced that it is actually the burial cloth of Jesus Christ. A few of these have also theorized that the mysterious image of the man on the Shroud, of which no human ancient, medieval or modern method has been able to reproduce, may have been produced by a method still unknown to science that may have been related to the so far unique event of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. It is beyond our purposes here to go into a lot of details with regard to the scientific studies and related questions (see www.shroud.com for much information including many scientific papers, as well as a number of related youtube videos including a several part BBC documentary). For a good introduction and overview of both the history and the science, see Dr. Wayne Phillips’ presentation in March 2014 (Phillips 2014).

Briefly, the Shroud of Turin is a very old linen cloth with the life-size front and back image and some blood stains of a scourged and crucified man who was “crowned” with a cap of thorns which corresponds to the New Testament Gospel accounts of what happened to Jesus. We know where the Shroud has been since there was a public exposition around 1355 in Lirey, France. Pollen found on the shroud, as well as comparisons with some very old paintings (see Wilson 1978), imply that it is much older and has been not only where it has been in France and Italy since 1355 (since 1578 it has been kept mainly in the Cathedral of Turin where it is now kept), but also in Israel (dust found on the back of the Shroud supports it having been in Jerusalem) and Turkey, among some other places.

In 1898 Secondo Pia took a photograph of the Shroud and discovered that the image on the Shroud is actually similar to a negative of a photograph (a stage in the chemical development of photographs before the advent of digital photographs)—this would discredit the view that the image was produced by a medieval artist since that time would have been several centuries before photography was invented. This photograph began the era of the scientific investigation of the Shroud. In 1976 Dr. John Jackson and Bill Mottern viewed for the first time the Shroud three-dimensional image of a human body with a VP8 Image Analyzer. This technology shows real 3D objects in three dimensions but does not produce three-dimensional images from photographs. From 8-12 October 1978 a team of scientists did many scientific tests on the Shroud. Among other things, they concluded that the image was definitely not painted. They were unable to explain what caused the mysterious image on the Shroud.

In 1988 three laboratories conducted carbon dating (C-14) from the same small corner section of the Shroud, using a very reduced rather than the recommended protocol (many criticized this and related to this some questioned the validity of the results), and dated the cloth

to between 1238 and 1430 A.D. Even if the earliest of these dates was correct the Shroud would not be old enough to be the burial cloth of Jesus. Some also questioned the results because all the other evidence concerning the Shroud from multiple perspectives is consistent with it being the burial cloth of Jesus. In 2005 chemist Raymond Rogers published a significant peer-reviewed scientific paper in the journal *Thermochimica Acta* and concluded:

As unlikely as it seems, the sample used to test the age of the Shroud of Turin in 1988 was taken from a rewoven area of the Shroud. Pyrolysis-mass spectrometry results from the sample area coupled with microscopic and microchemical observations prove that the radiocarbon sample was not part of the original cloth of the Shroud of Turin. The radiocarbon date was thus not valid for determining the true age of the Shroud."(retrieved 18 June 2019 from: <https://www.shroud.com/history.htm>, Jan. 20, 2005)

Blood stains on the Sudarium of Oviedo (in Spain), another smaller cloth that had been wrapped around the head of Jesus after he died and before he was buried according to tradition and that dates back to at least 570 A.D., match the blood stains on the Shroud of Turin. They are both from a human male and type AB. 70 points of correspondence on the face and 50 points of correspondence on the back of the head have been found as well as some on the nape of the neck. The conclusion is that these two cloths definitely covered the head of the same person (see, e.g., Guscini 1997). This implies that the Shroud also dates back to at least 570 A.D., that is, much older than the results of the 1988 C-14 dating. As well, Italian scientist Guiglio Fanti, of the University of Padua, worked with a team of scientists who used three other dating techniques, that is, other than carbon dating, on threads from the Shroud. These all date the Shroud to the time of Jesus with a 95 percent accuracy.(Stanglin 2013) Based on some of their experiments Fanti also thinks that the image of the man of the Shroud may have been produced by a very high voltage corona discharge when the body “dematerialized” during the resurrection. Paolo di Lazzaro (2015), Chief of Research at ENEA Research Centre in Frascati, Italy, based on some of his own research supports a theory originally proposed by physicist John Jackson in 1990 that

the image on the Shroud may have been produced by a very short flash (less than 50 nanoseconds) of vacuum ultraviolet radiation—by a method not fully understood by science. Dr. Wayne Phillips, in a presentation on the Shroud of Turin, also points out some other details of the Shroud which would be consistent with the body being transformed in the resurrection. The edges of the dried blood stains are smooth which would not be the case if the cloth had been unwrapped from a bloody corpse. Also the only way physics can explain certain properties of the image is if the cloth was flattened out above and below the body, and the body was weightless (e.g., there are no signs of depression as one would expect if the back and buttocks had pressed against the shroud) when the image was formed.(see Phillips 2014, the last 7 minutes)

Related to the above we can ask, “Does the Shroud of Turin support the bodily resurrection of Jesus?” It seems to me that the evidence is very strong that the Shroud of Turin is the actual burial shroud of Jesus. The mysterious image on the Shroud which science cannot explain also seems to be consistent with the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Besides the central theme in the New Testament of the resurrection of the body, first Jesus’ as already having occurred and of other humans sometime in the future, there is also a reported case in the Bible of bodily assumption into heaven. 2 Kings 2:1-18 is an account of the prophet Elijah being taken up into heaven by a whirlwind and his prophetic role passing to Elisha. Both the Orthodox and Catholic Christian traditions also hold that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was assumed into heaven, both body and soul, at the end of her life on earth. Pope Pius XII in 1950, following consultation and requests from hundreds of bishops and millions of laity, declared Mary’s bodily assumption into heaven to be a dogma of Catholic faith.(Hardon 1975, 160).

Christian theology ought to consider not only “what” are matters of revealed truth accepted in faith, including human bodily resurrection and bodily assumption, but also what the implications of these are. Related to our understanding of human persons, bodily resurrection and assumption means that God’s salvation of human persons is meant to include salvation of the whole person, not only the human spirit or soul but the whole person including one’s body.

Biblical Data Supporting an Intermediate State

Although traditional Christian teaching affirmed an intermediate state of the human soul between bodily death and bodily resurrection, some Christians today do not, namely those who hold emergent monist or non-reductive physicalist views. Related to this question let us first consider some of the biblical data (see also the section “Jewish Thought with Regard to What Happens to the Dead” above in this chapter) which many see as supporting the traditional Christian view that there is an intermediate state of the human soul, that the human person in some real sense continues to exist between bodily death and resurrection.

1 Samuel 28:3-19 begins by saying that the prophet Samuel had died and was buried in Ramah. King Saul asks a medium to consult a spirit for him. He asks her to bring up Samuel who appears as a ghost, “an *'elohim* (a ‘god,’ or *'elohim*’ being) coming up from the earth.” According to biblical scholar James Turro, “this term is frequently reserved for members of the heavenly court.”(JBC 1968, 9:40) The ghost of Samuel then enters into a conversation with King Saul. A related scholarly note in *The New Jerusalem Bible* says that, “The narrator seems to share the popular belief in ghosts (though he regards it unlawful to consult them)... The incident is presented as a genuine recalling of Samuel’s spirit...”(NJB 1985, 391, note 28.b) According to biblical scholar Antony Campbell, the time of composition of 1-2 Samuel “covers

the centuries from the beginnings of the monarchy in Israel to the exile and the postexilic period.”(NJBC 1990, 9:4)

From where does the spirit of the deceased prophet Samuel come? The abode of the dead in the Jewish Scriptures is called Sheol as we considered above. With regard to the narrative of the deceased Samuel communicating with King Saul, theologian John Cooper says,

...[D]ead Samuel is still Samuel ... He is the very person who was once alive Although this is a highly unusual occurrence, Samuel is nonetheless a typical resident of Sheol Although he implies that he is resting, it was still possible for him to ‘wake up’ and engage in a number of acts of conscious communication. Activity is still in principle possible for the dead even if they are usually ‘asleep.’”(Cooper 2000, 55-59; see *ibid.*, Chs. 2 and 3, for a fuller treatment of Old Testament anthropology)

Between the time that the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament were written, there were some Jewish writings that are often referred to as intertestamental or Jewish apocryphal literature. A few of these writings which were part of the Jewish Septuagint, the “Old Testament” scriptures used by many Christians in the early church, are called “deuterocanonical” by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.(McKenzie 1965, “Canon”) They are considered to be part of the divinely inspired scriptures or canon of the Bible by these churches but as “apocrapha” (unknown) by Protestants generally. One of these books, 2 Maccabees 15:11-16, reports Judas Maccabeus’s vision of two deceased just men, the high priest Onias and the prophet Jeremiah interceding with God for the Jewish people and the Holy City. Biblical scholar Neil McEleney says that these two just men represent the law (embodied in the priesthood) and the prophets. “The vision ... illustrates the author’s belief in the intercessory power of the saints.” 2 Maccabees 12:44-5 approves of praying for those who have died. Concerning this McEleney says that the author “sees Judas’s action as evidence that those who die piously can be delivered from unexpiated sins... This doctrine, thus vaguely formulated, contains the essence of

what would become (with further precisions) the Christian theologian's teaching on purgatory.”(NJBC 1990, 26:82 and 88)

Concerning everlasting life, as explained above, the main focus in the New Testament is on bodily resurrection in the light of Jesus' own resurrection from the dead. Nevertheless, a number of texts present Jesus, his disciples and the respective New Testament authors as also believing in an intermediate state between bodily death and resurrection. Let us begin by considering the Gospel according to Luke 23:43 which reports Jesus on the cross saying to the dying thief, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” With regard to “today in Paradise,” biblical scholar Carroll Stuhlmueller says, “Jesus' reply, his last words to any person on earth, puts the emphasis upon ‘today’—before the sun sets.’ Concerning ‘With me,’ He tells the thief that he will not be simply in Jesus' retinue (*syn emoi*) but will also be sharing his royalty (*meth' emou*).” She says, “paradise” is “A word derived from Old Persian ... used ... in the NT for the abode of the righteous (Ap 2:7; 2 Cor 12:2-4).”(JBC 1968, 44:172) With regard to this passage, Anglican bishop and biblical scholar Tom Wright says, “... in Luke, we know first of all that Christ himself will not be resurrected for three days, so ‘paradise’ cannot be a resurrection. It has to be an intermediate state.”(Wright 2008)

In Phil 1:21-24, the apostle Paul, imprisoned and perhaps facing death, says: “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me: and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.” With regard to this passage biblical scholar Joseph Fitzmyer says:

To ‘be with the Lord’ was the expectation of Paul for the parousia (1 Thes 4:17; 5:10). Now—due to the proximity of death—he realizes that another possibility exists, to enter sooner than the ultimate resurrection into a state of companionship with Christ in glory (cf. 2 Cor 5:2, 6-8; Col 3:3). Paul's words indicate that he reckons with an intermediate state in

which the deceased Christian is ‘with Christ’ after death and before the resurrection.(JBC 1968, 50:13)

Another biblical scholar Brendan Byrne says in part,

Death is gain, not—as in certain strands of Greek philosophy—in the sense of welcome release from bodily existence, but as intensifying the union with Christ, who has already passed through death to resurrection. Resurrection remains the ultimate goal.... Paul seems to envisage here a ‘being with Christ’ in some (disembodied) state prior to the general resurrection (cf. 2 Cor 5:2-4).(NJBC 1990, 48:15)

Compare also Heb 12:23 which speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem including the angels and “the spirits of the righteous,” as well as Rev 6:9-11 which speaks of the souls of the martyrs. Note that according to 2 Tm 2:17-18, the general resurrection of the dead has not yet taken place. Anglican bishop and biblical scholar Tom Wright concludes, “In the Bible we are told that you die, and enter an intermediate state. St. Paul is very clear that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead already, but that nobody else has yet.”(Wright 2008)¹

Post-biblical Christian Views Regarding an Intermediate State

Christian writers until the Protestant Reformation, both of the East and West, used the Greek Septuagint of the Old Testament and accepted the Deuterocanonical books of the Bible including 2 Maccabees (see above). They generally taught the immortality of the human soul, particular judgment of the individual at death; the existence of heaven and hell (which were considered permanent), and purgatory (which was considered not permanent); praying for the dead, faith and hope in God with regard to one’s salvation, the existence of angels and so forth.(see, e.g., FEF, vols. 1-3)

¹ Much of this section has been copied and adapted from my (Paul Flaman) paper, “The Human Soul: A Catholic Theological Response to Non-Reductive Physicalism,” published by the Metanexus Institute online: <<http://www.metanexus.net/archive/conference2008/articles/Default-id=10463.aspx.html>>, 22 May 2008. Part 1 of that paper considers the related biblical data and scholarly commentary related to the intermediate state in more detail than the treatment here.

Besides Catholicism, the Orthodox Church and theology also holds the traditional dichotomy of body and spiritual soul with regard to the human person. They emphasize the mystery of the human being. Compare 1 Cor 13:9 where the Apostle Paul says we now “see in a mirror dimly, but then [i.e., in the future life with God] we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known [that is, by God].”(NRSV)

The Protestant Reformers of the 16th Century A.D. considered the Deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament to be apocryphal, that is, as extra writing and not part of the canonical Bible. Martin Luther and some radical Reformers believed that the soul either dies with the body or “sleeps” until the general resurrection. On the other hand, John Calvin, referring to a number of biblical texts including Jesus’ words to the good thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in Paradise,” argued that the human soul is immortal. Calvin also accepted the intercession of the saints but emphasized Jesus Christ’s primary intercessory role to which their role was subordinate.(Lane 1996)

Today Protestant theologians are divided. Some including John Cooper defend the traditional dichotomy of body and immortal soul. Some Protestants speak of a trichotomy of body, soul and spirit (compare, e.g., 1 Th 5:23. With regard to this Cooper 2000, 98, does not consider the “soul” and “spirit” as ontologically separate. Catholic teaching holds that “this distinction does not introduce a duality into the soul. ‘Spirit’ signifies that from creation man is ordered to a supernatural end and that his soul can gratuitously be raised beyond all it deserves to communion with God”: CCC 1997, n. 367). Some Protestant Christians today, who advocate non-reductive physicalism, emphasize the biblical unity of the person, and see bodily death as dissolution of the whole person until bodily resurrection.(see, e.g., Brown, Murphy and Malony 1998)

Catholic Teaching Regarding the Intermediate State

Catholic teaching considers the Deutero-canonical books to be part of the divinely inspired canonical Bible. It affirms an intermediate state of the human person in a real sense (the human soul is both incorporeal and immortal) between bodily death and bodily resurrection, as well as the traditional Christian view with regard to: angels, particular judgment when one dies, Heaven and Hell (have no end—compare Mt 25:31-46 speaks of both “eternal punishment” and “eternal life”), Purgatory (if we are not as pure as God when we die—see 1 Jn 3—we need to be purified to be fully united with God in Heaven; this state will have an end), praying for the dead, Mary and the saints’ intercession for us, the communion of saints of the Church (the People of God) on earth with the Church in Heaven and in Purgatory, resurrection of the dead, the future Coming of Jesus Christ in glory, the Last Judgment, and the establishment of the new heaven and earth (see the teaching of various Church Councils as presented in TCT 1973, “The Last Things”; and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 1997, nn. 328-36, 668-82, 946-60, and 988-1060).

Many saints have been officially canonized by the Catholic Church. According to this view they are already enjoying the beatific vision of God. The canonization process normally requires two miracles worked by God (these generally involve remarkable physical healings which cannot be explained by natural powers but only by a special intervention of Almighty God) related to their (that is, the saints’) intercession after they have died. In working such miracles, does God confirm not only their holiness (their having died as exemplary Christians full of God’s love for God, people and the rest of God’s Creation), but also that they continue to be conscious and can really pray for us, even though their dead bodies (bones or ashes) are still on earth? If they were not really conscious and cannot really pray for us, would not God’s

working such miracles following requests for their intercession from persons on earth involve God confirming an erroneous view, that is, that they are really conscious and can intercede to God on our behalf? It is inconceivable that God would act in a positive way, such as by working a miracle, to support a false view. Such miracles related to the intercession and canonization of specific saints are strong evidence that they are in a conscious “intermediary” state. Related to the intercessory role and canonization of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska on 30 April 2000 see, for example, the testimony of Maureen Digan regarding the miraculous healing of her terminal disease lymphedema which never goes into remission (see <https://www.thedivinemercy.org/message/stfaustina/graces.php>: retrieved 24 June 2019) as well as the video of her sharing her experience: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ApikftyN9o&t=1000s>: retrieved 24 June 2019). Related to the intercessory role and canonization of Saint Faustina by Pope John Paul II on 27 April 2014, see Floribeth Mora Diaz’s recounting of her miraculous healing from a terminal and inoperable brain aneurism (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaRAKYM5XWU&t=24s>: retrieved 24 June 2019).

If the human soul continues to exist between bodily death and resurrection, what are the implications of this for our understanding of human persons? This means that our interpersonal communion with God and others in love can continue uninterrupted. The Church as the People of God is not only on earth now but also in communion with the Church in Purgatory and in Heaven with the glorious Trinity (God the Father, Son/Jesus, and the Holy Spirit), Mary, and all the saints and angels who are in God’s presence. This is all part of the Good News of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.