

## ONE'S SELF-CONCEPT AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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In an age of secular humanism there is a preoccupation with narcissistic questions: Who am I? How can I improve my life? Since these questions are in the air around us, Christians need to provide authentic answers. But how do we know who we are? By what method can we develop a self-concept? Clearly we are a people whose self-concept is somehow forged between the hammer of subjective experience and the anvil of the Bible. The Spirit renders our sense of ourselves molten, and the warmth of a worshiping community softens and shapes how we understand our lives.<sup>1</sup>

This article will focus on the self-concept of a believer. Within the broad scope of theological anthropology we will further restrict our attention to how we evaluate the question of soul-body concepts in the Bible.

Understanding and improving oneself is a central theme in television talk shows and popular magazine articles. It is what fuels the unbelievable growth of the mental-health movement. In most cities the telephone-book yellow pages show there to be more secular psychotherapists than churches and synagogues of all denominations combined.<sup>2</sup> The size and influence of the secular mental-health movement is doubling about every ten years. Two percent of the American gross national product is spent on secular mental-health and substance-abuse treatment, and that number is increasing.<sup>3</sup> Even at evangelical seminaries counseling has become a more popular subject than theology.<sup>4</sup>

Secular mental-health experts almost always assume that human nature is monistic, that we have only a single nature, which is annihilated when the

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Boyd, "Losing Soul: How and Why Theologians Created the Mental Health Movement," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30/2 (November 1995) 472–492; *Reclaiming the Soul: The Search for Meaning in a Self-Centered Culture* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1996); "A New Kind of Hermeneutics: Unconscious Hermeneutics" (unpublished paper); *Soul Psychology: How to Understand Your Soul in Light of the Mental Health Movement* (Cheshire: Soul Research Institute, 1994); *Affirming the Soul* (Cheshire: Soul Research Institute, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> In New Haven, CT, the yellow pages of 1994–95 include sixty percent more psychotherapist listings than those of churches and synagogues. In fact in every city I have studied, the yellow pages indicate that psychotherapists' listings outnumber those of churches and synagogues.

<sup>3</sup> Mental-health and chemical-dependency treatment represents about 15% of the health-care dollar. About 14% of the American gross national product goes toward health care. The two numbers multiplied together yield 2.1%.

<sup>4</sup> D. F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

brain dies.<sup>5</sup> The view of many psychiatrists is that of Epicurus: "Death is nothing to us; for the body, when it has been resolved into its elements, has no feeling, and that which has no feeling is nothing to us."<sup>6</sup> Although a minority of mental-health experts advocate a new-age spiritualism, they do not represent the mainstream.<sup>7</sup>

## I. SIX THEORIES OF HUMAN NATURE

The traditional Christian view, from Justin Martyr in the second century through Franz Delitzsch at the end of the nineteenth, was a dichotomy of soul and body.<sup>8</sup> Six proposals concerning the relationship of soul and body are live options for some today.

1. *Plato described Socrates' body as a prison from which his immortal soul yearned to be released.*<sup>9</sup> As Socrates drank the hemlock his disembodied soul could fly off into the realm of eternal forms to contemplate philosophy. The soul was intrinsically immortal. The body was spoken of contemptuously as the reason for wars, an obstacle to philosophy, and the source of evil. Because Plato was so influential in the Roman empire, many Church fathers thought Paul taught a Platonic dualism.<sup>10</sup> Subsequent theological anthropology was a blend of Biblical and Platonic themes.

<sup>5</sup> In the latest revision of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed.; Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 1994) every effort has been made to eliminate the difference between "mental" and "organic" disorders, for the mind and brain are assumed to be identical, and mind-body dualism has been officially renounced: "The term mental disorder unfortunately implies a distinction between 'mental' disorders and 'physical' disorders that is a reductionistic anachronism of the mind/body dualism. A compelling literature documents that there is much 'physical' in 'mental' disorders and much 'mental' in 'physical' disorders. The problem raised by the term 'mental' disorders has been much clearer than its solution, and, unfortunately, the term persists . . . because we have not found an appropriate substitute" (p. xxi). According to various polls 94% of the American people believe in God, whereas only 43% of psychologists and psychiatrists do; 87% of Americans are certain that Jesus literally rose from the dead, while only 30% of mental-health experts believe that; 6% of Americans are agnostics or atheists, while the corresponding figure for mental-health experts is 36% (*Religion in America: The Gallup Report # 259* [April 1987]; W. E. Henry, J. H. Sims and S. L. Spray, *The Fifth Profession* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1971] 45-71).

<sup>6</sup> Epicurus, *Diogenes Laertius* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1958) 665.

<sup>7</sup> For example, the primary voice of the new age in the mental-health movement is the magazine *Common Boundary: Between Spirituality and Psychotherapy*, which has a circulation of only 30,000, whereas there are probably a million secular mental-health professionals in the United States.

<sup>8</sup> Justin Martyr, "Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin on the Resurrection," ANF 1.294-299; F. Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology* (Grand Rapids; Baker, 1966).

<sup>9</sup> Plato, "Phaedo," *Plato in Twelve Volumes* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1982) 1.193-404.

<sup>10</sup> W. Jaeger, "The Greek Ideas of Immortality," *HTR* 52 (1959) 135-147; H. A. Wolfson, "Immortality and Resurrection in the Philosophy of the Church Fathers," *Immortality and Resurrection* (ed. K. Stendahl; New York: Macmillan, 1965); *Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1976).

2. *Thomas Aquinas, like Aristotle, taught that the soul was the form of the body.*<sup>11</sup> Aristotle said that a building is made of lumber (matter) and an architectural plan (formula). The lumber was the body, and the architectural plan was the soul. Aquinas said that man "is composed of a spiritual and of a corporeal substance," thereby implying that perhaps the soul and body were different substances.<sup>12</sup> Thomas adopted a middle position between Aristotle and Plato, accepting from Aristotle the definition that the soul is the form of the body and from Plato the idea that the soul survives death and is our basic identity: It is the "I."

A slightly different interpretation of Thomistic teaching in the twentieth century asserts that soul and body are one and the same substance.<sup>13</sup> It is difficult to imagine how the soul could separate from the body at death if it is the form of the body, and Aristotle thought the soul ended when the body died. In Catholic doctrine the survival of the soul after the body's death is regarded as a mystery.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes it is stated as follows: The soul is "a subsistent substance [or] a subsistent being," which means that the soul exists first and foremost (starting at conception), whereas the body only comes into existence because the soul organizes it. Thus the soul is incapable of dying.<sup>15</sup> The Roman Church today teaches that at death the soul survives but is unable to organize the decaying body into a coherent whole until the bodily resurrection, when the soul again receives the body into communion with itself.<sup>16</sup> Thus the scholastic or Catholic tradition holds that a human is not made of two parts (body and soul) but that these comprise one ontological unity:

Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. . . . For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day. . . . The unity of the soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the "form" of the body; i.e., it is because of the spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.75–102; F. C. Copleston, *Aquinas: An Introduction to the Life and Work of the Great Medieval Thinker* (New York: Penguin, 1955) 156–198; Aristotle, "On the Soul," *Aristotle in Twenty-Three Volumes* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1986) 8.2–203.

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, *Summa* 1.75.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. M. A. Krapiec, *I-Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology* (New Britain: Mariel Publications, 1983) 99–119, 335–362, for information about Catholic anthropology in the Lublin Thomistic tradition, the tradition of Pope John Paul II.

<sup>14</sup> E. Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1960) 228–229.

<sup>15</sup> Krapiec, *I-Man* 102.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*; F. J. Sheed, *Theology for Beginners* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1981) 59–64; cf. also K. Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Seabury, 1973) 16–26; J. Auer and J. Ratzinger, "The Immortality of the Soul and the Resurrection of the Dead," *Dogmatic Theology 9: Eschatology* (Washington: Catholic University, 1988); D. Q. Liptak, letter of August 22, 1994, and conversation of July 18, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori: Liguori Publications, 1994) 93.

During the second quarter of the twentieth century, Biblical scholars (especially Protestants) rejected both of these Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical notions and insisted that theological anthropology be based on the Bible alone.<sup>18</sup> Scholars such as Oscar Cullmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, C. G. Berkouwer, Krister Stendahl, Otto W. Heick and P. G. Lindhardt wrote that the concept of an immortal soul and soul-body dualism should be banished from the Christian religion.<sup>19</sup> Werner Jaeger insisted that soul-body dualism was a bizarre idea invented by Plato, was found nowhere in the Bible, and was imported as a contaminant into Christianity by Church fathers such as Augustine.<sup>20</sup> Stendahl wrote that the Bible "is not interested in the immortality of the soul. And if you think it is, it is because you have read this into the material."<sup>21</sup>

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, as Biblical theologians battled against philosophical influences, passions were strong. The terms "Hellenistic," "Platonic," "Greek," and "soul-body dualism" became epithets used to denounce ideas said to be un-Biblical. A consensus grew that there was no Biblical basis for the soul as naturally immortal, existing in a disembodied state, superior to or distinct from the body.<sup>22</sup>

3. *To fill the vacuum left by the demise of Christian Platonism, there arose a holistic interpretation of the relationship of soul and body called physical monism.* It insists that humans are an irreducible unity, that we have only one nature. When humans die they die in their entirety, for they are indivisible monads. With the monistic Christian position the soul does not survive the death of the body, and the entire human being is recreated *ex nihilo* by God at the resurrection. This is sometimes called re-creationism.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London: Oxford University, 1926); O. Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (New York: Macmillan, 1958); H. V. White, "Immortality and Resurrection in Recent Theology," *Encounter* 22 (1961) 52–58; R. W. Brockway, "Immortality of the Soul: An Evangelical Heresy," *Religious Humanism* 13 (1979) 14–18; M. Bailey, "Biblical Man and Some Formulae of Christian Teaching," *ITQ* 27 (1960) 173–200.

<sup>19</sup> Cullmann, *Immortality*; cf. also "Immortality or Resurrection?," *Christianity Today* 2/21 (July 21, 1958) 6; R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Scribner's, 1949) 5–13; C. G. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 203, 201; O. W. Heick, "If a Man Die, Shall He Live Again?," *LQ* 17 (1965) 99–110; K. Stendahl, "Immortality Is Too Much and Too Little," *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 193–204; P. G. Lindhardt, "Eternal Life," *Chicago Studies* 48 (1965) 198–210.

<sup>20</sup> Jaeger, "Greek Ideas."

<sup>21</sup> Stendahl, "Immortality" 193–202.

<sup>22</sup> J. Burtneis, "Immortality and/or Resurrection," *Dialog* 1/2 (Spring 1962) 46–52; K. J. Kraan, "Onsterbelijkheid der Ziel of Wederopstanding der Doden?," *Horizons* 21 (1958) 135–143; J. B. Cobb, "The Resurrection of the Soul," *HTR* 80 (1987) 213–227; R. L. Whitelaw, "Our Promised Resurrection: Why Is It Still Incredible to Many Christians?," *Resurrection* 92 (1989) 8–10.

<sup>23</sup> R. Young, "Professor Penelhum on the Resurrection of the Body," *RelS* 9 (1973) 181–187; P. Badham, "Recent Thinking on Christian Beliefs, VI. The Future Life," *ExpTim* 88 (1977) 197–201; V. A. Hannah, "Death, Immortality, and Resurrection: A Response to John Yates, 'The Origin of the Soul,'" *EvQ* 62 (1990) 241–251; E. C. Rust, "The Destiny of the Individual in the Thought of the OT," *RevExp* 58 (1961) 296–311.

Cullmann is frequently misinterpreted along monistic lines: "Professor Cullmann inferred that Jesus did not believe in immortality of the soul; that to him death meant the death of both body and soul; and hence that resurrection, in which he explicitly expresses a belief, meant to him a new creation of soul as well as body."<sup>24</sup> We will show below that this is incorrect as an interpretation of Cullmann.

4. *An alternative holistic interpretation of the Bible affirms a holistic dualism, sometimes called minimal or interactive dualism.*<sup>25</sup> As Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest state, interactive dualism assumes this relationship between spirit and body: "The human spirit or inner self abides in the body. The physical organism is the spirit's temporary, fragile dwelling place. A person . . . lives in 'a jar of clay.' . . . But he distinguishes himself from his body. . . . The human spirit as an agent acts through its body as an instrument. . . . Like a professional athlete, Paul said, 'I beat my body and make it my slave' (1 Cor 9:27). . . . The body also interacts on the spirit. . . . To sum up the doctrine of humanness ontologically, . . . the whole person is a complex unity composed of two distinct entities, soul and body, intimately interacting with one another . . . an interacting dichotomy."<sup>26</sup>

This view should not be confused with Platonism, from which it differs in these five ways: "The body is not the blameworthy cause of human evil, the inner self is. The existence of the naked spirit after death is an intermediate and incomplete state, not the eternal state. In the eternal state humans are not immortal souls only, but spirits united with resurrected bodies."<sup>27</sup> The body "is not the prison house of the soul but its instrument. The body is not less real than the soul."<sup>28</sup>

This position is called holistic dualism because the emphasis is on the harmonious marriage of body and soul during this life. Body and soul cannot be separated prior to death and are unified, as in the term "embodied soul." But at death humans come apart. Therefore there are two parts: a body, and something different than the corpse (the other part being called "spirit," "soul," "I," or the subjective person). Most arguments in defense of this position propose that there is an intermediate state of disembodiment between death and resurrection.<sup>29</sup> But even if we immediately assume spiritual bodies

<sup>24</sup> Wolfson, "Immortality" 54.

<sup>25</sup> J. W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); "The Identity of Resurrected Persons: Fatal Flaws of Monistic Anthropology," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988) 19–36; C. S. Evans, "Separable Souls: A Defense of 'Minimal Dualism,'" *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 19 (1981) 313–331; C. J. De Vogel, "Reflections on Philipp. 1:23–24," *NovT* 19 (1977) 262–274; G. R. Lewis and B. A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 2.134–142, 147–149, 164; G. R. Lewis, *Decide for Yourself: A Theological Workbook* (Downers Grove, 1970) 80–81.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative* 2.148–149.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 149.

<sup>28</sup> G. R. Lewis, letter of July 28, 1995.

<sup>29</sup> D. Moody, "The Double Face of Death," *RevExp* 58 (1961) 348–366.

after death, that is still dualism because some aspect of the human survives the demise of this earthly body.

5. *Just as there are two varieties of dualism (Platonic and holistic), similarly there are two varieties of monism (physical and spiritual).* The latter is rapidly gaining popularity. Physical monism, addressed above, holds that spirit and body are an indivisible physical monad. But spiritual monism holds that they are an indivisible spiritual monad, for the body is an illusion (cf. the Hindu *māyā*). The Hindu view of the soul is having a pervasive influence in the west as taught by transcendental meditation, Hare Krishna, and newagers.<sup>30</sup> These views are gaining popularity because of the inadequacy of the secular version of physical monism that is so popular in America.

Among theologians who call themselves Christian, there are three varieties of spiritual monism: Christian Science,<sup>31</sup> process theology, and gnosticism. Process theology views all reality (including the body) as psychical (i.e. spiritual).<sup>32</sup> Leading Jungian scholars today say that Jung is a gnostic.<sup>33</sup>

6. *A small minority of theologians hold a trichotomy viewpoint (1 Thess 5:23; Heb 4:12).*<sup>34</sup> We hold that they are dichotomists in disguise, for the distinction between soul and spirit is based on functional rather than ontological distinctions. Many women have two full-time jobs: in the home and outside. If one thought of the inner person as having two full-time jobs (as soul and as spirit), one would approach Nee's view of a three-person marriage: body, soul and spirit. That is a functional view. But at death we discover the marriage involves only two, for the body dies and there is only one survivor.

In summary, there are six mutually incompatible interpretations of Biblical anthropology: Platonic dualism, Aquinas' view, physical monism, holistic dualism, spiritual monism, and a trichotomy view. We could say that four of the positions are holistic and two are not. Neither Platonism nor the trichotomy view is holistic. They do not see humans as unified.

<sup>30</sup> G. R. Lewis, *What Everyone Should Know About Transcendental Meditation* (Glendale: Regal, 1975); *Confronting the Cults* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966); letter of May 27, 1995.

<sup>31</sup> M. B. Eddy, *Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: Christian Science Publishing Society, 1875).

<sup>32</sup> Interview of Bruce Demarest, November 17, 1994; A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan, 1979); N. Pittenger, "Process Theology Revisited," *TToday* 37/2 (July 1970) 213; F. G. Gruenler, *The Inexhaustible God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 18–19, 126 (cited in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative* 1.204–205, 210).

<sup>33</sup> *Jung: Gnostic* (ed. R. A. Segal; Princeton: Princeton University, 1992); M. Stein, "The Gnostic Critique, Past and Present," *The Allure of Gnosticism* (ed. Segal, J. Singer and Stein; Chicago: Open Court, 1995); W. G. Rollins, *Jung and the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1983); R. Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994); M. Stein, *Jung's Treatment of Christianity: The Psychotherapy of a Religious Tradition* (Wilmette: Chiron, 1985); C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1933); *On the Nature of the Psyche* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1960).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. e.g. W. Nee, *The Spiritual Man* (New York: Christian Fellowship, 1986).

To say that the Hebrew people had a concept of the whole person is true. But which of the four concepts of the whole person are we talking about? We have presented four holistic and unified theories of human nature: (1) Aquinas' doctrine that the soul is the form of the body, (2) spiritual monism, (3) physical monism, and (4) holistic dualism. The remainder of the article will be devoted to evaluating the evidence between these four views.

A Biblical self-concept cannot avoid metaphysical ideas.

Since God is spirit, and we are created in his image, we are hopelessly involved in metaphysics. Evangelical belief in a divinely originated propositional revelation means that what Christ and Scripture disclose is true of God and of the soul in themselves (Kant to the contrary), though of course "now we know in part" (1 Cor 13). Only those who reduce the Bible to a book of "nothing but" human knowledge need be caught in the Kantian skepticism regarding metaphysical knowledge of God and the soul in themselves.<sup>35</sup>

The ontological term "dualism" means that we have two natures (two essences), that we are composed of two substances. The idea that we are composed of two entities is most dramatically proved at death when one of them, but only one, is annihilated. But even during this life we have a sense of being a dichotomy because the mind has a transcendence in space and time and is capable of self-criticism and detached contemplation.

"Holistic" is not an ontological term. It refers to the degree of harmony in the soul-body marriage. A Platonic soul-body relationship would be akin to a bad marriage in which one partner is condescending and contemptuous toward the other. That is a contentious, not a unified, partnership. But interactive dualism is like a harmonious marriage—both partners cooperating—and such a soul-body cooperation would be holistic and unified.

An ontological monism asserts that humans have only one substance. We can never be subdivided without destroying everything. For example, if one had modeled a woman and man of clay, a monistic marriage would be one in which the two clay figures were merged together into one undifferentiated lump, like Siamese twins whose vital organs are shared. They are no longer two but one. In the physical version of monism, when the body dies the entire lump dies. At the resurrection, God makes a new lump and somehow creates a sense of continuity of identity between the new lump and the previous lump. In the spiritual version of monism death is less of a problem, for the body and its demise are illusory.

The Thomistic view would say that when the body dies the form persists as a spiritual entity.

## II. THREE VALIDITY TESTS

Having sketched the six principal interpretations of Biblical self-concept, how are we to choose among them? What does the Bible say, and by what principles are we to interpret Biblical teaching on the subject of self-concept?

<sup>35</sup> Lewis, letter of May 27, 1995.

Lewis and Demarest advance three tests of truth as justified both Biblically and philosophically.<sup>36</sup>

1. *Logical consistency.* As far as the first test is concerned, all six anthropological theories are logically consistent. There is, however, a popular viewpoint that is not. Often Biblical scholars say that they reject soul-body dualism, but they believe that the entire human is not terminated when the body dies. That statement is self-contradictory, even though it is called a “mystery.” Biblical mysteries are not muddles or logical nonsense but information not yet revealed.<sup>37</sup> If some aspect of a human survives the demise of this earthly body, then there is more than one part: the corpse, and something else. That is dualism. Usually when a scholar says “I reject dualism,” she or he is thinking of Platonic dualism and is failing to remember other dualistic alternatives, such as that of Aquinas (a soft dualism).

2. *Scriptural adequacy.* Many Biblical scholars reject the idea of dualism in the Biblical portrayal of human nature.<sup>38</sup> For example, C. G. Berkouwer said that

Scripture never pictures man as a dualistic or pluralistic being, but . . . in all its varied expressions the whole man comes to the fore. . . . The discussion has especially turned on this point, whether the term “soul” as used in Scripture has some special religious emphasis in the sense that we must deduce at least some sort of dichotomy. And this is more and more denied by theologians.<sup>39</sup>

In many Bible interpretations the unity and unsplitability of humans is emphasized.<sup>40</sup> Sometimes we read of the “Hebraic view of the whole person” and sometimes of Adam as a “living being” (Gen 2:7).<sup>41</sup>

It is here agreed that Biblical anthropology is incompatible with a Platonic dualism. For example, anthropological words such as “body,” “soul,” “spirit” and “heart” could each be used to refer to the whole person by means of synecdoche. The word “soul” is famous for how often it refers to the whole person (including the body as part of the soul) in the Bible. The OT never and the NT rarely use the word “soul” to describe those who have died (Rev 6:9; 20:4). Anthropological terms in the Bible have both a physical and a spiritual aspect mixed into the same term. For example the “heart” (*lēb, lēbāb; kardia*) was simultaneously that which beats in our chest, the essence of a human, and the location of thought. The NT emphasizes resurrection of the body as our hope, while immortality of the soul is not explicitly mentioned.<sup>42</sup> Since God created the human body (Gen 1:27; 2:7), both body and soul are

<sup>36</sup> Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative* 1.8; G. R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (New York: University of America, 1990) esp. 176–209.

<sup>37</sup> Lewis, letter of July 28, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> J. H. Boyd, “The Current State of Evangelical Thinking About the Soul” (unpublished paper).

<sup>39</sup> Berkouwer, *Man* 203, 201.

<sup>40</sup> A. C. Purdy, “Paul the Apostle,” *IDB* 3.681–704; Berkouwer, *Man* 71–72; J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Chicago: Regnery, 1952) 16; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1965) 1.191, 194–195, 204, 209.

<sup>41</sup> Stendahl, “Immortality”; “Preface,” *Affirming* (Boyd).

<sup>42</sup> Cooper, *Body*.

valuable. The dualistic phrase "body and soul" is found in only one verse of Scripture: In Matt 10:28 we read that it is possible to kill the body but not the soul. I. Howard Marshall said that most Biblical scholars are embarrassed by the dualism of Matt 10:28 and would prefer if it were swept under the rug.<sup>43</sup>

Based on these observations we can eliminate Platonic dualism as an option, for it is not compatible with Scripture. That leaves four holistic anthropologies to choose from: physical monism, spiritual monism, holistic dualism, and the view of Aquinas. The view of trichotomists was dealt with earlier and does not require further discussion.

Spiritual monism has not gained popularity in evangelical theology because it contradicts the first chapter of the Bible, which portrays God as the Creator and the creation as real. Genesis 2:7 indicates that God created the whole person, including the body. Thus we have eliminated three of the six anthropological theories: Platonism, trichotomy, spiritual monism. We next tackle physical monism.

There is considerable Biblical support for the idea that at death humans are not completely identical with the cadaver, which would be inconsistent with physical monism. Paul had a thorn in his flesh (2 Cor 12:7). Like most people with chronic illnesses, Paul did not think of himself as identical with his body but spoke of it rather as a temporary tent (5:1), a jar of clay (4:7), a place he would rather depart from (5:8). He yearned to have his earthly body transformed into a spiritual one, for the earthly vessel was "perishable," "dishonor(ed)," "weak," subject to Adam's nature (1 Cor 15:35–54). He said he beat his body to make it his slave, the way a disciplined long-distance runner must do (9:27). The estrangement between Paul and his body was so deep that he could even entertain the possibility that he took a journey to the third heaven without it. He says he has no idea whether he took the trip "in the body or out of the body" (2 Cor 12:2–4). Anyone who can even imagine a trip to the third heaven without his body is not a monist.

Paul writes: "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (4:16). This verse draws a distinction between the deteriorating outer man (body) and the renewed inner man (spirit).

There is a debate in the research literature concerning whether Paul could imagine an intermediate state of nakedness after death (5:1–4) when he would have no body but would be away from the body and with the Lord (5:8). There has been a recent controversy concerning Murray Harris' teaching about the resurrection body.<sup>44</sup> I think Harris is wrong, but that is irrelevant for the current discussion. Whether Harris is right or wrong, both views involve soul-body dualism. Whether Pauline scholars endorse the concept of an intermediate state or vote in favor of Paul expecting to acquire a spiritual body immediately after death, the implications are the same—namely, that Paul is a dualist.

<sup>43</sup> I. H. Marshall, "Uncomfortable Words, VI. 'Fear Him Who Can Destroy Both Soul and Body in Hell' (Mt. 10:28 RSV)," *ExpTim* 81 (1970) 276–282.

<sup>44</sup> M. Harris, *From Grave to Glory* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); cf. also "The Mother of All Muddles," *Christianity Today* (April 5, 1994) 62–65.

It is commonly but incorrectly assumed that if Paul thought he needed to be embodied to be whole, then Paul was not a dualist. If I dress in dungarees and sneakers one day and in a tuxedo the next day, then I am different than my clothes, and so there is dualism: I and my earthly clothes are different. Dichotomy is implied because humans are not identical with this earthly tent (5:1).<sup>45</sup> To be a physical monist a Christian would need to have his or her corpse disappear at the moment of death, transformed into a spiritual body, or bodily taken up into heaven, as happened to Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11–12). Alternatively, if Paul were a physical monist he would have needed to assert that the human spirit dies with the human body and that both are re-created by God at the resurrection. If Paul preferred to be embodied rather than naked, that is incompatible with Platonic dualism. But Paul's letters are also incompatible with monism.

Philippians 1:24 is difficult to reconcile with physical monism. How could Paul have expected to be stone dead immediately after death if he would “desire to depart and be with Christ”? By means of a careful word study, C. J. De Vogel shows that the word “depart” refers to departing from the body (see vv. 21–22).<sup>46</sup> Some scholars suggest that after death the first thing of which we will be conscious is Christ at the resurrection, for we will be asleep between death and resurrection. This, however, misinterprets the NT passages referring to death as “sleep,” as we will discuss below.

Cullmann is often cited incorrectly as a defender of physical monism against dualism. It is true that Cullmann in his book *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* utterly rejected Plato. But Cullmann endorsed an interim condition: “The lack of New Testament speculation about this does not give us the right simply to suppress the ‘interim condition’ as such. . . . The New Testament teaches only this much about the ‘interim condition’: (1) that it exists, (2) that it already signifies union with Christ.”<sup>47</sup> For this reason we must conclude that Cullmann rejected both physical monism and Platonic dualism. That implies that his view may have been consistent with holistic dualism.

Even if Cullmann thought that the dead were asleep or unconscious during the interim condition, that idea would be incompatible with physical monism because the dead spirits are not annihilated when the body is annihilated. King Saul was able to awaken the prophet Samuel from his sleep when Saul consulted the witch at Endor (1 Sam 28:7–20). Thus even in the OT there is dualism, because Samuel survived the death of his body (25:1). A dead soul would differ from a sleeping soul in that it has no continuity of existence or of memory, and it must be re-created instead of awakened at the resurrection. Thus even the Seventh-day Adventist idea of soul sleep is closer to holistic dualism than it is to monism.<sup>48</sup>

Luke 8:52–55 illuminates what Jesus meant when he said, “She is not dead but asleep.” He meant that a dead body was asleep. Apparently the

<sup>45</sup> Cooper, *Body*.

<sup>46</sup> De Vogel, “Reflections.”

<sup>47</sup> Cullmann, “Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection from the Dead?”, *Immortality* (ed. Stendahl) 40 n. 34.

<sup>48</sup> F. Barton, *Heaven, Hell and Hades* (Lenox: Henceforth Publications, 1990).

girl's spirit was not annihilated or even asleep but had simply departed. After Jesus took the girl by the hand "her spirit returned to her" (vv. 54–55). This passage is consistent with dualism but incompatible with monism, because v. 55 does not say that "her spirit was recreated out of nothing" or that "her spirit awakened." The implication is that the girl's spirit had departed her body at the moment of death. Only her body was asleep. For reasons like this, some scholars find that the Biblical references to the dead sleeping refer to the body sleeping, not the soul.<sup>49</sup>

The case for holistic dualism rests upon Christ's resurrection. If Christ did not rise, then there is no advantage of dualism over monism. If Christ did rise, then what provides continuity between our humanness in this life and the human being in the resurrection life?

Jesus warned us not to fear those who can kill the body but not the soul, thereby implying a separation at death (Matt 10:28; Luke 12:4–5).

Consider the rich man who built new barns and then was told by God, "You fool! This very night your *psychēn* will be demanded from you" (Luke 12:20). The word *psychē* can mean either life or soul, so the text allows either a monistic or a dualistic interpretation. The KJV translated it as "soul." Although the NIV uses "life" here, that interpretation is only obvious if one views Biblical anthropology through monistic assumptions. In context the emphasis is on God's judgment of the rich man, with a contrast between the man's attention to his wealth and his inattention to the needs of his soul: His soul should have been "rich toward God" (v. 21), and he should have stored up "treasure in heaven" (vv. 33–34). This parable occurs shortly after Jesus differentiated the body that dies from the soul that does not (vv. 12:4–5; cf. Matt 10:28). Thus "soul" is a plausible and reasonable translation of *psychēn* in Luke 12:20. Furthermore that translation would render the parable richer in theological color than the bland word "life."

When Jesus said to the thief hanging beside him, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (23:43), he sparked a debate between monists and dualists concerning what the word "today" refers to. Monists say that the Greek means "Today I say to you."<sup>50</sup> This again is an interpretation and is based on one's assumptions. If one makes an assumption of an intermediate state, then "today" refers to the thief's spirit separating from his crucified body so that when his body had died he was not totally terminated. This interpretation is further supported by other evidence that Luke wrote about an intermediate state.

Lazarus looked down at the rich man burning in hell, and the rich man asked that someone be sent to warn his five brothers who were still alive (16:22–28). Monistic interpreters<sup>51</sup> attempt to show that this text does not say what it plainly says, which is that something happened to the rich man's spirit immediately after the death of his body while his five brothers were still alive. An intermediate state offers the most parsimonious interpretation of this passage.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative* 2.164.

<sup>50</sup> Barton, *Heaven*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

When Stephen was stoned to death he prayed: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59; cf. Luke 23:46). This is more easily reconciled with the idea of Stephen's spirit separating from his body than with the idea that his spirit was annihilated when his body died.

Monism is incompatible with Jesus' comments about what God in the burning bush said to Moses (Mark 12:26–27; Luke 20:37–38). If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were annihilated when they died, and if they no longer existed prior to the bodily resurrection, Jesus would have said, "He is not the God of the living, but of the dead." Furthermore, how could a monist possibly explain Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration? The implication is that Moses and Elijah continued to exist prior to the resurrection.

The various eternal-life sayings in the gospel of John make more sense if one assumes that the human is not utterly destroyed when the body dies. Eternal life begins at conversion, so that believers already have it. The believer "has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24), "will live forever" (6:51), "never see death" (8:51), "never perish" (10:27). To say that a person is a whole lump of clay that dies in its entirety when the body dies and is subsequently re-created by God *ex nihilo* is difficult to reconcile with these passages. If we are not under divine judgment and we never die, then how could we die in our entirety? In 3 John 2 the health of the body is distinguished from that of the soul.

In Romans 6 Paul addresses the spirit "as distinct from the body and the agent using the body when he exhorts the Christian to yield the members of his or her body to righteousness, not to sin" (Rom 6:12–13, 19).<sup>52</sup> Paul speaks of the body as the instrument of the soul when he says, "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body" (1 Cor 6:18).

Similarly, Heb 9:15, 27 implies survival after death, so that we "receive the promised inheritance" and "die once, and after that face judgment." A "new and living way" is "opened for us through the curtain" of death (10:20). These passages suggest an intermediate state. They are difficult to reconcile with the monist expectation of extinction followed by re-creation.

James writes: "The body without the spirit is dead" (Jas 2:26). This implies separation at death.

Peter says he lives "in the tent of this body" but "will soon put it aside" (2 Pet 1:14), which implies an intermediate state. A monist would say, "I am the tent of this body, and when I put it aside I will no longer exist."

Further evidence of the soul surviving the demise of the body is found in Rev 6:9: "The souls of those who had been slain" call out for justice. And Rev 20:4 refers to "the souls of those who had been beheaded."

There is a distinction in the NT between the outer and inner person, the former being that which is visible and the latter being that which is not. At death the outer person ends, but the inner person survives. At the resurrection the outer man emerges again to join the inner man in a permanent state.

<sup>52</sup> Lewis, letter of May 27, 1995.

This outer/inner distinction differs from our twentieth-century sense of physical versus spiritual. The outer person might consist especially of the face, the appearance, the skin, and the bones that give shape to the skin. The breath, heart and blood would be part of the inner man. The outer or public person might consist of the person's appearance, name, reputation, family and possessions.<sup>53</sup>

For example, "hypocrite" referred to the large mask worn by actors, and the word sharply distinguishes the external appearance from the inner person.<sup>54</sup> The hypocrite in the synoptics is someone who outwardly appears holy but inwardly is not (Matt 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 16:3; 22:18; 23:13–29; 24:51; Mark 7:6; Luke 6:42; 11:44; 12:56; 13:15). The implication is that some people are actors, the outer person being different from the inner. "Hypocrites . . . honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Mark 7:6).

Similarly there is the outside of the cup, which the Pharisees clean, versus the inside of the cup, which is what is important (Matt 23:26; Luke 11:39–40). It is not what goes into a man that is important. What comes out from the inside shows what is in the heart (Mark 7:15–23). Pharisees and lawyers are like whitewashed tombs: outwardly very pretty, but inwardly full of dead men's bones (Matt 23:27–28). "God does not judge by external appearance" (Gal 2:6). The Lord "will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts" (1 Cor 4:5). "Circumcision is circumcision of the heart," not just outward and physical circumcision (Rom 2:28). Paul tells Christians to be strengthened "in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph 3:16–17).

*Anthrōpos* is used . . . in the phrase "the inward man," the regenerate person's spiritual nature personified, the inner self of the believer, Rom 7:22, as approving of the Law of God; in Eph 3:16, as the sphere of the renewing power of the Holy Spirit; in 2 Cor 4:16 (where *anthrōpos* is not repeated), in contrast to "the outward man," the physical frame, the man as cognizable by the senses; the "inward" man is identical with "the hidden man of the heart," 1 Pet 3:4.<sup>55</sup>

The inner person has two aspects: the old Adam that is soulish (1 Cor 2:14; 15:44, 46; Jas 3:15; Jude 19) and the new spiritual person who is progressively more Christlike (Gal 6:1; 1 Cor 2:13–15; 3:1; 14:37; 1 Pet 2:5).<sup>56</sup>

*Anthrōpos* is used . . . in the expressions "the old man," which are confined to Paul's Epistles, the former standing for the unregenerate nature personified as the former self of a believer, which, having been crucified with Christ, Rom 6:6, is to be apprehended practically as such, and to be "put off," Eph 4:22, Col 3:9, being the source and seat of sin; the latter, "the new man," standing for the new nature personified as the believer's regenerate self, a nature "created in righteousness and holiness of truth," Eph 4:24, and having been "put on"

<sup>53</sup> Pedersen, *Israel* 1.99–262. Although Pedersen's book is primarily concerned with the soul in the OT, his subjective (i.e. psychological) view of Biblical anthropology is informative.

<sup>54</sup> *Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (ed. J. R. Kohlenberger III and J. A. Swanson; Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984) 571–572; BAGD 845.

<sup>55</sup> *Expanded Vine's* 704–705; cf. also BAGD 68–69.

<sup>56</sup> *Expanded Vine's* 774, 1077–1078.

at regeneration, Col 3:10; being “renewed after the image of Him that created him,” it is to be “put on” in practical apprehension of these facts.<sup>57</sup>

The heart (*kardia*, *sklērokardia*) refers to the inner life. The distinction is not between physical and spiritual but between outer and inner. In addition to being the locus of thoughts and feelings the cardiac muscle is the vitality of the body and therefore the center of the inner person, which animates the outer person.<sup>58</sup> Thus the heart can be

(a) the seat of physical life, Acts 14:17, Jas 5:5; (b) the seat of moral nature and spiritual life, the seat of grief, John 14:1, Rom 9:2, 2 Cor 2:4; joy, John 16:22, Eph 5:19; the desires, Matt 5:28, 2 Pet 2:14; the affections, Luke 24:32, Acts 21:13; the perceptions, John 12:40, Eph 4:18; the thoughts, Matt 9:4, Heb 4:12; the understanding, Matt 13:15, Rom 1:21; the reasoning powers, Mark 2:6, Luke 24:38; the imagination, Luke 1:51; conscience, Acts 2:37; 1 John 3:20; the intentions, Heb 4:12, compare 1 Pet 4:1; purpose, Acts 11:23, 2 Cor 9:7; the will, Rom 6:17, Col 3:15; faith, Mark 11:23; Rom 10:10, Heb 3:12. . . . Scripture regards the heart as the sphere of Divine influence, Rom 2:15, Acts 15:9. . . . The heart, as lying deep within, contains “the hidden man,” 1 Pet 3:4, the real man. It represents the true character but conceals it.<sup>59</sup>

Even death has an outer and an inner aspect. *Ptōma* always refers to the outer man—that is, the corpse after the spirit has departed the body (Matt 24:28; Mark 6:29; Rev 11:8–9). But “dead” (*nekros*) is sometimes used of “the actual spiritual condition of unsaved men, Matt 8:22, John 5:25, Eph 2:1, 5, 5:14, Phil 3:11, Col 2:13.”<sup>60</sup>

The NT arose out of the interpretative community of Jews. From non-canonical writings we see that the Hebraic view of human nature at that time was replete with interest in soul-body dualism (cf. 2 Esdr 3:5; 7:75, 88, 100; Wis 2:22–3:1, 4; 8:19–20; 9:14–15; 15:3, 10–11; 4 Macc 14:4–6; and Philo’s interpretation of Gen 2:7).<sup>61</sup>

How far back into the history of Israel interest in an intermediate state (or surviving spirit) can be traced is debatable. As noted above, it is evident when King Saul conjured up the spirit of Samuel at Endor (1 Sam 28:7–20). Whether the dead in Sheol could be thought of as sleeping spirits or non-existent in a monistic sense is debated by scholars. Archeologists have dug up two dozen graves in Judah from the time of the monarchy and have found in them food, grain, jugs, bows and arrows, writing instruments, and other implements useful to the dead. Such graves are strikingly similar to graves archeologists have excavated in Ugarit and Egypt where there was a well-documented cult of the dead, leading to speculation that contact between ancient Israelites and their dead relatives was part of the culture out of which

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 704–705; cf. BAGD 68–69.

<sup>58</sup> Pedersen, *Israel*.

<sup>59</sup> *Expanded Vine’s* 536–537; cf. also BAGD 403–404.

<sup>60</sup> *Expanded Vine’s* 265; cf. also BAGD 534–535.

<sup>61</sup> Philo, “On the Account of the World’s Creation Given by Moses,” *Philo* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1991) 1.107; cf. further “Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis II, III,” *ibid.* 1.167–173. See also the defense of the immortal soul in the OT and intertestamental Hebrew literature in J. Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (London: SCM, 1992).

the OT arose.<sup>62</sup> The OT would not have warned so frequently against consulting the dead unless the ancient Hebrews had believed in an intermediate state (Lev 19:26, 31; 20:6; Deut 18:10–11; Isa 8:19). The Law was undoubtedly warning against demonic deceivers, but the impulse or motivation of Israelites to want to consult the dead implies that they thought the dead were in some sort of intermediate state.<sup>63</sup>

The question concerning what Sheol was like hinges in part on whether one reads Isa 14:9–20 as being a literal description of the place or a poetic fantasy. One would be overstating the case to say that those who died and went to Sheol were totally annihilated simply because they were separated from their bodies.<sup>64</sup>

Other OT verses are suggestive of spirit-body dualism. For example, Job 32:8 says that “the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, . . . gives him understanding.” This verse is compatible with a dichotomous view of Gen 2:7—namely, that humans are composed of an earthen vessel and divine breath. A similar view is suggested by or compatible with Eccl 12:7, which we will discuss below.

In summary, the hypothesis of physical monism is difficult to reconcile with the Bible. There is considerable evidence that humans are not extinct when the body dies. This is especially evident in the NT.

This leaves two anthropological theories that endorse both holism and dualism simultaneously: (1) Aquinas' view that the soul is the form of the body, and (2) holistic (or interactive) dualism. Does Scripture lend more support to either of these views?

In some verses the word “soul” refers to the entire human, including the person's body as part of the soul. For example, people would take a census and count the number of souls (KJV: Gen 12:5; 46:15, 18, 22, 25–27; Exod 1:5; 12:4; Acts 2:41; 7:14; 27:37). Another example is that Hebrew *nepesh* and Greek *psychē* sometimes function as a personal pronoun and can be translated “I,” “you,” “yourself,” and so on. This use of the word likewise implies that “soul” refers to the entire human. At first glance this observation appears to contradict both of the anthropological theories we are considering. It contradicts holistic dualism because “soul” is used to speak of the entirety, including the body as part of the soul. It contradicts Aquinas and Aristotle because “soul” refers to the whole person and not simply to the form of the body.

Upon closer inspection, however, we discover that this use of “soul” in the KJV might be considered a translation problem and not a conceptual one. It

<sup>62</sup> E. Bloch-Smith, “The Cult of the Dead in Judah: Interpreting the Material Remains,” *JBL* 111 (Summer 1992) 213–224; *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992); K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, AOAT 213 (1986).

<sup>63</sup> Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative* 3.458.

<sup>64</sup> U. Kellermann, “Überwindung des Todesgeschicks in der Alttestamentlichen Frömmigkeit vor und neben dem Auferstehungsglauben,” *ZTK* 73 (1976) 259–282; M. S. Moore, “Resurrection and Immortality: Two Motifs Navigating Confluent Theological Streams in the Old Testament (Dan 12, 1–14),” *TZ* 39 (1983) 17–34; N. Snaith, “Justice and Immortality,” *SJT* 17 (1964) 309–324.

is well known that many words refer to more than one unrelated concept. Recent translations such as the NIV handle the verses noted in the previous paragraph by using a word other than “soul.” For example, at a census the number of “persons” would be counted.

Aquinas would say that the soul can survive the death of the body. In that regard his view is compatible with holistic dualism and consistent with the Biblical evidence about an intermediate state. Nowhere in the Bible, however, is the soul described as the form of the body. There are Aristotelian abstractions associated with the scholastic tradition that do not find much foundation in the Bible. Aquinas defines the soul as “the first principle of life.”<sup>65</sup> That may be a brilliant abstraction based on Aristotelian assumptions, but is not explicitly found in Scripture.

The more parsimonious explanation of the Biblical data is holistic dualism, which has the advantage of avoiding almost the entire Aristotelian or scholastic superstructure of philosophical assumptions that go beyond the Bible. In this article the preference is to minimize rather than maximize the amount of metaphysics with which we interpret the Bible. But a minimal amount of metaphysics is inescapable.

3. *Existential viability.* The third test of validity is how theological anthropology affects human lives today. It is the subjective test of livability or authenticity.

I was married to a woman named Pat who developed a chronic and debilitating illness. She became blind, lost her kidneys and went on dialysis, had diabetes, had both legs amputated above the knee, lost the feeling in her hands, suffered from two strokes and two heart attacks, and eventually died at fifty years of age. It was difficult to fit Pat into the monistic assumptions of American culture. To tell her that she should rejoice because she was a whole person would be to mock her, for she was not whole. Over the fifteen years that I watched my wife disintegrate, she came to separate her identity from that of her body. She said, “I know that my body will fail me again and that I will end up unconscious on a respirator in an intensive-care unit again, but I no longer experience it as a personal defeat, because I no longer think of myself as my body.”

Since I work as a physician in a medical-surgical hospital, I am constantly faced with that vast army of Americans who do not fit the physical, monistic, anthropological assumptions of contemporary America—namely, those with chronic illness, gnawing pain, those who are withering from age, or patients struggling against persistent nausea or shortness of breath. Can a fifty-year-old man who needs to wear a diaper because he soils himself feel happy when he is told that he is so much of an embodied soul that no distinction can be drawn between him and his body? Would he not feel humiliated by this interpretation of the gospel? A woman with a colostomy may not be able to feel part of the human race if theologians insist that to be human you must enjoy your body.

<sup>65</sup> Aquinas, *Summa* 1.75.1.

If a child is born with such withered legs that there will never be a structural possibility of either walking or crawling, would the monists propose that the child's soul is limited by these architectural disasters of the spine, pelvis and femurs? I had a son born with precisely these deformities. His name was Justin. That son also died.

I do not believe the body should be blamed for these afflictions. Physical illness exists because we live in a fallen world that is under a curse (Gen 3:17).

The point is that we live in a secular culture with monistic assumptions about human nature. That culture provides an endorsement of physicality for those who are young and energetic. At first glance physical monism appears attractive, especially as shown on television and in our magazines. The models portrayed are unusually beautiful, healthy-looking, and rarely over the age of thirty-five.

In secular American culture the vitality of life arises from our bodies, and if we would be spiritually healthy then we should exercise regularly, remain trim, eat little cholesterol, and wear Nike sneakers. That is the American way. Each of us is allegedly such a psychosomatic unity that the route to fulfillment in life is to look and feel physically fit, especially with respect to our hair conditioners and our deodorants.

But physical monism comes with a price: Those who are suffering are plunged into worse suffering because they can no longer achieve the minimal requirements of being human—namely, having a vigorous and reliable body that is full of stamina, zest, sexiness and youth. If physical monism says we are our bodies, then those who have disintegrating or deformed bodies and those whose bodies torture them experience themselves as not part of the human race. Patients with chronic illnesses frequently tell me that when they lost their health they lost the meaning of life, an idea that is consistent with the current theological and television emphasis on the central importance of the body.

Our concept of human nature is a social convention. Like any such convention, this one benefits some people while oppressing or harming others. In the case of monism, those who are benefited are those aerobic and healthy young people who are already vigorous. Those who are harmed are the frail, those with devastating and chronic physical illnesses. The harm is in the form of a degrading self-concept that does not allow the suffering person to withdraw her or his sense of identity from their disintegrating body.

What is the point of this discussion of illness and birth defects? There are two points.

First, physical monism focuses our attention on this life more than on what happens at death. It is primarily in the confrontation with death that dualism emerges as superior to monism. But death is not something that necessarily happens and is over with. The Bible portrays the forces of death invading life, eroding and depleting a living person by means of a debilitating illness. This is evident in the book of Job (2:4–8; 3:20–22). The healings of the gospels and Acts are defeats for the forces of death. When Jesus healed withered limbs, restored sight to the blind, corrected birth defects and raised the dead, that was all part of the same activity of overcoming the forces of

death. Raising the dead was not a different kind of activity than healing the sick. It was the same.

In the NT, *sōzō* referred to both salvation and healing. It also conveyed a sense of preserving life, doing well, making whole. The same sentence could be translated “Your faith has saved you” or “Your faith has healed you” (Matt 9:22; Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 8:48; 18:42; Acts 14:9). Both meanings refer to overcoming the forces of death, restoring a person’s wholeness.

Vast numbers of people today live in that limbo of being half alive and half dead, maintained by dialysis or chemotherapy or another noxious treatment that can forestall our demise but not restore anything approaching true life. I watched as my wife Pat was whittled down and dismembered by such illnesses over the course of fifteen years. It is precisely in such a prolonged confrontation with death that one discovers that some forms of dualism preserve human dignity whereas physical or material monism undermines it. Passengers on a sinking ship feel better if they do not identify with the ship.

If the soul is the morally accountable agent in all our thinking, feeling and willing (decision-making) its superiority is evident in all of life, not just in the confrontation with death. But as we disintegrate and die, the advantages of holistic dualism over physical monism become obvious.

Second, the life experience of physicians is quite different from that of most theologians. Like theologians, we physicians would prefer patients to have a healthy body-soul relationship. Unlike theologians, more than eighty percent of a physician’s time is spent treating those for whom there is no cure on this earth—namely, those suffering from a body that is problematic, untrustworthy, and not able to be an ideal partner for the soul.

As a physician I cannot maintain a theological complacency about the monism/dualism debate. This is not simply an abstract debate of interest to metaphysicists. It is an urgent issue with which my patients struggle daily. Those theologians who glibly reject all forms of dualism may not have thought sufficiently about my patients with chronic, debilitating illnesses, not to mention their relatives. Theological anthropology appears to be based on the unexamined assumption that everyone has a vigorous and reliable body (as most seminary students do).

The relationship of spirit and body is like the relationship of people and their automobile. When the car is new and shiny, there is no spirit-car distinction. Driving is a spiritual experience. But when there are 190,000 miles on the odometer, when the car looks shabby, when it often will not start, when it lurches and makes noise, there is increasing estrangement between owner and car. Eventually the spirit survives and the car goes to the junkyard.

Ecclesiastes 12:1–7 portrays the relationship of spirit and automobile. Verse 1 describes young people as untroubled and therefore tending to forget their Creator. Verses 2–5 describe what it is like to be old and feeble. The aged tremble and stoop over (v. 3). Grinder teeth are few, and vision out the windows of the eyes is poor (v. 4). A dualism is evident because the narrator (spirit) is not identical with the house in which he dwells (body). Awakening before dawn, the person is unable to enjoy the song of the birds because of poor hearing (v. 5). Fear prevents one from leaving the house, for the person

is too fragile. No sexual desire is stirred. Rather, the grasshopper drags himself along in a pitiful way. In v. 7 the dichotomy splits apart: "The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

Of the six anthropologies examined in this article we conclude that one of them, physical monism, fails the test of existential viability. Our view is not that a Christian anthropology is true because it works. Rather, we hold that if an anthropology coheres with reality, the result is that it works.<sup>66</sup>

### III. CONCLUSION

How do we develop a self-concept? In the introduction to this article we provided an intuitive answer to this question: "Clearly we are a people whose self-concept is somehow forged between the hammer of subjective experience and the anvil of the Bible."

Who am I? Holistically I am both body and soul, not just one or the other. I am holistically dependent upon God and responsible to God. I am not a mere victim of my environment or education, but a responsible moral agent who is accountable for controlling the members of my body. Trusting Christ as Savior and Lord that I will survive death and give account of my thoughts, words and deeds at the judgment seat of Christ.<sup>67</sup>

This article has reviewed six mutually incompatible self-concepts held by Christians: physical monism, spiritual monism, holistic dualism, Platonic dualism, Aquinas' view, and trichotomy. When these anthropologies were tested by the hammer of subjective experience and by the anvil of a grammatico-historical and contextual reading of Scripture, one emerged as more coherent than the other five. Holistic dualism fits the objective data of Scripture and the internal data of the dying.

If dualism can be so simple as to mean that we come apart at death, as the evangelical philosopher John Cooper said,<sup>68</sup> either to enter a temporary period of disembodiment or to enter a different and spiritual body or to enter eternity, then why are so many reputable Biblical scholars so opposed to dualism? The answer is that they make the incorrect assumption that the only alternative to monism is Platonic dualism.

For example, I asked a Pauline scholar whether there was not a hint of dualism in Paul, for reasons outlined above. The scholar replied: "Absolutely not. If you look at Philo you might make an argument for dualism. But compared with his contemporaries, such as Philo or the Greek philosophers, what is striking about Paul is that he kept the two parts of a person close together. Thus when you look at Paul within his historical context, there was no dualism." This is a self-contradictory statement. The scholar's own words affirm that Paul saw a human as composed of two parts (dualism), but he denies that Paul was a dualist. It would be more logical to say that both

<sup>66</sup> Lewis, letter of May 27, 1995.

<sup>67</sup> Lewis, letter of July 28, 1995.

<sup>68</sup> Cooper, *Body*.

Paul and Philo were dualists but differed in that Paul kept the two parts in closer approximation than was true of Philo. The Pauline scholar assumed that the term “dualism” was a non-Christian notion. We have shown that there are varieties of dualism, some of which are Christian and others not. This is similar to the way in which there are two varieties of monism.

Dualism means there are two partners: body and soul. There are bad marriages and good. A bad marriage would be Platonic dualism in which the partners do not get along, in which the soul is estranged from and dominating the body. A good marriage would be holistic dualism in which both partners are valued, in which they interact in such a harmonious way that one might think they were completely unified. When the body dies the soul may feel a terrible loss, but the soul does not die and can eventually find new love and remarry the resurrected body.

Some may object that the Bible frequently says that God alone has immortality (1 Tim 6:16). We reply that God alone has immortality in an absolute sense, but his image-bearers have a dependent everlastingness.<sup>69</sup> “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Ps 23:6).

In the intermediate state “personal identity continues, as the presence of Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration confirms (Matt 17:3). At death a Christian’s spirit departs from the body (Phil 1:23; cf. 2 Cor 5:8), the saint feels ‘unclothed’ (2 Cor 5:3–4) and consciously ‘longs’ for the resurrection body (2 Cor 5:2).”<sup>70</sup> Only at the resurrection will we again feel whole.

#### IV. ADVANTAGE FOR APOLOGETICS

We live in an age of secular humanism in which the secular world finds human nature more interesting than God. It is urgent for Christians to declare whether our view of humans supports or contradicts the dominant view—that is, the secular psychological view of human nature. The mental-health view is limited by a womb-to-tomb time frame and includes no transcendent aspects of human nature. For example, a secular psychotherapist typically inquires about one’s relationship with one’s parents but never inquires about one’s relationship with one’s real Father.

When theologians say that the Biblical view of humans is unified and holistic, it sounds as if the Bible supports secular humanism. Since secular humanists are almost all physical monists they endorse the holistic view of humans. Mental-health clinicians would vote in favor of the holistic view of humans. A small number would say that the whole person is spiritual along new-age lines, but the vast majority would say the whole person is physical along the lines of physical monism. That is why biological psychiatry is such a dominant force inside the mental-health movement.<sup>71</sup> Whether intentionally or unintentionally, theologians appear to agree with that view of human

<sup>69</sup> Lewis, letter of May 27, 1995.

<sup>70</sup> Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative* 3.473.

<sup>71</sup> Molecular medicine is having a pervasive influence in every field of medicine today, whereas the influence of psychosomatic medicine has always been small and is not increasing.

nature. For these reasons it is widely but incorrectly thought that the mental-health concept of human nature is compatible with Christianity.<sup>72</sup>

Physical monism is an anthropology for this life. It turns our attention away from death and hides the expectation that at death the spirit separates from the body (Luke 8:54–55; Acts 7:59; Jas 2:26). Christian monism denies the most obvious fact about earthly life: It is short. Therefore physical monism undermines any sense of religious urgency or ethical responsibility, because it does not remind us that tomorrow we may die and face a Judge. Monism encourages the attitude of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*: "I'll worry about that tomorrow."

Because physical monism emphasizes this life and cannot be reconciled with the Christian hope at death, it gives aid and comfort to a secular view of humans. De Vogel said that the "man-as-a-whole" theme originates with the twentieth-century secular view and has been read into the Bible.<sup>73</sup>

Holistic dualism has many advantages for apologetics. If one's opponent is a Christian Platonist, one can emphasize the holistic slant of Biblical anthropology. But if one's opponent is a secular humanist, then one should emphasize the dualistic slant (without losing sight of the holistic aspect). By such an emphasis we would remind the public that we offer a self-concept that secular humanists cannot offer, because we claim that humans survive death, that they will be judged, and that many will enjoy eternal life. To think of oneself as a soul and body is to be reminded daily that we are religious by nature<sup>74</sup> and that we had better attend to the agenda of Christ and not get caught up totally in the agenda of this world.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> D. G. Myers, *The Human Puzzle: Psychological Research and Christian Belief* (New York: Harper, 1978), cited and refuted in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative* 3.482–483.

<sup>73</sup> De Vogel, "Reflections."

<sup>74</sup> Philosophers such as Karl Popper and C. J. Ducasse have argued in favor of dualism but against the religious nature of the soul (J. W. Cooper, letter of September 29, 1994). See K. R. Popper and J. C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain* (New York: Springer, 1977) 11. But the majority of laypeople, upon hearing the word "soul," assume it is religious in nature.

<sup>75</sup> I wish to thank Gordon R. Lewis for reviewing previous versions of this article.

Definitions of biblical theology abound and most of them, understandably, tend to align with one's views on the nature and role of Scripture in the Christian life. Brevard Childs famously quipped in *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, "The real question is not whether to do Biblical Theology, but rather what kind of Biblical Theology does one have." Attempting to provide a constructive, more lucid definition, Anthony Thiselton posits that "Biblical theology attempts to use biblical exegesis and interpretation to provide a coherent and constructive account of biblical data." (1). *Biblical theology through history* He looks at the self-conscious development of theology through history as shown in the Bible itself; the Biblical history of progressive revelation (or increasing human acceptance) of God. *Understanding Biblical Theology* clarifies the catch-all term "biblical theology," a movement that tries to remove the often-held dichotomy between biblical studies for the Church and as an academic pursuit. This book examines the five major schools of thought regarding biblical theology and handles each in turn. Enter your mobile number or email address below and we'll send you a link to download the free Kindle App.