

## **Other Unique Christian Teachings:**

### **The Soul and Resurrection:**

The word soul, as commonly understood and used in English, often conveys major elements acquired from Greek philosophical thought. In popular usage, the word incorporates a complex collection of ideas emanating from these ancient philosophies as refined by medieval scholasticism.

- In Plato the soul is a pure spiritual principle, the subject of thought — immortal and distinct from the body.
- In Aristotle, soul is united with the body as a form united to matter (its spirituality and immortality are less evident).
- In scholasticism, the spirituality and immortality of Platonism are united with the Aristotelian conception of form and the soul becomes a subsistent spiritual form.

Some modern manifestations of this, such as Theosophy, would say that the human being is a soul that works through an acquired body.

#### ***The biblical view:***

The biblical concept of the word we translate as soul, however, reflects none of these ideas. In the Old Testament, soul is essentially the life principle. It always appears in some form or manifestation without which it could not exist. Hebrews could not conceive of a disembodied soul; therefore, in the Old Testament, soul never means the 'immortal soul' of Greek thought.

Also in contrast to Greek thought, the Hebrew language has no word for body except to designate a corpse. Hebrews could speak of their flesh as we would of our 'bodies' but, to explain it using a modern concept, they would speak of their souls as a psycho-physical organism — that is, a "self." A man or woman did not simply have a body, s/he was an animated body. S/he was a unit of life that manifested itself in a fleshly form.

In Genesis 2:7, by receiving God's breath in his nostrils, the human (Adam) comes alive — becomes a living self or person. Sometimes linked in scripture with blood, life is always a totality. It may express itself in the whole body, or may concentrate itself in some body part (such as the tongue, eye, ear, heart, etc.). As a term used to express the human totality of self, the soul hungers, thirsts, is greedy, satisfied, feels joy, sorrow, love, hope, etc. This self also is the subject of appetite (including carnal appetites), hunger, feeling, emotion, will, etc.

In summary, while the ancient Hebrew could distinguish soul from body as material basis of life, there was no understanding of two separate, independent entities called body and soul — the one flesh alone, the other immortal spirit. Rather, there was one self.

In the centuries immediately before Jesus' birth, one can trace the intrusion of Greek thought into the literature that is not included in the Hebrew canon. In one such book that is not officially a part of either the Old or New Testament, (The Wisdom of Solomon...part of a collection of writings known as "the Apocrypha",) there are clear traces of Greek concepts such as the pre-existence (8:19) and immortality of the soul

( 3:1), the soul as burdened by the body (9:15), ethical qualities attributed to the soul, and the idea that soul goes to Hades. There is some evidence for a belief in the reservation of souls for judgment after death.

The New Testament is heavily dependent on the Old Testament understanding of self or person. It shows amazingly little effect of the dominant Greek philosophical influence of the time. On the contrary, especially in the letters of St. Paul, one can sense that the Hebrew Bible's understanding is being introduced into a predominantly Greco-Roman world. Psyche in the New Testament is often translated as life, and it means the totality of the self as a living, conscious subject. While the English language employed will use the terms body, soul and spirit (for instance I Thessalonians 5:23), it does not imply a trichotomy (human beings consist of three parts: body (soma), soul (psyche) and spirit (pneuma)) but rather expresses the totality of the human personality which needs to be sanctified by God. It is that totality of the self which is saved for eternal life.

In the New Testament, the psyche as "... the object of salvation furnishes a basis for the common idioms such as 'saving one's soul,' 'care of souls' etc. The psyche in the New Testament is still the totality of self as a living and conscious subject, and it is the totality of the self which is saved for eternal life. The novelty of the New Testament belief doesn't arise from a new idea of the (soul), but from a radically new revelation of the meaning of life and salvation - resurrection of the dead, not immortality of the soul".

Lutherans confess the New Testament proclamation of *"the resurrection of the dead* (The Nicene Creed), or *"the resurrection of the body* (The Apostles Creed).

To understand this proclamation, we turn not only to Jesus' promise of new life after death, but also to St. Paul who speaks of the resurrection as our being given a spiritual body, not after the image of the first man (Adam) but after the image of the man from heaven - Jesus, the Christ (John 11:25, 14:19). Paul tells the congregation at Corinth that "Resurrection will involve a transformed body, as different as the grown plant is from the seed - a body imperishable, not perishable; powerful, not weak, spiritual (pneumatikos), not physical (psychikos), in the image of heavenly origin, not from the dust of the earth" (1 Corinthians 15:35-44). For St. Paul, and for ELCA Lutherans, death in this body is real, but so is resurrection. It is a transformation to new life, (e.g., "...we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. ... For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (I Corinthians 15:51b-52).

Most certainly, in common parlance and in our knowledge that a corpse decays, soul has come to be identified as that which lives on after death, even as in the child's prayer "... I pray the Lord my soul to take." Yet, in faith we know that this resurrected self is the totality of the person. The whole person is given a new form or manifestation by God, who again breathes into us the breath of life - this time of a life that will never end. When that happens we will be enjoying the life lived now by the risen Jesus and by all the departed whom God has also raised.