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Chapter 12

Joseph Ratzinger on Resurrection Identity

Christian Tapp

Introduction

A central object of Christian hope is that God will resurrect you on the Last Day. If it is really *you* who is subject to resurrection, then there must be quite a strong relation between you and somebody in heaven (I use “heaven” as shorthand for the realm of the resurrected without any further connotations), a relation so strong that the existence of that heavenly person makes the statement “you were/have been resurrected” true. Let me call this relation “resurrection identity”.

Resurrection identity resembles ordinary personal identity. We are essentially human persons, and so must our heavenly counterparts be. But perhaps they need not share all the characteristics associated with the ordinary personal identity of human persons. For example, we usually assume that personal identity presupposes some sort of space-time continuity (or the weaker principle “different places at the same time means different persons”). But space-time continuity seems too strong a principle for resurrection identity because it is hard to believe that the world to come is material like our actual world is. Whichever way, the criteria for ordinary personal identity are subject to lively philosophical debate.

I want to leave open the exact nature of the relation between resurrection identity and ordinary personal identity. Perhaps they are the same relation, perhaps not. Resurrection identity itself already furnishes the most crucial question: if it is *we* who are resurrected and/or eternally relegated to condemnation or heaven, then the traditional doctrines of Christian individual eschatology are supremely relevant for us. What do they teach about how we survive our death?

Eschatology was a key focus in Joseph Ratzinger’s work as a theological scholar, featuring in several articles and finally a book entitled “Eschatology” (1977), which is also available in English translation.¹ Eschatology remained central to his thought even in his papacy, which is confirmed, for example, by his second papal encyclical, “*Spe salvi*” (2007).² We thus have not only a famous

¹ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI.), *Eschatologie: Tod und ewiges Leben*, Kleine Katholische Dogmatik 9, 2nd edn (Regensburg: Pustet, 1978), English trans.: *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2007). In the following, this work is cited in the form English translation/German original.

² Pope Benedict XVI., “*Litterae Encyclicae Spe salvi*”, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 99 (2007): pp. 985–1027.

academic theologian dedicating himself to eschatology but the Pope himself whose thinking still focuses on it. So whom, if not him, shall we ask about how we survive death?³

Ratzinger belongs to a small group of traditional theologians whose thinking is both well rooted in Christian tradition and sensible to philosophical problems connected with it. He explicitly recognizes the problem of identity through death. For example, when discussing views like “total death theories” and Luther’s “death sleep”, he says:

If there is no soul, and so no proper subject of such a ‘sleep’, who is this person that is going to be really raised? How can there be an identity between the human being who existed at some point in the past and the counterpart that has to be re-created from nothing? The irritated refusal of such questions as ‘philosophical’ does not contribute to [making sense of the matter].⁴

This can be read as an invitation to address the philosophical problems attending the Christian hope for the resurrection of the dead. What is this hope about? What is its object? The creeds are scarce on the topic. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed includes only belief in “the resurrection of the dead”. The Apostles’s creed is somewhat more specific in confessing “the resurrection of the body”. In an early encyclopedia article, Ratzinger concentrated on the binding doctrine of the Catholic Church with respect to resurrection in two dogmatic propositions:⁵

- (Dog₁) Resurrection is universal: each and every person will be resurrected.
- (Dog₂) Resurrection includes the body: transformed, but somehow identical with our current body.⁵

But how can bodies that decay be resurrected? And what insures that the resurrected body is *mine*? What makes it *me* who is resurrected? Is (Dog₂) tacitly supposing a soul as guarantor of resurrection identity? Finding answers requires deeper examination both of Ratzinger’s writings and their historical context.

³ For an overview over Ratzinger’s eschatology see Thomas Marschler, “Perspektiven der Eschatologie bei Joseph Ratzinger”, in Peter Hofmann (ed.), *Joseph Ratzinger: Ein theologisches Profil* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2008), pp. 161–91; for more details consult Gerhard Nachtwei, *Dialogische Unsterblichkeit. Eine Untersuchung zu Joseph Ratzingers Eschatologie und Theologie*, Erfurter Theologische Studien 54 (Leipzig: St. Benno, 1986).

⁴ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, p. 106/p. 94. The ending of the above quotation has been modified, for the German original: “Die unwillige Abweisung solcher Fragen als ‘philosophisch’ trägt nichts dazu bei, die Sache sinnvoller zu machen,” is much stronger than the original English translation.

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, “Auferstehung des Fleisches”: “I. Lehre der Kirche” and “VI. Dogmengeschichte”, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd edn (2 vols, Freiburg, Basel, and Wien: Herder, 1957), vol. 1, cols 1042 and 1048–52, col. 1042.

The following discussion of Ratzinger’s thoughts on these questions relies on several of his papers and on the *Eschatology* book. It must however be noted that this book is neither a handbook on eschatology nor what may be called a systematic *tractatus*, maintaining instead its original tone as a lecture course. It was not intended to present a uniform theology with every sophisticated element worked out in detail. Its aim was instead to familiarize beginners with the core ingredients of Christian eschatology.

The Traditional View Challenged

Ratzinger’s eschatological views developed in the context of turbulent discussions in the 1950s concerning individual resurrection and the notion of soul. Key words included “resurrection-in-death”, “complete death theories”, “intermediate state problem”, and “the Assumption Dogma”.

Before the Second Vatican Council summaries, like the following, of the Catholic Church’s teaching about the future of an individual after death were common: the soul will separate from the body, the body will more or less decompose in the grave while the soul is put on individual trial; then, if necessary, the soul will undergo purgatory before waiting in Christ for the Last Judgment when all flesh will be resurrected, that is, all of the deceased will receive bodies and be judged, gaining admittance to glory or condemnation.

Although this rough picture is inadequate to the elaborated theology of earlier times, it is probably a fair description of what most ordinary Christians believed. What makes this picture interesting is that it presupposes a soul-body-duality, as a matter of course and as almost self-evident. For some people the Christian doctrine may have looked like a simple addition: an element from the Greek platonic tradition, namely the immortality of the soul, plus an element from the Hebrew tradition, namely the resurrection of the flesh.⁶

To shorten a complex history: around the turn of the twentieth century, theologians became more and more aware of the fact that traditional theology contains traces of both true biblical faith and Greek philosophical thought. The suspicion arose that the original biblical faith had been intermingled with alien elements. So there began a strong movement among theologians to find the original true biblical faith behind its alleged philosophical or metaphysical disguises.⁷

⁶ In Ratzinger, “Auferstehung des Fleisches”, *Sacramentum Mundi* 1 (1967): cols 397–402, Ratzinger describes that view with reservation, formulating his two-total-answers theory, see below.

⁷ Ratzinger himself claims that the church has dogmatized not the body-soul-distinction but only the contents of Christian faith formulated by such philosophical means. He, too, presupposes that dogma has a content that can to some extent be distinguished from its philosophy-impregnated formulation.

Early twentieth century Protestant theology developed a radical view concerning the soul, proclaiming an opposition between Christian faith and philosophical thought, or faith and reason. Resurrection was said to be pure grace and was opposed to the Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul. For these Protestant theologians, the notion of soul itself became suspect. Death was seen as the complete destruction of the human person, not only of his or her body, and resurrection was conceived as complete re-creation. Some positions admitted no intermediate state but rather a dying-into-God's-timelessness (Stange, Brunner), while others contained some sort of intermediate state like a Lutheran death-sleep (Cullmann) or a being kept in God's will (Althaus). It was exactly these positions that Ratzinger criticized in the above citation. What secures the identity of the re-created person with the completely (!) destroyed earlier one?

In Catholic theology the discussion grew lively in the 1950s and 1960s in connection with the new dogma, binding from 1950, of the assumption of Mary with body and soul into the glory of heaven. Catholic theologians joined their Protestant colleagues in emphasizing the need to distinguish biblical hope for resurrection from philosophical belief in the soul's immortality. But in general their position posited not so much an antagonism as an important but not necessarily exclusive distinction.⁸ Karl Rahner was among the first to remind theologians of the problem of a bodiless soul. In my words: either you emphasize that human beings are a *unity*, in which case a soul without a body cannot be in a state of real perfection and fulfillment, or you emphasize that *souls* are what matters, so they can be subject to perfection and fulfillment, which requires either devaluing the body to a mere accidental thing (or even a "prison" of the soul) or abandoning the unity of human beings.

Ratzinger's Opposition to the Resurrection-in-Death Theory

These problems led some theologians, including Gisbert Greshake and Gerhard Lohfink, to question the theological usefulness of the notions of soul and intermediate state. They developed the view of a "resurrection in death", which claims that resurrection occurs at the moment of death.⁹

Ratzinger criticized several aspects of the resurrection-in-death theory. The following touches on three points of critique from which we can distill elements of Ratzinger's own position. I then turn to greater detail on a fourth point.

(1) According to Ratzinger, Greshake and Lohfink's dropping of the future moment of resurrection yields the result that resurrection is a non-historical event. On their view it is equally remote from every point in time, in the sense that it can equally be said to have already occurred or to occur at any time. But, in Ratzinger's

⁸ See Theodor Schneider, *Handbuch der Dogmatik* (2 vols, Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1992), vol. 2, p. 448.

⁹ See Thomas Schärtl's article in this volume (Chapter 6).

eyes, history would be devalued if resurrection and judgment were generally already in effect and not only anticipated in the community with Jesus Christ. So the positive claim Ratzinger takes to speak against resurrection-in-death is:

(Fut) Resurrection has a strong future moment. Even if there is some anticipation of it like the faithful's being in Christ, resurrection in principle is yet to come.

(2) Ratzinger's second criticism is that claiming resurrection of the person who had just died yields the consequence that resurrection does not include matter, at least not the matter we know from our everyday lives, for we see that the corpse is obviously not living anymore. Ratzinger criticizes especially Greshake's conception for positing a dichotomy which does not lend itself to English translation: "*Leiblichkeit*" versus "*reine Körperlichkeit*". An approximative translation may be "living body" versus "mere physical body", or "experienced body" versus "sheer body".¹⁰ According to Greshake's theory, the body can be subject to perfection, but only as an "ecstatic moment of the act of human freedom" ("*ekstatisches Moment des menschlichen Freiheitsaktes*"). For Ratzinger such a position implies a dematerialization of resurrection: real matter as we know it and experience it is not part of the eschatological fulfillment of the world.¹¹ So a resurrection in death would, according to Ratzinger, have as a consequence the very thing it was posited to combat, namely salvational dualism which splits the former person into two parts, one of which is salvaged and the other is excluded from perfection. Ratzinger pleads, instead, for:

(Mat) Resurrection includes fulfillment and perfection also for the material aspects of the world.

If this means more than that the resurrected person will have a material component, namely that the concrete matter of our earthly lives must be included in eschatological fulfillment (perhaps after some inscrutable transformation), then (Mat) ushers in problems of material identity: to whom will molecules previously comprised in somebody else's body, now part of mine, belong on the Last Day? Is such a position committed to ontological splitting theories or to claims of multiple existence? Will there be a newly created kind of matter, replacing the old one? That, however, appears to contradict (Mat).

(3) Ratzinger criticizes the view that identifies individual death and resurrection. According to him this view repeats a mistake made already by Greek-influenced

¹⁰ "*Leiblichkeit*" means that a body is essentially alive, capable of experiences, whereas "*reine Körperlichkeit*" refers to the physical aspect of a human being which remains what it is when the being dies.

¹¹ See Matthias Remenyi, "Mit Stimme, Antlitz und Gestalt: Überlegungen zur personalen Eschatologie", *Theologie und Glaube*, 96/1 (2006): pp. 73–86, p. 80.

medieval thought: it restrains resurrection to a question of individual destiny only and fails to account for the fact that the Christian message emphasizes the communion and togetherness of God's people.¹² It is not by chance that the Letter to the Hebrews portrays salvation by means of a heavenly town, the New Jerusalem.¹³ Ratzinger observes that salvation cannot be a matter of isolated individuals but must be one of community, of existential relations (such as love or compassion) to other human beings, for to be in Christ means to love one's brethren. Thus Ratzinger holds that

(IC) Christian Eschatology has an individual and a communitarian aspect; both are indissolubly tied (→ "no individualism").

To summarize, I see three theological convictions which precluded Ratzinger from advocating the resurrection-in-death theory: (1) the future aspect of resurrection, also demanded by the respect for history; (2) the alleged dualism excluding the material component of creation from salvation; and (3) the community aspect of Christian salvation.

Whereas these three aspects of Ratzinger's thought remained constant, his views on the relation between Greek philosophy and the Bible in general, and the body-soul duality in particular, have undergone quite a development: from his early view which sees them in stark contrast to each other to his later view which sees them as complementary. This holds in part as well for the fourth criticism Ratzinger advances against resurrection in death, which relies on the concept of eternity as non-time. If eternity is simply some sort of non-time, and if bodily life on earth is tied to time, then to die bodily means to leave the biological world, to leave the dimension of time, and to enter the dimension of non-time. According to Ratzinger, it was this move by which resurrection-in-death theorists were able to avoid the aporias of the intermediate state. But if one holds (Fut) with Ratzinger—the thesis that resurrection has a future aspect—and that people who have died are dead, then there is a temporal gap: a state between death and resurrection, that is, an intermediate state. It seems that the tri-partition (before death, after death but before resurrection, after resurrection) requires a temporal dimension. But that would be inconsistent with a conception of eternity as non-time.

The questions of what "eternity" means and how eternity relates to time are too complex to discuss here in detail.¹⁴ But since this topic is central to eschatology, I will highlight at least some problems with this fourth criticism. Note that not every ordering relation invoked by the terms "before" and "after" must be conceived

¹² Ratzinger made this point independently of the resurrection-in-death debate in "Auferstehung des Fleisches" (1957).

¹³ Hebrews 11:10; 11:16; 12:22; 13:14. See also Pope Benedict XVI., *Spe Salvi*, paragraph 14.

¹⁴ Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (eds.): *God, Eternity, and Time* (Aldershot: Ashgate, to appear 2011).

of as a temporal relation. What is needed here is a binary ordering relation with some two or three states—a state "before", a state "after", and an "intermediate" state. Such an ordering relation may well be conceived of as a discrete ordering relation, while time is usually taken to be continuous. At least in an Aristotelian perspective, where time is "the measure of motion", time is bound to change and most changing processes are regarded as continuous. So a presupposition of time is much stronger than a presupposition of a discrete ordering relation. And, hence, the inference from the usage of words like "before" and "after" to a dimension of time is not always valid. Sometimes it is simply convenient to express such simple and discrete ordering relations with the help of words that are usually used to denote a continuous ordering relation like time. The fact that an intermediate state theory presupposes some ordering relation that is expressed by temporal vocabulary does therefore not necessarily mean that it presupposes some extramundane sort of time. (Even so, other elements of Christian eschatology, like purgatory when conceived of as a *process* of personal purification, may presuppose such an extramundane time.)

On the other hand, however, it is not one single person who dies, but several million people every year. Hence there are in fact billions of points connecting their intermediate states with our earthly timeline. And all of these points are different: every point is the instant of death of some person *p*, and the beginning of *p*'s intermediate state'. In this way, at least with respect to us as observers, our earthly temporal ordering induces sort-of a temporal ordering of the "events" after death.

Such a consequence is probably incompatible with an overly simple conception of eternity as non-time. Ratzinger is therefore right in advocating the need to rethink the concept of eternity. Note that this applies as well to the resurrection-in-death theorist: resurrection "in death" insinuates a timely conception in that it is at this specific moment of the world's history that somebody dies and, in consequence, that *his* resurrection takes place. Rethinking the concept of eternity would have to solve the problem—among others—that for an individual person *p* eternity as his *ersatz* mode for the usual temporal mode of existence has a beginning in time.

Discussing Ratzinger's critique of the resurrection-in-death theory has revealed several aspects of his own view of our individual destinies after death. The heart of Ratzinger's individual eschatology, however, is "dialogical immortality". This comprises two elements: first, conceiving of resurrection as immortality (including a certain commitment to a notion of soul); second, a dialogical conception that conceives of human beings as essentially oriented toward relationship in general and relationship to God in particular.¹⁵ It claims a general primacy of the mental, the *logos*, over the material, the physical. The following two sections discuss these two elements, as they pertain first to the notion of soul and second to the dialogical conception of reality.

¹⁵ See Kevin Corcoran's article in this volume (Chapter 11).

A Platonic and a Christian Concept of Soul

The resurrection-in-death theory was motivated by the problems related to the traditional concept of soul. Greshake, Lohfink, and others wanted to avoid the *aporias* of an *anima separata* called the form of a body but said to exist, during so-called intermediate state, without a body. Their theory was intended to do without a concept like soul. Ratzinger not only criticized them for not succeeding at avoiding the dualism they eschewed, as we saw; he also took the opposite position and defended the conception of an immortal soul.

Why such a Hazardous Enterprise?

"Defending the conception of an immortal soul" sounds like Platonism. Ratzinger, however, set out to establish what he takes to be a non-platonic, or non-dualist, concept of soul. Why such a hazardous enterprise? (A) Why not a platonic concept of soul?, and (B) Why, if not a platonic soul, a concept of soul at all?

As to (A), it is surely remarkable for a by-and-large platonic-neoplatonically influenced thinker like Ratzinger to dismiss a platonic concept of soul. He has, I believe, several theological reasons.

1. A platonic soul is incapable of change. It can neither come into existence nor pass away. Therefore the assumption of a platonic soul conflicts with the Christian belief in creation. Platonic souls are uncreated. This is also the main reason why most church fathers before St. Augustine rejected platonic notions of soul.¹⁶
2. That everlasting life is no mere consequence of the soul's nature but a result of God's grace accords better with the teachings of the church. Ratzinger aimed at proving, in general, that "immortality is never a purely philosophical doctrine. It could be asserted only where a religious tradition with its own due authority entered onto the scene."¹⁷ One may raise some doubts about this claim taken as a factual assertion. But the guiding theological intuition is good traditional theology. It may be summed up by the following theological axiom of Ratzinger's:

(Grace) The ultimate fulfillment of man does not result from man's own natural powers but from the power of God the creator as he revealed himself in Jesus Christ.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Hermann Josef Eckl, "Seele", in Albert Franz, Wolfgang Baum, and Karsten Kreutzer (eds), *Lexikon philosophischer Grundbegriffe der Theologie* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2003), pp. 364–7, p. 365.

¹⁷ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, p. 143/p. 121–2.

¹⁸ See, for example Ratzinger, "Auferstehung des Fleisches" (1957), vol. 1, col. 1051.

3. A third reason for rejecting a platonic notion of soul is the dualism it appears to imply.¹⁹ The soul is only a substantial part of human beings. But if this part were the proper subject of resurrection, then the Christian promise would extend not to the whole human being but only to part of her. This point is related to the abovementioned axiom (Mat): if the proper subject of resurrection is the soul and the soul is conceived of in opposition to the body, then the body in the material sense will not be subject to fulfillment.

Why does Ratzinger maintain the notion of soul despite the problems with the platonic notion (question (B))? Here too several theological reasons are involved. The first might easily be overlooked for its obviousness.

1. The physical bodies of the deceased are decomposing in their graves. So, if there is something like resurrection identity, it cannot rely primarily on the identity of material objects like the body.
2. Ratzinger wants to keep close to the tradition of the church fathers, especially to St Augustine, renowned for re-establishing a stoic variant of the philosophical notion of soul in theology.
3. An important reason stems from a pastoral concern. The term "soul" was deeply rooted in what might be called the "everyday language of Christian faith". In the 1960s and 1970s, when theologians critically debated the concept of soul, many believers found that they needed this concept to express their faith. Here, Ratzinger anticipated the position of a 1979 letter of the Congregation of Faith requesting to retain the concept of soul for the sake of ordinary believers.²⁰

Hence, there is a need for a non-bodily identity principle (1), this need was traditionally met by the concept of soul (2), and things should remain this way for the sake of ordinary religious life (3). Ratzinger's vision was, I think, to maintain the role played by the traditional concept of soul in ordinary religious speech while

¹⁹ With respect to Plato's dualism I might have to touch a very strange point in Ratzinger's *Eschatology*, p. 106/p. 94: There he claims to have shown "that the frequently encountered notion of a Hellenic-Platonic dualism of soul and body, with its corollary in the idea of the soul's immortality, is something of a theologian's fantasy."

To claim that there is no body-soul-dualism in Plato and no proof of the immortality of the soul is really strange as we read about platonic dualism in each and every handbook on antique philosophy. Some authors even hold that the dualism of the mental and the physical was the proper fundament of Plato's thought. See, for example, Walter Kranz, *Die griechische Philosophie*, reprint of the 5th edn (München: dtv, 1971), p. 122 and his whole chapter on the human soul, pp. 122–40.

²⁰ Congregation of Faith/Sacra Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei, "Epistula ad Venerabiles Praesules Conferentiarum Episcopalium de quibusdam quaestionibus ad Eschatologiam spectantibus", *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 71 (1979): pp. 939–43.

avoiding the problems connected with a platonic conception. This may sound like having one's cake and eating it. The only way out seems to be a sharp distinction between a platonic and a Christian notion of soul, that is, something like claiming that there are two cakes. And that is what Ratzinger did. He distinguished between two concepts of soul and assigned the soul-related problems to the philosophical side alone. The intentions are clear: (a) keeping the alleged Christian concept free of stronger challenges by localizing the problems in the philosophical concept and (b) establishing a genuine Christian notion of an "immortal soul" for which immortality is not something which the soul has by its own power (following from its indivisibility), but a matter of grace according to (Grace). But this localization comes at a price. What is a soul in the alleged Christian sense? Is there an entity to which this concept refers? If a theological sense of "soul" is completely detached from a philosophical one, then theology must shoulder the burden of proof for showing there is such a thing. Before dealing with this question, it will be helpful to shed light on where this "Christian soul project" is located within Ratzinger's general attitude towards philosophy.

The Christian-Soul-Project in Light of Ratzinger's General Attitude towards Philosophy

Ratzinger's project of (re-)establishing a genuinely Christian notion of soul fits well with one of his more general attitudes with respect to the relation of philosophy and theology. He strove clearly to distinguish the teaching of the church from philosophical interpretation or expression of that teaching. This maxim embodies the fundamental hermeneutical insights that, in the doctrine of faith, philosophical and theological elements are intertwined, and that claims of faith extend only to the theological part (as far as it is separable from the philosophical part). As it stands, this distinction allows for a limited but definite freedom in understanding and interpreting the tradition of faith. However, drawing a clear boundary between a philosophical and a theological concept of soul goes far beyond a legitimate hermeneutical insight. Ratzinger's approach appears to harbor remnants of the view that Greek philosophy and biblical faith are opposed. The identification of such an antagonism is a little surprising for it is generally conceded that there was a development in Ratzinger's thinking from such an antagonism to quite the opposite position.²¹

In his early writings like the encyclopedia article *Resurrection of the Flesh* ("Auferstehung des Fleisches") in 1967, Ratzinger took Christian faith and Greek philosophy to be at odds. Against exaggerated hellenization suspicions he argued that biblical and Greek-platonic thought cannot be consistently paired, for both present complete answers to the question of the future of man. On the

²¹ Ratzinger states in the foreword of his *Eschatology*: "I tried to construct a 'de-Platonized' eschatology. However, the more I dealt with the questions and immersed myself in the sources, the more the antitheses I had set up fell to pieces in my hands."

Greek-platonic view, human beings comprise two heterogeneous substances, one of which, the body, decomposes, while the other, the soul, is immortal. So, for Platonic philosophy, there is no future for the human being as a unity composed of body and soul. The human being will disintegrate and its parts will have different futures. On the Christian view, by contrast, the complete human being continues to exist even though it undergoes a radical transformation. According to Ratzinger's earlier writings, Greek philosophy and biblical faith each have different bipolarities as their systematic bases: the bipolarity of body and soul (or of spirit and matter) in Greek philosophy, and that of creator and creation in biblical faith.

Later Ratzinger saw that this oversimplifies matters. In his 1968 *Einführung in das Christentum*, Ratzinger watered down this strong incompatibility claim, saying that both views are necessary and complement each other. Talking about the soul, he says, is not wrong, but requires much additional explanation. A 1972 paper argues that Greek philosophy and biblical faith differ only in formulation and direction of thought. In his 1977 *Eschatology*, Ratzinger "re-establishes" Greek philosophy for Christian thinking, culminating in the claim that there is no dualism in Plato (see fn. 19). Finally, in 1980, in a commentary on the 1979 Congregation of Faith document, he explicitly embraces the Congregation's demand to adhere to the notion of soul for the good of the ordinary and "simple" believer who just needs simple words to express his faith.

I think this is quite a development, even if charitable interpreters consider it not a break but a gradual unfolding of one and the same position.²² As we have already seen in the axiom (IC), according to Ratzinger a Christian eschatology must emphasize two elements: community and wholeness—community as opposed to isolated individuals and wholeness as opposed to souls-as-substantial-parts. If this is true, a Christian concept of soul cannot be that of a substantial part of a human individual. The whole human being has been promised salvation and eternal fulfillment—of course not without changes with respect to our terrestrial lives, but not with leaving out a substantial part of it.

The Alleged Christian Concept of "Soul"

What, then, is the notion of soul Ratzinger wants to (re-)establish as a truly Christian notion? My impression is that, for Ratzinger, the notion of soul is a mixture of several ingredients, and it is not always clear how their different aspects relate. Ratzinger often claims often that Thomas Aquinas's concept of the *anima unica forma corporis* is the basic ingredient of his conception of soul. And it is exactly the modifications of Aristotle's view that attracts Ratzinger to Aquinas's position. According to Aristotle, the individual soul as the form of the body perishes with the perishing body, and what remains after death is only the universal and impersonal *nous* in which the individual human being had participated. When

²² For an overview over this development see Nachtwei, pp. 7–11; the "no-break interpretation" on pp. 7–8.

Aquinas modified this position to enable a future for the individual human soul, this proved the most attractive way of thinking for Ratzinger. An individual future is possible, but it is not built into the nature of human beings. Instead, it depends upon God's special will.

In the early encyclopedia articles, Ratzinger talks about "body" and "soul" without reservation. He discusses decomposition and relics, using the term "body" in the usual sense. This may fit well with the teaching that the soul is the form of the single individual. But it becomes philosophically problematic when Ratzinger later uses "soul" to denote the whole, undivided human being. If "soul" is used in this way, it is no longer a co-principle to the body but denotes instead the concrete individual. This deviates from Aquinas, who holds that "my soul is not me," meaning that one cannot identify the soul with a concrete human individual.²³ Furthermore, such usage would lead to paradoxical consequences, for example, that the body would be part of the soul, making the soul divisible.

But Ratzinger uses "soul" not only in this sense, but also in the sense of a placeholder for certain pieces of Christian belief, which themselves differ from time to time. In a 1966 lecture in Salzburg, Ratzinger said that the Christian, in using the word "soul", wants to express that God knows and loves human beings in a way different from all other creatures.²⁴

Is immortality, then, an anthropological datum for Ratzinger? The answer is yes and no. Yes, because for every human being it is possible to obtain immortality. But no, for it will not be actualized automatically: it remains subject to the individual freedom of the single human being and to an act of God: one can enter into community with Christ, which provides everlasting life, or one can refuse this community, thereby abandoning the prospect of eternal life. Immortality is not a prospect for believers alone, but for each and every human being, depending on his or her willingness to be open to God. "Love is the foundation of immortality, and immortality proceeds from love alone."²⁵

Ratzinger's point of view is clearly not philosophical: he does not start from the realm of universal reason, but from that of a special reason, namely the reason of Christian faith. His theology habitually tries to keep Christian faith free of special philosophical doctrines, which only succeeds to a certain extent, since many theological data cannot even be expressed without philosophical means. But Ratzinger holds that resurrection is a theological term which is not bound to any certain anthropology. Therefore, he says,

we may reasonably expect it to have the capacity to make a variety of anthropologies its own and find appropriate expression by means of them. But

at the same time, and equally, we must expect that this theology will confront all anthropologies with its own critical measuring rod. From its thought of God it draws forth a number of affirmations about man.²⁶

Hence it is just consequent that Ratzinger disputes the claim that a convincing and complete anthropology is possible without God. If it were, faith would be nothing but an optional add-on to a self-sufficient human life. It would neither be important, let alone existentially crucial for human beings. If faith is important for our lives, then a pure philosophical anthropology without reference to God is necessarily incomplete. (This, of course, is a theological statement about philosophical theories.) Faith must then be deeply connected with basic anthropological options.²⁷ In Ratzinger's view, true anthropology is possible only from a Christian standpoint, and a Christian standpoint, in turn, is directed towards the humane and requires anthropological concretization. Theology needs an anthropological *Ansatz* that makes visible the reason of faith and provides a way of proceeding step-by-step in the dialogue among all people on earth.

Let me summarize the above points on Ratzinger's notion of soul. I observed that the word "soul" for Ratzinger must be maintained for the sake of ordinary Christians' ability to express their beliefs. Ratzinger uses this word to denote something that secures personal identity in resurrection, something that others might call the "kernel of the individual", the "individual spirit" (Otto H. Pesch), or, maybe, the "person". But there remains a decisive dilemma: either the term "soul" carries with it an arsenal of problems known from philosophy (for example, mind-body-interaction) or theology (for example, intermediate state), or one establishes of it a "pure" theological meaning, taking on the burden of proof that something of this kind exists at all. Whatever may be a solution to this dilemma, the concept "soul" will remain theologically problematic, at least in that it invites (alleged) misunderstandings, such as a dualism which excluding our bodies from salvation—and that, as Ratzinger himself says, is unacceptable.

Dialogical Immortality: Being in Christ

Ratzinger's eschatological position is often characterized as "dialogical immortality". I have already discussed the "soul side" of immortality, and must now add some remarks concerning the "dialogue side".

For Ratzinger, the central message of Christian faith with respect to the fortune of human beings after death is that they are in Christ. He finds that in the Old Testament, belief in resurrection was not generally accepted, but developed only gradually. For the early Christians it became much more central because of

²³ Super I. ad Cor. 15: 1–2.

²⁴ See Joseph Ratzinger, *Die Sakramentale Begründung christlicher Existenz* (Meitingen: Kyrios, 1966), p. 16.

²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 304.

²⁶ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, pp. 118–9/p. 104.

²⁷ See Ratzinger's commentary to "Gaudium et Spes", *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (2 vols, Freiburg, Basel, and Wien: Herder, 1957), add. vol. 3, pp. 316–18.

Jesus Christ's resurrection. And it was Jesus himself who made it possible for his disciples to interpret their post-Easter experiences in terms of resurrection. In argument with the Sadducees, Jesus pointed to God's self-presentation in the burning bush: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," and, Jesus adds, He is a God of the living, not of the dead, and so they must be alive (Mark 12:26–27).

Ratzinger draws an interesting systematic conclusion which, taken literally, is a little hard to grasp: "Those who have been called by God are themselves part of the concept of God."²⁸ I think what he means is that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have become part of the Judeo-Christian framework for referring to God. For they belong to the history of God with his people and are included in the Christian belief system. Hence, they help to identify the God whom Christian faith refers to, and their names are part of definite descriptions of this God. In this sense one may reasonably say that their names have become part of one of God's names.

Ratzinger expands this line of thought. In the theology of the Letter to the Romans, the "communion with God, which is the native place of life indestructible, finds its concrete form in [participating] in the body of Christ."²⁹ This christological expression of resurrection hope is brought to the highest degree of density of speech in Johannine theology, for example in the story of Lazarus, which culminates in Jesus' words: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." (John 11:25) Ratzinger comments: "Whenever someone enters into the 'I' of Christ, he has entered straight away into the space of unconditional life."³⁰ This theological reason also yields the explanation for the fact that the author of John's gospel does not raise the question of an intermediate state: it is "precisely because Jesus is himself the resurrection," Ratzinger says.³¹

If Ratzinger is right that "being in Christ" is the central category for eschatology, then Christian eschatology is deeply rooted in Christology. And so the dialogical character of immortality is rooted in a dialogical conception of reality in general (of God, human beings, creation, church, and so on).³² The whole world has a dialogical structure, for believing in the createdness of the world includes for Ratzinger that the world is pervaded by the divine *logos*. Jesus Christ, the son of God, stands in the intimate relation of hypostatic union with the divine *logos*. He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He personifies God's loving attitude towards all creation.

An anthropological approach to theology may provide a first step toward making sense of these deep theological thoughts. For example, man seeks a kind of immortality: in others, in his children, his pupils, his fellows, and so forth.

²⁸ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, p. 113/p. 100.

²⁹ Instead of "participating" the translation quoted has "sharing", see Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, p. 115.

³⁰ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, p. 117/pp. 102–3.

³¹ Ibid., p. 117/p. 103.

³² See Nachtwei, p. 8.

This quest cannot be fulfilled as such, since it is not real immortality which we are trying to find in others. But this anthropological datum shows a human desire God promised to fulfill truly. All love is a desire for eternity, while God's love, Ratzinger says, has the power not only to desire, but to fulfillment. The praying man knows through faith that God will bring about justice (Job 19:25; Psalm 73:23f.).³³ So being in Christ is no simple add-on, remaining external to man, but rather fulfills the infinite demand of true love that can and will be fulfilled by the all-powerful God who revealed himself by suffering, with Christ, the full consequences of his love.

The goal of an anthropological approach like Ratzinger's is to motivate a theological theory (or, say, a certain cluster of theological convictions) without making theology derivable from anthropology. It helps to understand the anthropological relevance of Christian faith. But this is only the first step toward grasping what Christian faith is about. The second step is to spell out its contents as they extend beyond the anthropological domain. In the context of the questions discussed in this paper, it is the central concept of "being in Christ" that remains unexplained in Ratzinger's eschatology. As mentioned above, it displays Ratzinger's systematic conviction that eschatology is rooted in Christology. But what does this mean? Can "being in Christ" answer the question of our fate after death? Does it really solve the problems attending resurrection identity and the intermediate state? What does it mean to be "in Christ" or to be "in communion with Christ" such that entering this communion is entering "into the space of unconditional love"?³⁴ Wouldn't that be a sort of spiritualism which Ratzinger explicitly criticizes? Or a form of theological supernaturalism, claiming a second reality besides the "worldly" one, accessible only through faith? The short formula "being in Christ" must not be the end point of theological explication, for then theological speech would be disconnected from other kinds of speech. It would jeopardize its own meaning.³⁵

The Resurrection Body

The last point this paper addresses concerns to imagine the resurrection body. According to Ratzinger, it is the firm and binding teaching of the Church that:

³³ See Ratzinger, "Auferstehung des Fleisches" (1967): cols 397–402.

³⁴ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, p. 117/pp. 102–3.

³⁵ I consider it to be of utmost importance for theology to try to spell out the *sense* of such a central expression. It would be rewarding if theology succeeded in it—not only with respect to theology and its foundations, but also with respect to the believer's and the critic's common aim to understand Christian faith.

1. When the world comes to its end, all dead people will be resurrected, the just and the unjust. So resurrection is universal without exception, it is not limited to a circle of elected or otherwise qualified people (see (Dog₁)).
2. The resurrection body is the same as the body which is connected with the soul during one's mundane life (see (Dog₂)).

Ratzinger considers both propositions to be dogmas.³⁶ In the context of the second one, however, he explicitly differentiates between what is dogmatically fixed—namely, the identity claim as such—and the philosophical background theory which is, of course, not fixed.³⁷ He does not explicitly say so, but what he means by “philosophical background theory” is the body/soul-conception presupposed by talk of the sameness of the body. Nevertheless, Catholic dogma requires the presupposition of some sort of bodily existence in heaven. How should this be conceived?

Ratzinger is reluctant to describe the resurrection body in detail. But there are hints of such description in his early writings. For example, in a 1957 article on the resurrection body, Ratzinger claims that the unity of the body-forming soul is decisive for resurrection identity, since it guarantees also the “unity” of the body. (And it was the identity of the body that was dogmatized along the lines of (Dog₂).) However, the tradition requires one limitation of this soul-focusedness, namely, that resurrection cannot neglect the relics of the old earthly body as far as they still are available as such.³⁸ This is not to say that the relics’ molecules become part of the resurrection body *as they are*. They may be transformed in a way that eclipses our understanding. But Ratzinger’s position is a realist one: he explicitly says that “existential” or “mystical” interpretations of eschatology are reductions of faith. If they lack a factual basis, they would teach a faith in vain (see 1 Cor. 15:17). The outermost limit of Ratzinger’s realism is his early assertion that the resurrected body is a normal if transformed human body, maintaining even its sexual characteristics. Never has he dared to portray resurrection more concretely. Immediately after the citation above, he adds that further inquiry into the possible forms of resurrection bodies is useless and should be eschewed. And the sexual characteristics, in my view, are mentioned only as an example of bodily elements that are deeply interwoven into our psychological identity.

The purpose of mentioning this discussion is to locate an interesting methodological maxim. Reluctant though Ratzinger is to speculate, he sometimes considers it useful to extrapolate from our worldly life. Such extrapolation can, of course, be highly tentative. But it helps to fill faith with content and to understand it at least incipiently. In case of eschatology, Ratzinger claims, such extrapolation does not reach beyond the point of death. Everything later he considers to be pure speculation or subject to revelation. The methodological maxim seems to be: the

³⁶ Ratzinger, “Auferstehung des Fleisches” (1957), vol. 1, col. 1042.

³⁷ Ibid., col. 1052.

³⁸ Ibid., col. 1053.

subject of revelation is not knowledge of things completely inaccessible to natural knowledge, for such knowledge would be without connections to our real lives. But revelation transcends what we can naturally know only as it pertains to truths which are relevant for meaningfully conducting our earthly lives. This maxim partially resembles Occam’s razor in ontology: cutting off what is not necessary for the purpose of what really matters.

The tendency to avoid conceiving of a resurrection body grew over the course of Ratzinger’s eschatological development. We get only scarce hints of such speculation in his later works. He increasingly tended toward an *askesis* with respect to concrete answers and concrete models.

He is surely right to withstand the tendency to ask for too many details and even for things that cannot be known. But it takes things too far to dismiss all questions about conceiving of resurrection as pure speculation falling short of its subject and therefore being senseless.³⁹ It may be pointless to press Christian theologians to make assertions like: “the heavenly body will be twice as powerful as the earthly body.” But it is surely legitimate to ask for models of thought for the Christian promises. If we can imagine resurrection in a certain way, then this need not be taken as a claim that it will be so. But if it can be imagined in one way or the other, this shows that Christian faith is reasonable, since what it believes in is possible.

Conclusion

Once again: how can we survive our death? Ratzinger’s remarks are scarce. He presents us not with a concrete model but with a theological emphasis of the being in Christ that has already begun for the faithful on earth. It is the result of God’s loving initiative faithfully answered by man and is therefore dialogical in nature. All of creation, in virtue according to Ratzinger of being pervaded by the divine *logos*, has this dialogical structure. And so to be in Christ is no simple add-on remaining external to man, but is to fulfill the infinite demand of true love that can and will be fulfilled by the all-powerful God.

Ratzinger opts for a genuine Christian notion of soul for securing resurrection identity. He wants to keep this distinct from the platonic concept of soul with its inherent devaluation of the body, its claim of immortality as a “built-in feature” of the very notion of the soul, and its tendency to reduce the future to a question for the single, isolated being. Perhaps a notion like “soul” really is indispensable to keep faith as simple and understandable as possible for ordinary believers. But it invites misunderstanding and so must be filled out with a meaning independent of, or in contrast to, the philosophical tradition.

I end up with an apparently negative result: no clear model, no intuitively plausible or easily understandable conception. But there is also a positive side,

³⁹ See Ratzinger, “Auferstehung des Fleisches” (1967): col. 402.

namely the clarification of what, for Christian theology, belief in resurrection really involves and what it does not. And there is something even more positive, if partly hidden: that the teaching of the Church, including theologians like Joseph Ratzinger, contains no concrete models means that there is room for creativity to form one's own perspective on these matters. As Ratzinger said, the Church claims truth for the dogmatized contents, not for their forms of expression as such. Hence, several models of the axioms for resurrection are possible and each may contribute to proving Christian faith both meaningful and reasonable.

This volume, in my eyes, is a good step forward in a direction which, according to the Catholic position, is not only allowed by faith but strongly sought after. Anselm's famous "*fides quaerens intellectum*" meets with the statement in Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity* that it is not the religiously neutral, but the believer who has the stronger objections to face and the harder work to do. He who is bound to a religious tradition that is not his own construction, but a gift from his fellow believers and, in the end, from God, has to make sense also of the less convenient elements of Christian faith. According to the inner structure of faith, the believer must withstand the temptation to select pieces of it and must instead accept it as a whole. If philosophical activities contribute to that goal, they are of utmost theological importance.

Summary: Ratzinger's "Axiom System"

Ratzinger's axioms on resurrection that have been discussed in this paper:

- (Dog₁) Resurrection is universal: each and every person will be resurrected.
- (Dog₂) Resurrection includes the body: transformed, but somehow identical with our current body.
- (RI) [Resurrection Identity] The resurrection of an individual requires a certain kind of identity between the deceased and the resurrected, or his counterpart, respectively.
- (Fut) Resurrection has a strong future moment. Even if there is some anticipation of it like the faithful's being in Christ, resurrection in principle is yet to come.
- (Mat) Resurrection includes fulfillment and perfection for the material aspects of the world too.
- (IC) [Individual & Communitarian] Christian Eschatology has an individual and a communitarian aspect; both are indissolubly tied (no individualism).
- (Grace) The ultimate fulfillment of man does not result from man's own natural powers but from the power of God the creator as he revealed himself in Jesus Christ.