

Contemporary perspectives on theological anthropology : Nancey Murphy's nonreductive physicalism and Karl Rahner's understanding of the human makeup

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**CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON
THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY:
NANCEY MURPHY'S NONREDUCTIVE PHYSICALISM AND
KARL RAHNER'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN MAKEUP**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the S.T.L Degree
from Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (Weston Jesuit)

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May, 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Catholic theology asserts that the human person is the unity of the physical body and the spiritual soul. Several important doctrinal documents of the Church, a number of liturgical texts, and Catholic practice—particularly in relation to the deceased—express this theological anthropology. Developments in biblical studies over the last century and advances in modern science, particularly in the field of neuroscience, have led theologians to raise several questions regarding the makeup of personhood, especially the role of the human soul. These inquiries have posed challenges to longstanding Catholic anthropological understandings of the person.

One philosophical theologian whose anthropological understanding challenges the traditional Christian and Catholic view with respect to the human person is Nancey Murphy. Murphy carries out her anthropological research in dialogue with science, leading her to critique the belief in the existence of the immaterial element called *soul* as a constituent of the human being. She says that the concept of soul is no longer helpful in explaining the human behaviors and faculties that could not be explained physically in the past and were considered to have resulted from the actions of the person's soul. Murphy's *non-reductive physicalism* does not deny that the human person is spiritual; rather, she relocates human spirituality (which is traditionally located in the soul) in the physical body, which is seen as spiritual in and of itself. Murphy and other theologians are attempting to build more dialogue between science and theology as they construe the human, and their work raises significant questions: What impact does non-reductive physicalism have on traditional Catholic anthropological accounts of the person? Is it

necessary to re-think traditional Catholic anthropological teachings? What is contemporary Catholic teaching regarding the human person (and its current conceptual expressions, such as the *body-soul schema*), and is this way of construing the human adequate for considering the scientific knowledge available today in relation to the human being?

Advances in the dialogue between theology and science make it imperative to explore forms of Catholic theology that describe the human person as the unity of body and soul. What does this theology intend to communicate through its use of “body-soul” language? What has the Catholic Church wanted to express through its belief in an immortal soul? What will happen to the language of “soul” in theological explanations of the human person? Is there a need for a different construal of personhood in order for theologians to be in dialogue with contemporary science?

In this thesis, I will explore these questions by using a three-pronged approach. First, I will consider biblical anthropology in accordance with three prominent scholars who address the relation between body and soul. Next, I will examine Nancey Murphy’s *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, which calls for a *non-reductive physicalism*, an end to any binary description of persons as bodies and souls. Finally, I will review and analyze the theological anthropological understanding of the person as presented by the renowned twentieth century Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner. In particular, I will examine three of his essays: “The Secret of Life,” “The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith,” and “The Body In the Order of Salvation;” this review will enable me to respond to Murphy’s proposal of non-reductive physicalism. I have chosen Rahner here because I consider his interpretation of the person as a unity of body

and soul to be coherent and comprehensive; furthermore, he also sought to put theology in dialogue with scientific thought. I believe that Rahner's theological approach to the human person is more successful than Nancey Murphy's non-reductive physicalism, despite the fact that Murphy raises very important concerns that theologians will need to continue to address in working in dialogue with contemporary science.

I.1 A Review of the Doctrine of the Human Soul as Expressed in Church Teaching

Throughout history, the *Magisterium* of the Church, in the official resolutions of its Councils and Papal letters, has expressed the Catholic understanding of the human makeup as a belief in a twofold, yet single and indivisible, nature of human beings. The *Council of Toledo* (400), for instance, stated that the human soul is neither part of God nor a divine substance, but a creature (D20, 31).¹ This same Council, which asserted the humanity of Christ, declared that the body and the rational soul are one human person (D40). The *Council of Constantinople IV* (869-870), condemned those who believed that there are two souls in one person. This Council affirmed that the Old and New Testaments teach that the human person has "one rational and intellectual soul" (D338). Similarly, the *Lateran Council IV* (1215) asserted that the human being is constituted by spirit and body (D428).

Another Church document that addressed the human makeup came from the *Council of Vienne* (1311-1312), which replied "to the question (of the Greeks) as to how

¹ References and English translations are from Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (St. Louis: Herder, 1957). In the same *Council of Toledo*, which affirms the humanity of Christ, we have the assertion that "[...] just as the rational soul and body are one man [...]" (D40).

spirit and body are united.”² This document declared that the intellectual and rational soul is the *form* of the body (D481). Through this conciliar assertion, the *Magisterium* used Thomas Aquinas’s theological appropriation of Aristotle’s philosophical hylomorphism in its dogmatic formulation.

With respect to eschatology, Benedict XII’s edict *Benedictus Deus* (Jan. 29, 1336) stated that the souls of the departed remain alive until the last judgment (D530). The souls of the righteous go to heaven and contemplate and enjoy the divine essence of God (D530); the souls of those who died in mortal sin “after their death descend to hell where they are tortured by infernal punishments” (D531). But it was in the *Lateran Council V* (1512-1517), that the *Magisterium* upheld the immortality of the soul (and its multiplicity according to the number of bodies) and “condemn[ed] and reject[ed] all who assert that the intellectual soul is mortal” (D738).

In recent times, the Church’s belief in the immortal and spiritual soul has been reaffirmed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its *Letter on Certain Questions Regarding Eschatology* (May 17, 1979), which was addressed to all bishops.³ In addition to asserting the need for keeping perfect fidelity to doctrinal tenets of faith and being careful while teaching it, the text made clear the Church’s belief in the existence of the human soul and its survival after bodily death:

The Church affirms that a spiritual element survives and subsists after death, an element endowed with consciousness and will, so that the "human self" subsists. To designate this element, the Church uses the word "soul", the accepted term in the usage of Scripture and Tradition. Although not unaware that this term has various meanings in the Bible, the Church thinks that there is no valid reason for

² Elmar Klinger, “Soul” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Adolf Darlap, ed. (New York: Herder and Herder; London: Burns and Oates, 1970), 6:140.

³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Letter on certain questions regarding Eschatology*. (May 17, 1979) http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19790517_escatologia_en.html (accessed November 10, 2010).

rejecting it; moreover, she considers that the use of some word as a vehicle is absolutely indispensable in order to support the faith of Christians.⁴

Thus, according to this important Catholic account of eschatology, the Church expressed its belief in the existence of a spiritual element that survives bodily death and persists in existence. This *element*, which carries and maintains human consciousness and will in such a way that the “I” remains, is called *soul* according to Scripture and Tradition.

While taking into account the distinct meanings of this term in the Scriptures, this letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith affirmed that this term is critical to sustaining Christian faith.

Finally, and more recently, the document from the International Theological Commission entitled “Some Current Questions in Eschatology”⁵ (December, 1991), confirms and is consistent with similar affirmations mentioned earlier about the soul. By drawing upon the Scriptures, this document defends the teaching that the soul survives bodily death and persists until the resurrection. Defending against accusations of Platonic dualism, the document states that “Christian Anthropology has characteristics proper to itself and quite different from the anthropology of the Platonic philosophers.”⁶ The most significant difference between the two traditions is that in the “Christian tradition the state of the survival of the soul after death is neither definitive nor ontologically supreme, but ‘intermediate’ and transitory and ultimately ordered to the resurrection.”⁷ Therefore, there is a “duality of elements”⁸ but no dualism because the separated soul is merely a temporary state. In keeping with the teaching of St. Thomas, the document also explains

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ International Theological Commission. “Some Current Questions in Eschatology,” in *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58 (1992) : 209-43.

⁶ Ibid., 224.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

that the separated soul is neither a substance nor the “entire person.”⁹ Nevertheless, it also affirms that, because the soul is the “conscious and subsistent element of people,”¹⁰ it guarantees the continuity of personal identity. Moreover, although the document states that the separated soul is an incomplete reality, “it performs personal acts of understanding and will.”¹¹ Therefore, as shown above, the belief in the spiritual and immortal soul is part of the Church’s teaching regarding the human person. This soul, although not considered the whole person, is able to carry and to guarantee personal identity between death and resurrection.

I.2 A Thomistic Interpretation of the Human Person

In order to better understand the Catholic position regarding the human makeup, it is important to understand St. Thomas Aquinas’s theological consideration of anthropology. Aquinas was one of the foremost Catholic theologians who described the soul as the *form of matter* that is the body. The theological anthropology of St. Thomas has had enormous impact on contemporary Catholic theology that both affirms the body-soul unity and asserts that the soul is separable from the body. In a section from *Person and Being*,¹² titled “Structure of Human Nature,” Aquinas commentator W. Norris Clarke briefly summarizes St. Thomas’s understanding of the “ontological structure of human nature,” stating that “a profounder and more exact description in terms of St. Thomas’s own total vision of man would be *embodied spirit*.”¹³ Although this notion of the human

⁹ Ibid., 225.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 226.

¹² W. Norris Clarke. *Person and Being: The 1993 Aquinas Lecture* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998).

¹³ Ibid., 32.

person as “embodied spirit”¹⁴ seems to be more holistic and expressive of the deep union between matter and spirit in the human being, the human *form* (the soul) is ultimately separable from its *matter* (the body).

According to Clarke, St. Thomas believed that the human being could be defined as “a personal being possessing its intellectual nature as joined in a natural unity with a material body.”¹⁵ The intellectual nature (or rationality) of the human person is associated with the soul—it is in fact, one of the faculties of the soul. The purpose of Clarke’s analysis is not to focus on St. Thomas’s philosophical and anthropological definitions of human nature, “but rather on the human being as a person.”¹⁶ However, in Clarke’s essay, we can observe St. Thomas’s characterization of the human soul:

An individual human nature is a natural unity of body and intellectual soul, each complementary to the other. Since this soul, the unifying center of all vital activities in the body, also performs purely spiritual acts of intelligence and will transcending any bodily organs, the soul must possess its own spiritual act of existence, transcending the body, which it then “lends” to the body, so to speak, drawing the latter up into itself to participate in the higher mode of being as the necessary instrument for the soul’s own journey of self-realization through the material cosmos as embodied spirit, the lowest of the spirits. The human soul and body thus form a single unified existing nature. But because the soul possesses its own spiritual act of existence in its own right as spirit, it can retain this existence even when separated from its bodily partner at death, though it always retains its intrinsic orientation towards this body and will rejoin the latter again in the final resurrection of the body. Thus the human soul is not just the “form of the body,” as it seems to be for Aristotle, but a form *plus*, a spirit *and* a form, a spirit which does indeed operate as a form within the body but also transcends it with higher operations of its own.¹⁷

In Clarke’s view, although the human soul has an “intrinsic orientation towards this body,”¹⁸ it is separable from the body in death. In this explanation of Aquinas’s theology

¹⁴ Ibid., 32-3.

¹⁵ Ibid., 32.

¹⁶ Ibid., 34.

¹⁷ Ibid., 35.

¹⁸ Ibid.

of the person, the soul is clearly identified and linked to human intelligence; since human will is considered a faculty of the intellect, the will is directly related to the soul.

Clarke is just one example of a theologian who upholds the teachings of Catholic tradition. He tries to go beyond dualistic understandings of the human nature by using the term *embodied spirit*, which expresses the “dual nature”¹⁹ of the human being. The affirmation that certain faculties of the person are properties of the soul alone (i.e. “spiritual acts of intelligence and will”), accompanied by the belief in the separation of body and soul between death and resurrection, allows for interpretations that cause some to claim that soul/body unity gets overshadowed by soul/body distinction.

I.3 Catholic Anthropology in Church Practice: Prayer in the *Order of Christian Funerals*

Before taking a closer look at biblical theological anthropology in Chapter 1, I will first review several prayers from the funeral liturgy that incorporate potentially dualistic language as part of pastoral practice. I will point out instances in which these language patterns can be construed as dualistic.

While the Church does not affirm that the soul is the person in its complete mode of existence, it teaches, nonetheless, that the soul keeps the personal identity of the deceased after death. This can be observed through the language of certain official Church prayers, especially those that refer to the dead. In the *Order of Christian Funerals*,²⁰ for instance, there is a linguistic tension with respect to the location of the person after death. He/she is mentioned by his/her name or only as a soul. Also the

¹⁹ Ibid., 37.

²⁰ Catholic Church, *Order of Christian Funerals* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1998).

person is located in heaven with God or is said to be resting in the grave where the body is.

When referring to the departed, the majority of the texts use the terms *he* or *she*, *our brother/sister N.*, or *your servant*. However, at a certain point during the rite, there is a prayer that refers to the soul of the dead person. Let us consider, for example, the following concluding prayers of the “Vigil for the deceased:”

Concluding Prayer: Lord God, in whom all find refuge, we appeal to your boundless mercy: grant to the soul of your servant N. a kindly welcome, cleansing of sin, release from the chains of death, and entry into everlasting life. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Concluding Rite: Blessing: Blessed are those who have died in the Lord; let them rest from their labors for their good deeds go with them. Eternal rest grant unto him/her, O Lord. R: And let perpetual light shine upon him/her.

May he/she rest in peace. R: Amen.

May his/her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. R: Amen.²¹

Although the departed is named or addressed by a personal pronoun in some of the invocations, in the last one, the assembly prays for “his/her soul.” There is a tension with regard to what precisely will “rest in peace”—the whole person or only the person’s soul? The majority of the prayers in the *Order of Christian Funerals* refer to the person for whom the assembly is praying by using the person’s name, pronouns (e.g. he/she, his/her, him/her), or specific nouns (e.g. “our brother/sister,” “your servant,” “the just who sleep in your peace [and] will rise”).²² This usage is fused with the term *soul*, which seems to represent the person who died: “To you, O Lord, we commend the soul of N. your servant; in the sight of this world he/she is now dead; in your sight may he/she live for ever. Forgive whatever sins he/she committed through human weakness and in your goodness grant him/her everlasting peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. R:

²¹ Ibid., 42-4.

²² Ibid., 66.

Amen.”²³ The soul of the person who died appears to be considered as an expression of the whole person.

In the Final Commendation that concludes the Funeral Mass, there is a song of farewell, which seems to contain the same logic. After an invocation, follows the response: “Saints of God, come to his/her aid! Hasten to meet him/her, angels of the Lord! R: Receive his/her soul and present him/her to God the Most High.”²⁴ The angels and the saints receive the “soul of the person” but present “the person” to God. Thus, the soul seems to be synonymous with *person*, or it may even refer to the spiritual element which carries in itself personhood (or personal identity).

In the prayer of the “Procession to the place of committal,” the body, even though not named, is referred to also as *brother/sister*: “In peace let us take our brother/sister to his/her place of rest.”²⁵ What is in the grave is not the body or corpse but the person who died. At the same time, however, the choirs of angels and the martyrs will receive the person, not only his/her soul, in the “eternal Jerusalem.”²⁶ This prayer does not make a distinction between the person and his/her soul or body. The *person* is buried, not merely his/her body or corpse; the same person is received by God, not just his/her soul. Not only the body, but the person will remain in the grave until the final resurrection: the grave is “our brother’s/sister’s resting place.”²⁷ Nevertheless, in this same prayer, there is still the tension between the person who is commended “to the Lord”²⁸ and his/her body

²³ Ibid., 91.

²⁴ Ibid., 104.

²⁵ Ibid., 106.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 115.

²⁸ Ibid. The full prayer: “In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, **we commend to Almighty God our brother/sister N.**, and **we commit his/her body to the ground** [*or the deep or the elements or its resting place*]: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, **dust to dust**. The

that is “commit[ted] [...] to the earth.”²⁹ Through two different petitions, the prayer implies that there is a separation between the person and his/her body: the brother/sister who is commended to God and his/her body, which is laid in the grave.

These prayers from the *Order of Christian Funerals* express uncertainty about the person’s state/condition during the afterlife; therefore, people are left with a sense of ambiguity with respect to the notion of personhood concerning the unity of the person after death.

I.4 Catholic Anthropology and Catechetical Formation: The 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*³⁰ asserts that the human person is a unity despite sharing in both created orders, spiritual and material (327, 355): “[t]he human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual” (326). In describing the oneness of the human person in the body-soul duality, the *Catechism* demonstrates a biblical understanding of the term *soul*: “In Sacred Scripture the term ‘soul’ often refers to human life or the entire human person. But ‘soul’ also refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him, that by which he is most especially in God’s image: ‘soul’ signifies the spiritual principle in man” (363).

Therefore, the meaning of the term *soul* in the Scriptures is not univocal. At the same time that the *Catechism* says the term *soul* is taken as a synonym of the whole person, the

Lord bless him/her and keep him/her and be gracious to him/her, the Lord lift up his countenance upon him/her and give him/her peace.” Emphasis mine.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Washington, D.C.: [distributed by] United States Catholic Conference, 1997). References are to paragraphs.

document also stresses that, according to the Scriptures, the soul is the spiritual principle giving value to the human person because it is what makes him/her the image of God.

Then, the *Catechism* explains the intrinsic and deep unity of both body and soul in philosophical Thomistic language: “The unity of 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 its 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” (365). The person is one nature, a unity composed of matter and spirit, body and soul. This unity, expressed in one nature, emphasizes the wholeness of the person, but there is still a dualism in the Church’s teaching about the person after death. Because the soul is immortal and the body is mortal, the Church states that in death, body and soul are separated. The soul “is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection” (366). Regarding death, the church’s language is explicitly dualistic:

In death, the separation of the soul from the body, the human decays and the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body. God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls, through the power of Jesus’ Resurrection (997).

[...] In that “departure” which is death the soul is separated from the body. It will be reunited with the body on the day of resurrection of the dead (1005; see 1016).

Although it always mentions the reunion of both body and soul in the resurrection, the Church’s understanding of how the human person persists between bodily death and resurrection is clearly dualistic. After death, the soul, which had previously formed a single nature with the body, remains alive and continues to carry the person’s identity until the day both body and soul will be reunited again. Therefore, despite their original

unity in creation, the soul remains alive, even though it has been separated from the body after bodily death.

* * *

The teaching of the Catholic Church in relation to the human person, as demonstrated in the *Catechism*, tends to exalt the dignity of the human person who, because he/she was created in the image of God (the human person was created with a spiritual principle, i.e. the spiritual soul), is superior to all creatures. The affirmation that the human person is the unity of body and soul is the expression of the human's participation in the totality of creation, the spiritual and material orders. And yet it is precisely because the human person is *spiritual*, that he/she is understood to have a relationship with God.

One strength of this teaching regarding the unity and oneness of the person is that body and soul form a single nature which is at once material and spiritual. *Body* and *soul*, in this case, are terms used to express realities that can be distinguished but not separated. When one considers the dominant Catholic Christian presentations of what happens at death, however, one notices that there is an accent placed on the notion of a human soul (separated from the body), which departs to meet God first. How is it possible to affirm the human person as the profound unity of body and soul in life, but then to separate them at death? The idea that a human being's personal identity continues to exist through a disembodied soul remains a challenging matter, as does the assumption that this soul (a sort of incomplete human nature) enjoys God's presence without physicality. My project seeks to explore some building blocks that can help address these questions.

CHAPTER 1

Contemporary Biblical Perspectives on Theological Anthropology

Before offering a comparative analysis of Nancey Murphy's and Karl Rahner's views on the theme of the human makeup, I would first like to examine biblical anthropology—particularly Scriptural treatment of the human soul. Additionally, I will explore the kinds of eschatological themes whose development have directly influenced Christian understanding of the human makeup as understood by different biblical scholars. My study will not be a comprehensive overview of biblical anthropology, but I believe that it will give the reader a sense of the variety of interpretations of “biblical anthropology” that are apparent in the work of Scriptural Scholars.

Nancey Murphy, in her theology, uses Scripture to argue against a dualistic understanding of the human person. Assessing her argument requires some understanding of biblical anthropology as presented by contemporary scholars. The works of the three scholars I have chosen to examine provide different perspectives regarding the human soul in relation to the body. The works included here are: Jon D. Levenson's *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*; N.T. Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God*; and John W. Cooper's *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*.³¹ Jon Levenson is a Jewish scholar who researches and writes about the Jewish Bible and ancient rabbinic literature. N. T. Wright is a Christian biblical scholar who researches the Jewish Scriptures through the prism of the New Testament. Levenson and Wright maintain that the Jewish bible has

³¹ Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and Restoration of Israel: the Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006); N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989). In the following sections references in the text are to page numbers of these works.

a more monistic, rather than a dualistic, anthropological view; John Cooper, on the other hand, is a Christian scholar who, through his analysis of biblical eschatology, contends that both the Old and the New Testaments presume a holistic dualism in regard to anthropology. As a way to grapple with these scholars' presentations of biblical anthropology in the context of eschatology, I will then discuss Peter C. Phan's article, "Contemporary Context and Issues in Eschatology,"³² in which he responds to the document "Some Current Questions in Eschatology" from the International Theological Commission (ITC), mentioned briefly in the introduction of this thesis. Phan's comments concerning the theme of the intermediate state are particularly helpful here. But first, I wish to review definitions of biblical understanding of the term soul.

1.1 Biblical Language about the Human Person

In general, *soul* was the term chosen to translate the Hebrew term *nepeš* and the Greek *psyché* in the Scriptures. *The Oxford Bible Commentary* notes that in the Old Testament, the Israelites did not construe the human being in terms of "soul" and "body."³³ This dictionary entry affirms that the expression "my soul" is a way of saying "myself," or simply "I", and that there is an effort to avoid the use of the term *soul* in translations today.³⁴

³² Peter C. Phan, "Current Theology: Contemporary Context and Issues in Eschatology," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994), 507-536. In the following sections references in the text are to page numbers of this work.

³³ John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 364.

³⁴ *Ibid.*; Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2 vols. (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988), 1988.

The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*³⁵ notes that the etymology of the Hebrew term *nepeš* is uncertain.³⁶ As used in the Old Testament, *nepeš* has several different, but correlated, meanings: *throat* or *breath* (the organ of breath);³⁷ *desire* or *appetite for life* or *vitality*; the *vital self* and *reflexive pronoun*; the *individuated life*; *living creature* and the *person*; and the *nepeš* of God.³⁸ In addition to this list of meanings for the term *nepeš* in the Old Testament, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*³⁹ states that the term can also signify *blood*, *corpse* or *tomb*, and *human will*.⁴⁰ Therefore, *nepeš* is a term with very embodied meanings. This dictionary states that the Greek term *psyché*, while used in the *LXX* version, does not denote a reality that is antithetical to the body, but rather complementary to it.⁴¹

Many other dictionaries, such as *A Dictionary of the Bible*, are also in agreement in affirming that in the Old Testament, the terms translated by the word *soul* refer to the *life principle* or simply to *life*, meaning the whole person.⁴² The Greek view, which distinguished between body and soul, was introduced by the later book of Wisdom. Since

³⁵ G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. eds., David El Green, trans., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 9:497-519. Hereafter TDOT.

³⁶ TDOT, 502.

³⁷ *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 364.

³⁸ TDOT, 504-17.

³⁹ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Abridged in one volume and translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Devon, U.K.: The Paternoster Press, 1985), 1343-53. Hereafter TDNT.

⁴⁰ TDNT, 1343-4.

⁴¹ TDNT, 1344, 1346.

⁴² W. R. F. Browning, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 357; William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies* (Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1978), 406; *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1987-1988; John E. Steinmueller and Kathryn Sullivan, *Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia - Old Testament* (New York City: Joseph F. Wagner Inc., 1956), 1030; Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 2 vols., (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 747; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 4:587-9; Charles F. Pfeiffer, John Rea, and Howard Fredric Vos, eds., *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1975), 1616; J. D. Douglas and Norman Hillyer, eds., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1982), 1135; TDOT, 9:497-519; TDNT, 1343-1353; Klinger, 138-9.

this book was influenced by Greek thought, in Wisdom “[s]oul and body are in antithesis”⁴³ and the soul survives bodily death. Regarding the Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* affirms that this idea “is not part of the Israelite understanding of the constitution of human nature. It does not take root in the thought of Judaism or in the New Testament [...]”⁴⁴

With respect to the New Testament, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* affirms that, although used differently in each book, the term *psychē* generally refers to the whole person, the physical life, or simply, life itself.⁴⁵ This dictionary explains that the use of *psychē* in the book of Revelation can also mean *life after death* and, in this context, “does not denote merely a provisional, noncorporeal state but embraces the whole person living in eschatological salvation.”⁴⁶ This dictionary emphasizes that in the New Testament *psychē* is not a soul that is separable from the body, nor “a term for life in an intermediate state.”⁴⁷ Corresponding with this view, the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* explains that soul and body are not separable in either the Old Testament or the New Testament:

There is no suggestion in the Old Testament of the transmigration of the soul as an immaterial, immortal entity. Man is a unity of body and soul—terms which describe not so much two separate entities in man as the one man from different standpoints. [...] In the New Testament the word for soul (*psychē*) has a range of meanings similar to that of the Old Testament.⁴⁸

Although the biblical research devoted to the subject of the soul is extensive and requires considerable study—far too much to be adequately treated in the parameters of

⁴³ TDNT, 1346.

⁴⁴ *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 766.

⁴⁵ TDNT, 1347-1351; Browning, 357.

⁴⁶ TDNT, 1350.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1351.

⁴⁸ *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1987. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* affirms that “man in the OT is conceived of as a unity and not as a composite of different principles” (747).

this thesis—these definitions and perspectives about the soul do help one to understand the work of Levenson, Wright, and Cooper.

1.2 Scriptural Anthropology in Contemporary Perspectives

Different contemporary perspectives on biblical anthropology are apparent when one surveys the words of specific scholars. For example, John Levenson, in his *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, and N.T. Wright, in his *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, uphold an anthropological perspective that is more monistic.⁴⁹ John W. Cooper, however, in his *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, supports a more dualistic standpoint. Let us consider each in turn.

1.2.1 Jon D. Levenson

Levenson examines Jewish belief in resurrection through its main sources: Jewish Scriptures and rabbinic tradition. His central argument is that the notion of resurrection is not a creation of Second Temple Judaism, nor an imported belief from other foreign cultures, as is commonly affirmed by many biblical scholars.⁵⁰ Levenson demonstrates that belief in the resurrection of the dead is present in early Jewish thought, and it can be found in several biblical themes and in the rabbinic tradition. He also asserts that there is a deep connection and agreement between the early and later Jewish views on this subject. Levenson appears to be against the modern Judaic view, which excludes the theme of resurrection and prefers to use the concept of *immortality* in order to avoid any

⁴⁹ Jon D. Levenson and N. T. Wright are both biblical scholars who approach (indirectly, for the most part) the theme of the soul while addressing the eschatological theme of the resurrection.

⁵⁰ See the review of Levenson's book by Carol Bakhos, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75 (May 2007) : 424.

relationship between Jewish doctrine and Christianity and to be more compatible with scientific thought (4-5).

Since discussing human anthropology in the Hebrew Scriptures or rabbinic literature is not the main purpose of Jon Levenson's book, he is not concerned with explaining what the soul means in Hebrew thought. In examining the Hebrew understanding of resurrection, however, he alludes to the biblical belief on the subject of the soul. For example, Levenson states that the resurrection is "often mistaken for belief in the immortality of the soul" (*ix*)⁵¹ and is erroneously considered to be a Christian rather than a Jewish belief. Levenson believes that the modern, individualistic conception of the human being is a problem for understanding the resurrection of the dead, which in Jewish belief relates to the restoration of a people, and not simply to the restoration of an individual to life. In this regard, he criticizes the accent on the "nature of the soul" in relation to the afterlife in Western thought (*x*).

While discussing the important and ancient Jewish prayer, Amidah, that affirms that God will revive the dead, Levenson asserts that Jewish thought does not explain what happens to a person between death and resurrection (5). He clarifies, however, that Jewish thought does not necessarily deny the existence of an immortal soul:

The point, rather, is that, whatever notions of the soul circulated in ancient Judaism (and there were several), in the Amidah God was not thought to have fulfilled his promises until the whole person returned, body included. Like death, a disembodied existence was deemed to be other than the last word, for the person is not "the ghost in the machine" (that is, the body) but rather a psychophysical unity. Even the familiar language of "body and soul," with its implicitly dualistic associations, cannot do full justice to the Jewish view under discussion (6).

⁵¹ For Levenson, the belief in resurrection is "the belief that at the end of history, God will resurrect the dead and restore them to full bodily existence" (*ix*).

Although Levenson mentions the existence of several notions of the soul in early Judaism, he does not explain or elaborate on them. Nonetheless, by affirming that the human being is a unity, and not “the ghost in the machine,” he seems to criticize indirectly the notion that there is an immortal element in the human constitution that is separable from the biological body. Furthermore, the human being is a “psychophysical unity,” and the “language of ‘body and soul’” with its “implicitly dualistic associations” does not adequately describe the Jewish view of the human being.

Levenson notes that Reform Judaism rejects the classical rabbinic belief in the resurrection of the dead, replacing it with the belief in the immortality of the soul (7).⁵² The theme of resurrection is problematic for modern thought (11); thus, in order to avoid being at odds with science, Reform Judaism dichotomizes body and spirit or soul to solve the dilemma by affirming that, despite bodily death, the soul “[...] lives in the shelter of God’s love and mercy” (13). Levenson criticizes this view by saying that scientific motives should not provoke the devaluation of the belief in resurrection. Furthermore, he subtly rejects the notion of a dichotomized human nature by stating that “[b]ody and soul, if they are to be distinguished at all, are born together and they die together” (13).⁵³ Even if body and soul are meant to be distinguished from one another, they are united in their beginning and end, and they are inseparable. Therefore, if there is a soul, this soul came into existence with the body and will die with the body.

⁵² Levenson distinguishes the belief in the immortality of the soul from the general belief in immortality. In the case of immortality alone, he thinks that both beliefs (immortality and resurrection) can coexist because they do not contradict each other. One figure from Reform Judaism whom Levenson criticizes is David Einhorn, who proposes to replace “the doctrine of resurrection with ‘the idea of a purely spiritual immortality’” (8).

⁵³ The author also affirms that in ancient Israelite belief, “the biblical nepeš can die” (111).

In criticizing the replacement of the belief in the resurrection with the belief in the immortal soul, Levenson asserts that the Scriptures express and stress the continuity of the dead through their descendants in whom God realizes his promises (14). With respect to this connection between the dead and their descendants, Levenson argues against any belief in the persistence of life through the immortal soul, explaining that in the Jewish biblical mindset, “[t]o live as a disembodied spirit [...] is to live in disconnection from peoplehood” (22). The dead exist through their descendents or their people; they do not exist, he stresses, as “disembodied spirits”:

Rather, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob continue to exist after they have died, not, it should be underscored, as disembodied spirits but as the people whose fathers they will always be. That death represents an absolute terminus, as it does to the modern mind, is not a foregone conclusion in biblical thought. In biblical thinking, it is possible to continue even after death, and without either resurrection or immortality in the sense of survival as a bodiless soul (30).

Therefore, in the Jewish biblical sense, a dead person continues to exist through kinship ties, through the continuity of his/her people and descendants, and not through an immortal element that is separable from the physical body after death. As Levenson states, if this spiritual element is to be considered as constitutive of the human makeup, it dies with the body.

Levenson defends the traditional Jewish view, present in the Hebrew Bible, in which bodily resurrection of the dead is remarkable and irreplaceable; bodily resurrection should not be blurred or diminished by any other belief in an immortal soul. After analyzing several texts which imply the notion of immortality or eternal life,⁵⁴ Levenson explains that they “do not speak of any indestructible core of the self that endures in a disembodied state even after the flesh and bones have rotted away.” He states that “the

⁵⁴ Some of the passages Levenson analyzes are: Ezek 47:1-12; Psalm 133; Psalm 15; Psalm 125:1-2; Jon 2:3-10; Gen 3:22-24; and 2 Kgs 2:1-12.

analogy with resurrection is stronger than that with immortality of the soul” (105) in those passages because they refer to the God’s intervention.

Levenson asserts that the Jewish belief in immortality is not a belief in the disembodied immortal soul, but is linked instead to the beliefs in the resurrection and eternal life. For Levenson, immortality in the Scriptures is not a characteristic of the soul; rather, immortality is related to the power of God to preserve the lives of the faithful. Quoting N.T. Wright, Levenson states that, even in “Hellenistic Jewish texts” (105), such as the Wisdom of Solomon, the belief in immortality refers to the renewed and embodied life achieved in the resurrection, and not merely to the persistence of a disembodied soul (106).

1.2.2 N. T. Wright

With Levenson’s reference to N. T. Wright,⁵⁵ let us now turn to the latter’s understanding of Old Testament anthropology regarding the theme of the soul. At the end of the second chapter of his book, Wright analyzes the understanding of life after death in the Greco-Roman mindset, which held to the belief in the separation between body and soul. This view differed from the belief in resurrection within Judaism and Christianity. For Wright, Judaism had its own belief regarding resurrection in spite of the influences of the different cultures surrounding Israel. Wright says: “Resurrection is not part of the pagan hope. If the idea belongs anywhere, it is within the world of Judaism” (85). In presenting the theme of the resurrection according to Second Temple Judaism, Wright

⁵⁵ Wright, in the first part of his book, analyzes resurrection through the lens of the Old Testament while considering other cultural influences on the biblical world, such as Greek philosophy, in order to show the antecedents of Christian belief regarding resurrection. Although Wright’s book deals broadly with the theme of resurrection, I will focus on Chapters 3 and 4, in which he analyses the Hebrew Scriptures.

states that although the term *resurrection* is relatively vague, “[i]t clearly refers to a newly embodied existence; it is never a way of talking about ghosts, phantoms or spirits” (130). He emphasizes that the biblical meaning of human resurrection in the Old Testament is very different from the Platonic understanding of human life after death in a disembodied existence through the immortal soul.

Wright examines several texts from later Judaism,⁵⁶ principally from the first century, which affirm the soul as immortal, separable from the body, and persisting after bodily death (142). He argues that Jewish thinkers employed body/soul dualism to explain the after-death period and resurrection as a non-corporeal and immortal existence, rather than a new and embodied existence. In this dualistic (and Platonic or Hellenistic) view, the body is the prison of the soul, which pre-exists the body. Thus, the resurrection of the body makes no sense because, after death, the soul is finally free from the body. Despite these Hellenistic ideas being found in Jewish texts, this is not the view of the Old Testament, says Wright.

On the other hand, Wright does not find the concept of immortality incompatible with the belief in resurrection, and he agrees with James Barr’s argument that “the Bible does indeed concern itself with human immortality.” According to Barr, there are four different “senses of immortality.” The first is from the Genesis story, in which Adam and Eve had the chance to live without dying. The second is Platonic immortality—“the innate possession of an immortal part of one’s being (e.g. the soul), which will survive bodily death” (92). The third sense Wright discusses is the one present in the Wisdom of Solomon; here, immortality is a gift from God to some people and represents a kind of

⁵⁶ Examples include Pseudo-Phocylides 105-115, the Testament of Abraham [rec. A] 20.14, 1 Enoch 103.3-8, and 4 Maccabees 18.23 (141-143).

personal continuity between death and resurrection. The fourth sense is associated with Christian belief as a “way of describing resurrection itself” (92). In this way, Wright allows for an interpretation of the Old Testament as having a dualistic anthropology when he affirms the third sense of immortality. In the books from the period of Second Temple Judaism this sense emerges as a belief that something like a “personal identity” survives bodily death and waits for the resurrection of the body. Although Wright does not contend that this “kind of ongoing existence” (164) occurs through an immortal soul, the mere affirmation that something of the person’s identity remains after bodily death can be interpreted as the expression of a dualistic view. However, the Old Testament must be understood in its complexity and through the different mindsets out of which each of its books were written.

With regard to the book of Wisdom, Wright asserts that this book “clearly teaches the immortality of the soul” (163). This immortality is not understood platonically as a permanent disembodied existence, but rather as being connected to the belief in the resurrection. For Wright, immortality and resurrection are not antithetical realities (164). He thinks that it is a mistake and a false dilemma to consider them as such. In the biblical sense, the notion of immortality does not imply disembodied states, but resurrection (165). Wright uses 1 Corinthians 15:53-54 as an example. In this well-known passage about the resurrection, Paul draws on the notion of immortality simply to describe “resurrection itself, a new bodily life in which there can be no more death” (164). Therefore, biblical immortality must not automatically be linked to Platonism.

In Post-Temple literature, the belief that something of the person remains between bodily death and resurrection is undeniable. According to Wright, “any Jew who believed

in resurrection, from Daniel to the Pharisees and beyond, naturally believed also in an intermediate state in which some kind of personal identity was guaranteed between physical death and the physical re-embodiment of resurrection. This, too, is a form of ‘immortality’” (164). Wright does not reject the belief in an intermediate state, but this belief must always be understood in relation to the resurrection of the whole person and not necessarily seen as a temporal state where a disembodied soul remains alive. He offers Wisdom 3:1-4 as an example because it explicitly states that “the souls of the righteous are in God’s hand” (v.1) and uses the word *immortality* (“they appeared to have died” - v.2; “their hope is full of immortality” - v.4); this passage should not be read independently of its context, but rather within the context of the book and the rest of the passage as a whole (e.g. Wisdom 3:1-10), in which “immortality” is used to affirm the Jewish idea of resurrection. Moreover, the assertion in verse 4 about the righteous ones whose “‘hope is full of immortality’ implies that they have not yet fully attained it” (168). In Wisdom, according to Wright, the righteous attain immortality through wisdom, not because they have immortal and pre-existent souls. If we can affirm that in the book of Wisdom, the “soul” persists between death and resurrection, it is not due to its immortality, but rather the power of God. Immortality will be the state of the resurrected life.

Wright argues that, even when the notion of immortality occurs, it is to describe resurrection. He says that this idea is not derived from the Greek concept of the immortal soul, but rather is its own Jewish conception. In relation to the allusion to the concept of immortality in the book of Wisdom, Wright states “that the work does describe resurrection, and that any Greek borrowing (which after all pervades all Judaism

throughout the period) is held firmly within this essentially Jewish notion. ‘Immortality’ is pressed into service, in fact, to enable the picture of resurrection to attain clarity” (168). Thus, for Wright, the notion of immortality in the Jewish scriptures, when referring to resurrection, has a specifically Jewish meaning that does not contradict the belief in bodily resurrection. Similarly, when the term *soul* is used in the Scriptures, it should not be understood in the platonic sense by the reader (200).

1.2.3 John W. Cooper

In his book *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, Cooper contends that the Scriptures exhibit a theological anthropology that he calls *holistic dualism*. He finds this anthropological view developed implicitly in the context of personal eschatological hope and the question about what happens to the person between death and resurrection. In Cooper’s view, many scholars from the fields of Christian philosophy, theology, and biblical studies are resistant, if not hostile, about the dualistic understanding of human nature; however, he believes that dualism is strongly rooted in the Scriptures. Moreover, he notes that traditional Christian doctrine and the majority of Christians hold that the human person persists after death through the soul, which is separable from the body. For Cooper, the key question for faith is what happens to the person after death, and any attempt to answer it cannot ignore the body-soul question (4).

Cooper finds two basic approaches in interpretations of Old Testament anthropology. The first, which he terms “*Traditional Christian Dualism*” is grounded in platonic philosophy (Greek dualism). In this approach the human person is composed of body and soul, understood as material and immaterial substances, respectively. Death is

the separation of the mortal body and the immortal soul, which “ascends to dwell with God” (33). The other approach is *antidualism* (or *monism* or *holism*) (34), which affirms that the human being is an inseparable unity. In this second view, all the different words used in the Scriptures to describe the human person, such as *body*, *soul*, and *spirit*, express different aspects of the one person, but they are not to be understood as separable parts. Death entails the whole person: “Whereas in Greek dualism the real self or essential person can survive and perhaps even flourish apart from organic existence, for Hebrew holism personal existence apart from bodily existence is a flat impossibility. It is inconceivable to the Hebrew mind” (35).

Cooper, however, attempts to take both *Traditional Christian Dualism* and *antidualism* into consideration. He writes:

My own conclusion is that the truth combines elements of the two extremes—that the Hebrew view of human nature strongly emphasizes living a full and integrated existence before God in the world, but that it unquestionably also includes the belief in continued existence after biological death. If I am correct, then Old Testament anthropology is both holistic and dualistic [...] (37).

Cooper believes that Old Testament anthropology contains an “existential-functional holism” (49), which is also a “holistic dualism.” The term *holism* is used to signify that a person is considered “an integrated whole” as a “psychosomatic unit[y]” (70). In explaining that the Old Testament has a holistic view of the human person, Cooper affirms that people from that time

[...] viewed a human being as an integrated whole, using no dichotomous categories which compartmentalize body, mind, emotions, and will. Biological processes are not just functions of the body as distinct from the soul or spirit, and mental and spiritual capacities are not seated exclusively in the soul or spirit. All capacities and functions belong to the human being as a whole, a fleshly-spiritual totality. Surely the Old Testament people of God viewed human beings holistically as single entities which are psychosomatic unities (70).

Nonetheless, for Cooper, this view also presumes a kind of dualism because, in some sense, the person continues to exist after death without the body (although Cooper does not explain how this happens). He also says that the person will return to have a bodily existence one day on the occasion of the resurrection of the dead. For Cooper, this dualistic view is not incompatible with the Hebrew holism of the Old Testament (70-1).

Another point raised by Cooper to bolster his thesis that the Scriptures hold a dualistic view relates to the Pharisees. Cooper points out that the Pharisees “represent all the central themes of intertestamental eschatology” (89). They believed in the resurrection of the body and in the temporary separation of the human soul and body after death as the soul waits for the final resurrection (90). In his view, intertestamental eschatologies imply some kind of dualism. Without displacing the functional holism of the Old Testament, these eschatologies add new meanings to it: “Soul and spirit, for example, could now refer to the discarnate dead, as well as to the whole person, the life-force, and the breath” (92). Despite the differences between the Old Testament and intertestamental literature, both have an anthropology that can be considered as having a holistic dualism (93).

New Testament anthropologies also exhibit a holistic dualism for Cooper. He insists, however, that terms like *body*, *soul*, and *spirit* do not refer to separable parts of the human constitution, but function as figures of speech referring to the whole person. He criticizes Calvin’s platonic and dualistic interpretation of several texts from the New Testament, including some of Paul’s passages in which the words *body*, *soul*, and *spirit* are used. Cooper observes that Calvin “does not consider the possibility that such texts might employ stock expressions and figures of speech from ordinary language which are

wholly lacking in anthropologically dualistic implications. It does not occur to him that such words might refer to inseparable aspects or capacities rather than separable substances” (94). Biblical language and its use of figures of speech should not be taken literally, but need to be considered in context. Moreover, terms used to describe the human person have no dualistic meanings.

In contrast to the scholars who interpret New Testament anthropologies in a monistic way, Cooper finds himself more in agreement with tradition, which “has generally assumed that the New Testament implies, if not teaches, a dualistic anthropology” (95). At the same time, he is wary of drawing “clear and distinct philosophical implications” from Old and New Testament texts (104). He thinks that the majority of Old and New Testament texts do not imply either philosophical monism or dualism. Even a text like 1 Thess. 5:23 (“May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”) has what he calls a philosophical neutrality that makes it consistent, or compatible, with both monism and dualism: “As a matter of logic, it is perfectly possible that a text which uses anthropological language non-philosophically was authored by a dualist. That would follow from the fact that the third option is philosophically neutral, thus compatible with either monism or dualism” (102). Although Cooper agrees that anthropological terms like *body*, *soul*, and *spirit* express the wholeness of the human, there is no textual proof that rules out dualistic interpretations of it.

Even if one considers the philosophical neutrality or indeterminacy of the New Testament texts, Cooper believes that they could be construed as having an implicit

anthropological monism. This is possible if the texts' different terms stress only the wholeness of the person and if there are no implicit textual mentions of separability (104). According to his analysis, however, several New Testament texts⁵⁷ imply that some kind of separation occurs with the person after death. Thus, if there are texts that "imply dualism" in the New Testament, the New Testament must have an anthropology that is "both holistic and dualistic," which is similar to the Old Testament anthropology (104).

In order to understand the anthropology of the New Testament, it is necessary to understand how it describes what happens when the person dies. Cooper affirms that "traditional views of the afterlife necessarily assume a dualistic anthropology," according to which the person (through his/her *soul* or *inner self*) remains disembodied in an intermediate state between death and the resurrection. Cooper states that contemporary biblical scholars, who disagree that the New Testament holds this dualistic anthropological perspective, avoid the "intermediate state and its commitment to dualism" (105) by holding one of the two major monistic alternatives of interpretation for what happens to the person after death. These are "immediate resurrection" and "extinction-re-creation" (106-7).⁵⁸ In the first alternative, the person goes through a transformation (or resurrection) at the moment of death, taking him/her into a dimension that is beyond time. In this view, all the New Testament texts that state that the resurrection will happen only during the Parousia "cannot be taken literally" (106). In the

⁵⁷ Examples include Hebrews 12:23 and Luke 23-24 (which Cooper observes use the term *spirit* in a dualistic sense); and Revelation 6:9-11 and Matthew 10:28 (which use the term *soul* in a dualistic sense). See Cooper, 113-119.

⁵⁸ The third alternative is the dualistic one: the intermediate state.

second interpretation, the person completely ceases to exist until the final resurrection, when God will resurrect or re-create the whole person.

Cooper maintains that the New Testament texts' expressions of personal eschatology are essential for determining if they have monistic or dualistic anthropologies. He defends "holistic dualism as the anthropology implicit in the New Testament" (108). Therefore, in his discussion of the anthropology and personal eschatology of the Pauline Epistles, Cooper maintains that St. Paul's writings implicitly bear the dualistic view of the intermediate state, despite not being mentioned explicitly. He begins his analysis of the Pauline texts by taking a non-Pauline text, Acts 23:6-8, which presents Paul describing himself as a Pharisee who believes in the resurrection of the dead. Cooper argues that although there is no explicit evidence in this text about belief in the intermediate state, Paul, as a Pharisee, probably believed in it and in the resurrection:

[...] the Pharisees' belief in the future resurrection included affirmation of the intermediate state. Individuals continue to exist after death and are eventually raised. That is what resurrection means to the Pharisees. Thus there is absolutely nothing in the fact that Paul mentions only the resurrection to imply that he had abandoned the intermediate state while retaining the resurrection. Without evidence to the contrary, we must assume that Paul affirms the whole scenario (136).

In considering the three alternative interpretations of the afterlife mentioned above, Cooper next examines what he considers relevant Pauline texts. His purpose is to "identify as precisely as possible the personal eschatology taught by Paul in order to determine the anthropology embedded in it" (154). He analyzes 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4; and Philippians 1:21-24. After his analysis, Cooper concludes that the most reasonable hypothesis and defensible

conclusion is that Paul believed in the existence of an intermediate state and asserted that the person would “be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23) between death and the resurrection in the Parousia. Cooper affirms that the other two options of interpretation, immediate resurrection and extinction-re-creation, are in conflict with some of the analyzed Pauline texts; although the intermediate state option cannot be shown in all of the texts, this option is not in contradiction to these texts. Paul’s teachings that “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (155)⁵⁹ and that the resurrection of the dead will occur during the Parousia, suggest that the person will remain in existence after death and before the resurrection. For these reasons, the dualistic “intermediate state-future resurrection” theory is a “more adequate interpretation” (155) of Pauline eschatology. Furthermore, “[i]t is what Paul meant to teach, not just his incidental mode of expression” (156).

It follows from this interpretation that these Pauline texts have an anthropological view that, although holistic, considers the human person in a dualistic way because there is a time between death and resurrection when something of the person persists without the physical body. This interpretation, which Cooper considers dualistic, is in agreement with the traditional Christian belief in the immortal soul.

The belief in the eschatological theme of the intermediate state is decisive for the “monism-dualism debate about biblical anthropology” (157), says Cooper. However, despite his apparent agreement with the Christian tradition that holds to the belief in the immortal soul, Cooper’s use of the term *dualism* does not necessarily mean that he believes the Scriptures teach the existence of an immortal and immaterial *soul* that survives bodily death and can live disembodied. Rather, he holds that the New

⁵⁹ 2 Cor 5:8.

Testament teaches that *personal identity* (or personhood, ego, or the self) does not die but survives physical death:

And the ontological possibility of that mode of human existence is all I mean by dualism. Personal existence apart from earthly-bodily existence is possible. When we die, there is a dichotomy of ego and the earthly organism. We are constituted in such a way that we can survive “coming apart” at death, unnatural as this may be. This is all that I mean by “dualism” (162-3).

Cooper argues that the Scriptures have a philosophical neutrality and that terms like *soul* have no philosophical definitions in the Bible or in the doctrine of the intermediate state (163). Consequently, his ‘holistic dualism’ does not entail the existence of an element or substance—philosophically defined—which remains and survives bodily death as a soul, self, or mind. Instead, he strongly and repeatedly insists simply “that persons can exist without earthly bodies” (164). Cooper does not affirm that the person persists through the soul in the philosophical, platonic sense as a “simple spiritual substance” that is “metaphysically indestructible” (197). He merely asserts the person’s persistence, which is supported by the Scriptures’ personal eschatology based on faith in an intermediate state. Nevertheless, if personal persistence between death and resurrection occurs through the immortal soul, as tradition maintains, Cooper is not opposed to it: “There is nothing unbiblical about affirming the immortality of the soul in the sense of continuous existence between death and resurrection” (198). In fact, he explains that “[his] own philosophical position continues to waffle between substance dualism and the soul-matter holism of the Thomistic tradition” (*xxvii*). Therefore, for Cooper, the Scriptures have an anthropology which is holistic as well as dualistic. By holistic, he means that the person must be considered in the integrity of all her dimensions—body, soul, mind, spirit, person, ego, or self (163, 165). By dualistic, he

means that persons who have died “are held in existence without fleshly bodies until the resurrection” (231).⁶⁰

1.2.4 Peter Phan’s Response to the International Theological Commission on Eschatology of the Soul

As presented in the introduction to this thesis, it is important to consider the document “Some Current Questions in Eschatology” from the International Theological Commission (ITC) in this discussion of theological anthropology. The ITC’s document affirms an “eschatology of the soul,” according to which the human soul survives bodily death and preserves the person’s identity in an intermediate state until the resurrection. Peter C. Phan offers a critical view of the ITC’s document which will be helpful for my discussion. Thus, in this section, I will review Peter C. Phan’s article, entitled “Contemporary Context and Issues in Eschatology,” in which he critiques the document’s affirmation of the belief in the intermediate state.

After summarizing “Some Current Questions in Eschatology,” Phan criticizes some points of the document that he considers “disputed questions” in theology, such as the belief in the intermediate state, and suggests an approach for eschatology today (507). Phan criticizes the document for not taking into account Karl Rahner’s groundbreaking essay, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions,” which he calls “one of the most influential essays on the hermeneutics of eschatological statements in the history of Roman Catholic theology” (515).⁶¹ While noting that the document is consistent with

⁶⁰ In the preface to the second edition of his book, Cooper states that the words body and soul “promote [...] ‘holistic dualism,’ a term chosen to capture both the unity of human nature and the possibility of personal existence without the body” (xxvii).

⁶¹ See Karl Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions,” in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 4:323-346.

Rahner's reflections on several points, Phan suggests that Rahner's hermeneutical approach to eschatology would have helped the ITC's document to be "more organically structured, more complete in its exposition, and more receptive to insights of contemporary eschatology even when these do not coincide with its point of view" (517).

For Phan, Rahner's stress on the unity of the person would help to correct the document's "'eschatology of souls' and its teaching on the intermediate state." Rahner insists that eschatological assertions must take into consideration the profound unity of the person, who "cannot be neatly divided two parts, body and soul" (516). According to Phan, although the ITC's document agrees that death affects the whole person, it fails to explain how death affects the person's soul. Phan writes, "[i]t would seem that the Commission is still operating with the understanding of death as separation of the soul from the body and appears to be unaware that such a description of death, though legitimate in its emphasis on the immortality of the soul, is seriously inadequate in describing death as a *human* event" (518-9). Thus, if the whole person is affected by death, it is not logical to say that the soul persists without being affected in some way. Although the document states that this separated soul is "an ontologically incomplete reality," it fails to explain how death affects this separated soul, which according to the same document, still "performs personal acts of understanding and will."⁶²

Phan considers the affirmation of the intermediate state to be the "main burden" of the document (520). Concerning the interpretation of authoritative sources such as Scripture and Tradition, Phan argues that the "hermeneutics of eschatological assertions is far more complex than the Commission appears to assume" (523) and must also take into consideration the theological debate in the field as well as insights from

⁶² *International Theological Commission*, 226.

contemporary science. In particular one should distinguish between what a dogma actually intends to teach and the particular concepts or terms used to express it. In the present case, he asks whether the intermediate state is a doctrine of faith.

The document uses Scripture to affirm the existence of the intermediate state. Phan responds by claiming that the texts in question (Dan 12:2; Isa 26:19; Luke 23:43; John 14:1-3; Phil 1:21-24) merely suggest the existence of such a temporary state and, therefore, cannot be taken as proof of it (523).

According to Phan, the Commission rejects the total death hypothesis, according to which the whole person dies and is recreated by God in the resurrection, on the grounds that “it is rooted in Protestant anthropology, and that it cannot account for the continuity between the person who dies and the person who rises” (523). He grants the point concerning the continuity of identity but not the implication that an anthropology is wrong because it is Protestant. Furthermore, Phan claims that the total death hypothesis is more consistent with the affirmation that the whole person is affected by death.

The Commission rejects the hypothesis that the person is resurrected immediately at death, stating that resurrection will be a future event according to the Scriptures. Phan criticizes this position by saying that “it is too simplistic to identify the time of the resurrection of the individual simply with the parousia.” First, he notes that while scripture speaks of the parousia as a future event it does not fix it to a specific date. Second, he notes that some Pauline texts imply that resurrection is “something already occurring in the life of the Christian (Col 2:12-13; Eph 2:5-6).” Third, he argues that there is a “realized eschatology” (524) found in John’s Gospel. Therefore, for Phan, the

New Testament does not conclusively rule out the hypothesis of the immediate resurrection.

Following Rahner, Phan holds that the intermediate state is not a dogma of faith and is a matter open to theological debate (525).⁶³ For Rahner, the hypothesis of *immediate resurrection with death* is neither problematic nor heretical. With Rahner, Phan contends that the real issue at stake in the Church's faith is the continuity of personal identity in the life of the resurrection. From this perspective, it is not necessary for theology to use the notions of the intermediate state and the separated soul in order to safeguard this point of faith. Even considering the distinction between body and soul,

the human person must count empirically and ontologically, first and last as being one, so that one need not conceive of the soul as separated from the body after death and existing in an intermediate state waiting for an eventual reunion with the body. Furthermore, the immortality of the soul may mean no more than that the human person, as a being of self-transcendence and freedom, is one who through his or her history of freedom can achieve final and definitive validity before God, and need not imply the doctrine of the intermediate state (526).

Therefore, the person must be considered in his/her wholeness after death, and notions such as the immortality of the soul and the intermediate state need to be interpreted in accordance with this fundamental rule.

1.3 Discussion

As we will see in the next chapter, Nancey Murphy argues that the majority of biblical scholars understand the Bible as having a monistic anthropology. I have tried to investigate this through an exploration of biblical anthropology utilizing two sources: 1) biblical dictionaries and encyclopedias, and 2) the arguments from three biblical scholars.

⁶³ Phan quotes a long section from Karl Rahner's essay "The Intermediate State," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 17:114-5.

I have sought to understand the biblical concept of *soul* and to discern whether this presumes a dualistic or monistic presentation of the person, or if it has elements of both. And I have relied on the scholarship of three biblical theologians in addressing biblical perceptions of the human makeup of body and soul.

Regarding the term *soul*, there appears to be agreement among biblical sources that in the Old and the New Testament, *soul* neither denotes nor expresses a reality that is separable from the physical body, even as it is mentioned in the book of Wisdom. Nonetheless, there is not full scholarly agreement regarding this book, which is always referenced when the human constitution is discussed. As we have seen, the *Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia Old Testament* clearly states that the term *soul*, as used in the book of Wisdom, means a spiritual substance that is different from the body; thus, the human being is considered in a dichotomized way in this Scriptural text. This conclusion supports a more traditional Christian understanding of the soul as a spiritual and immortal (and therefore separated) element in the human makeup.

In their analysis of biblical belief in the resurrection, Levenson and Wright believe that the ancient Judaism contained in the Jewish Scriptures and in the Old Testament tends toward a more monistic understanding of the human being, and does not emphasize the notion of immortality. When the accent on immortality occurs, it is not intended to stress the importance of the persistence of some part of the human being after bodily death, but, rather, to emphasize the resurrection, which is directly associated with an embodied state, according to Levenson and Wright.

Despite recognizing the influence of other cultures and their beliefs (including the immortality of the soul from Platonism) on the Judaic and Christian understandings of

resurrection, Wright agrees with Levenson's view that Jewish belief in resurrection has its own roots and authenticity. Levenson argues against modern (or liberal) Judaism. In his view, definitions, prayers, and beliefs that emphasize the immortality of the soul change and weaken the original meaning of the resurrection of the dead in the Jewish Bible and in rabbinic tradition. For both Levenson and Wright, Jewish belief in the resurrection is the belief in an embodied event. It does not signal a belief in some kind of life through an immortal and bodiless soul. Both authors seem to be against dualistic interpretations of the after-death that stress the persistence of the soul separated from the body.

My overview of Levenson's and Wright's understanding of biblical anthropology has shown that they do allow, however, for the possibility of a dualistic interpretation, at least with respect to the intermediate state. As we can see from their analyses, particularly Wright's, there is agreement that, in books from Second Temple Judaism (like the book of the Wisdom of Solomon), there is a belief that some kind of personal identity survives bodily death through the soul. Wright notes, however, that in the book of Wisdom, this soul (some kind of personal existence) is temporarily preserved after bodily death by the power of God and not because it is an immortal substance. Wright considers that immortality is not an attribute of the soul, but rather is a concept used to describe the state of the person in the resurrection. The mere consideration in some biblical books (such as the Wisdom of Solomon) of the belief in an ongoing human existence in a "bodiless mode" (between death and resurrection when personal identity is preserved) is enough to suggest that the person can be dichotomized. In some obscure and mysterious way, the person remains in existence while her physical body is dead.

Cooper never considers resurrection and immortality to be contradictory beliefs. For Cooper, it is a mistake to assume “that the assumption that the (temporary) existence of a person without a body and bodily resurrection are mutually exclusive alternatives. This is simply false. An intermediate state ought not be confused with a Platonic notion of ‘the immortal soul’” (xxv). Cooper does not argue that it is the soul of the person that remains after death; he writes that there is a state in which the person exists temporarily without the body (so person = soul). In contrast to Cooper, who considers that “the intermediate state is a teaching of Scripture” (xxv, xxvi), Peter Phan, keeping with Rahner’s eschatological reflections, asserts that Scripture merely suggests the existence of such a state and nothing more. Cooper’s conclusions about the personal eschatology of Paul’s letters strongly suggest that Paul believed in the intermediate state and in the persistence of the self after death, which thus reinforces Cooper’s thesis of the holistic dualism of the New Testament in agreement with the Old Testament; however, there is no explicit mention of, or teaching about, the intermediate state in the Pauline texts. Thus, an intermediate state seems to be a matter of Cooper’s interpretation. As Phan argues, the matter of the intermediate state is still open to theological debate. Even though there are reasons for holding the position that the Scriptures suggest the intermediate state, all the authors studied here recognize the difficulty and anomaly of this belief.

There are further anthropological views in different books of the Bible that have not been covered in this chapter. The conclusions cited here regarding the book of Wisdom are not meant to suggest that the whole of the Old and New Testaments is unquestionably anthropologically dualistic. In Cooper’s view, the intermediate state, in which the person remains somehow dichotomized after death, is sufficient to make a

claim for dualism in biblical anthropology. My study shows that there is no singular, unequivocal, and biblically-based anthropological view to support such a claim.

CHAPTER 2: Nancey Murphy's Non-reductive Physicalism

In her book *Bodies and Souls or Spirited Bodies?*⁶⁴ Nancey Murphy argues for what she calls a *non-reductive physicalist* understanding of the human person, an anthropological view that maintains that the human person is her/his body, which is in itself spiritual. In dialogue with contemporary science, Murphy claims that belief in an immaterial soul is no longer needed to explain higher intellectual functions, freedom, and spiritual capacity. She interprets the human person as being able to have a relationship with God not because of a spiritual substance in its composition, but because the body *is* a spiritual reality. Murphy's approach poses a challenge to contemporary traditional Catholic theological anthropology that considers the human person in binary form as body-soul / material-spiritual.

This analysis of Murphy's non-reductive physicalism will grapple with her challenges to theological anthropology and consider seriously her contributions to the dialogue between theology and science.

2.1 Nancey Murphy's *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*

Nancey Murphy focuses both on the knowledge that the natural sciences have given us about human nature and on Christian theology's reception of this knowledge, including reasonable adaptations and reinterpretations of Christian doctrine. In *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* Murphy addresses traditional Christian understanding of

⁶⁴ Nancey Murphy. *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). In the following sections references in the text are to page numbers of this work.

the human nature and discusses the possible impacts upon this understanding by the discoveries and advances in physics, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience.

Murphy defends what she calls *non-reductionist physicalism*, which is an account of the human being that attempts to overcome both extremes, *substance dualism* and *reductionist physicalism*. *Substance dualism* is an anthropological account first described by René Descartes which considers the human being to be composed of body and soul, both understood as different substances or realities. Descartes divided the human person into body and mind/soul. The *res extensa* is the body or extended substance, while the *res cogitans* is the soul or thinking substance—also called *mind* in modern times (45).⁶⁵ In this Cartesian view, human consciousness, knowledge, will, and all human intellectual functions are functions of the *res cogitans* or soul. The other extreme, *reductionist physicalism*, is also known as *neurobiological reductionism* and *causal reductionism*. This is an anthropological perspective that understands the human person and human characteristics (e.g. consciousness, intelligence, freedom, morality, and spirituality) to be solely the result of physical and biological processes. Those who subscribe to physicalism view features of humanness as being brought about exclusively by neuronal (and therefore physiological) processes without the need, help, or action of any immaterial substance or element. Therefore, the term *physicalism* points to the human person being purely a physical entity, denying the existence of any non-material element in the human makeup.

⁶⁵ Murphy also explains “that the terms ‘mind’ and ‘soul’ were once (nearly) interchangeable, but in recent years ‘soul’ has taken religious connotations that ‘mind’ has not” (2). Descartes, for instance, uses the term ‘soul’ to describe what he calls *res cogitans* (thinking substance), which is translated nowadays as ‘mind,’ without religious meaning.

Murphy queries at the beginning of her book: “Are humans immortal souls temporarily housed in physical bodies, or are we our bodies?” She explains that her goal in writing the book is to answer this aforementioned question according to “Christian theology, science (especially the cognitive neurosciences), and philosophy” (ix). In response to her question, Murphy presents two different views of human nature. The first points toward an understanding of the human as a soul that inhabits a physical body for a specific time; this is a dualistic standpoint that privileges the soul as the center of personhood and reduces the physical body to a specific instrumental purpose: to “house” the soul. The second (and physicalist) view looks toward the human being as body, which is in itself a spiritual reality; an immortal soul is not viewed as the core of personhood because everything ascribed to it is the result of physical and biological processes; there is no spiritual element as a component of the person because the physical is spiritual. Murphy includes her definition of the human being in a statement of the book’s main argument:

My central thesis is, first, that we are our bodies – there is no additional metaphysical element such as a mind or soul or spirit. But, second, this “physicalist” position need not deny that we are intelligent, moral and spiritual. We are, at our best, complex physical organisms, imbued with the legacy of thousands of years of culture, and, most importantly, blown by the Breath of God’s Spirit; we are *Spirited bodies* (ix).

Murphy’s non-reductionist physicalist anthropological view does not place the human person in a body-soul schema. The person is the physical structure of the body, along with all of its faculties that characterize humanness. The physical body is a reality breathed by the Spirit of God, but this does not mean that there is a separated spiritual element in the person’s composition. The image of God’s breath is simply a scriptural metaphor used by Murphy to express the physical as a spirited reality. One might

question the coherence of Murphy's argument because while she denies the existence of a "metaphysical element" in the human makeup, she maintains that this physical being is spiritual. This spirituality of the body is not understood as a reality that is meta-physical, i.e. beyond the physical; it is understood as a characteristic of the physical reality of the human body. There is not a spiritual element in the human constitution that can be removed from the body or that is discontinuous to it.

For Murphy, the higher value attributed to the soul in relation to the body can trigger misunderstandings that devalue human embodied existence. This mindset can result, for example, in a non-committed and unengaged stance by Christians with regard to the real and embodied/material problems of the world (27-9). She underscores that the distinctiveness of human beings in relation to other animals is connected to "morality and the ability to be in relationship with God" (5). There is no need for a non-material element in the human composition to explain human spirituality and moral behaviors. Human spirituality (understood as the "capacity for religious experience" or "the ability to be in relationship with God"), free will, morality, and personal identity are enabled by culture and by the greater complexity of the human nervous system (5-6). Murphy calls her physicalist account of the human being nonreductive because humanness results from the interaction between the cultural environment and the physical body. There is no need for a non-physical element such as a soul.

Murphy points out that there is no clear instruction or teaching in the Bible concerning the relationship between the body and the soul. Thus, the interpretation of sacred texts about the composition of human nature has fluctuated throughout Christian history. She argues against dualistic interpretations of Scripture by stating that "most of

the dualism that has appeared to be biblical teaching has been a result of poor translations” (37). Murphy contends that the dualistic view of the person upheld by Christians throughout history was influenced by cultural factors, along with the Bible’s unclear teaching concerning this matter. Therefore, she seeks to reformulate traditional accounts of the human person by considering contemporary cultural and scientific developments that question dualism and point toward a more monistic or physicalist account of the human person (37).

According to Murphy, during the nineteenth century many scholars of biblical criticism began “to question whether body-soul dualism was in fact the position to be found in Scripture” (8). She explains that H. Wheeler Robinson, an Old Testament scholar, affirmed that body-soul dualism was an invention of the New Testament, which was influenced by Greek thought and its philosophical understanding of human nature. She presents Robinson’s explanation of how the Hebraic understanding of *person* differs from the New Testament conception:

[...] the Hebrew idea of personality is that of an animated body, not (like the Greek) that of an incarnated soul. However, while arguing that the New Testament is largely continuous with the Old in conceiving of the person as a unity rather than dualistically, he also said that the most important advance in the New Testament is the belief that the essential personality (whether called the *psyché* or the *pneuma*) survives bodily death. This soul or spirit may be temporarily disembodied, but it is not complete without the body, and its continued existence after bodily death is dependent upon God rather than a natural endowment of the soul. So here we see the beginning of the recognition that dualism was not the original Hebraic understanding. He sees a modified dualism as a New Testament invention (8-9).

Murphy points out that even at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were different understandings about what the soul was. Various sources described the soul and the human person differently. For example, the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (1910)* asserts that “there is a clear consensus that the whole of the

Bible is dualistic.” Other sources, such as *A Dictionary of the Bible (1902)*, offer contradictory views: in one entry on the *soul*, the author affirms that in biblical anthropology, the soul is not a substance and that terms such as *nepeš* (Hebrew) and *psyché* (Greek) are merely used to correspond to “life embodied in living creatures.” In the entry on *resurrection* in the same dictionary, another author offers a clearly dualistic view of the human person, prompting Murphy to comment that “some of the authors in this dictionary assume dualism while others explicitly deny that it is the anthropology of the Bible” (9).⁶⁶

Although the Hebraic scriptures offer an approach to human nature that is very close to physicalism, Murphy asserts that body-soul dualism took root in the Christian mindset. In her view, one of the reasons for this was that the Hebraic scriptures were translated into Greek in an environment influenced by dualistic philosophy. The Greek terms *psyché* (soul) and *soma* (body), used to translate the Hebrew terms *nepeš* and *basar*, respectively, had the connotation of being components of the human person. Murphy observes that, in the Hebrew mindset, the term *nepeš* was not understood dualistically. However, the translation from Hebrew to Greek in the Septuagint, which read *psyché* where it was *nepeš*, gave a dualistic connotation to the Old Testament. Murphy notes that in several more recent translations of the Bible, instead of the word *soul*, we find the terms *me* or *my life* in an attempt to be more faithful to the anthropology of the Old Testament.

Nevertheless, according to Murphy, many passages of the New Testament—which was, in fact, originally written in Greek—reinforce a dualistic anthropology

⁶⁶ The findings in the first chapter of this thesis concerning the diversity of opinions regarding the human composition in the biblical field correspond to what Murphy is affirming here.

because they seem to refer to *soul* and *body* as separable components of human existence (19).⁶⁷ In Murphy's understanding, however, the authors of the New Testament were not addressing the issue of human composition/makeup when they utilized the term *soul*. She states emphatically: "[T]he New Testament authors are not intending to teach anything about humans' metaphysical composition. If they were, surely they could have done so much more clearly!" (21).

Murphy asserts that New Testament scholar James Dunn's distinction between "'aspective' and 'partitive' accounts of the human nature" lends support to her conclusion. In Dunn's view, the concern of the New Testament authors (and of Hebraic thought) was not to define the human being's constitution by different components, as some Greek philosophers did, but to express different dimensions or aspects of the whole person. Thus, *soul* in many texts of the New Testament is not a part or component of the human person, but the word used to express a dimension of the whole person. Murphy explains: "for the biblical authors each 'part' [...] stands for the whole person thought of from a certain angle. For example, 'spirit' stands for the whole person in relation to God" (21). Hence, Murphy concludes that there is not a singular or uniform view regarding the human nature in the Bible. She continues: "What the New Testament authors *do* attest is, first, that humans are psychophysical unities; second, that Christian hope for eternal life is staked on bodily resurrection rather than an immortal soul; and third, that humans are

⁶⁷ The author cites some of these passages: "(1) Matthew 10:28 (REB), 'Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Fear him rather who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell;' (2) Luke 16:19-31, the story of Lazarus in which (without reference to prior resurrection of the body) Lazarus is said to be with Abraham; (3) Luke 23:39-43, in which Jesus says to one of those crucified with him that he will be with him today in Paradise; and (4) 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, in which Paul says that 'in this present body we groan, yearning to be covered by our heavenly habitation put over this one, in the hope that, being thus clothed, we shall not find ourselves naked'" (19).

to be understood in terms of their relationship—relationships to the community of believers and especially to God” (22).

For Murphy, the theologian Karl Barth made the clearest distinction between Hebraic and Hellenistic understandings of human nature. Barth favored the Hebraic viewpoint for a better understanding of Christianity, as did other theologians of the biblical movement during the twentieth century. Murphy explains that Rudolf Bultmann, in his *Theology of the New Testament*, was another scholar who made an important contribution to this issue by claiming that “Paul used *soma* (‘body’) to characterize the human person as a whole” (10). Yet, despite the general tendency today to understand the Bible’s conception of human nature as a unity, Murphy affirms that there remains a strong tendency to stress the separation of body and soul, at least after death.

Murphy affirms that ancient philosophy influenced early Christian dualistic thought. Nonetheless, there were very different understandings among philosophers about what was meant by *matter* and *soul*. She explains briefly the difference between the most influential thinkers in relation to this issue, the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. According to Murphy, Plato had a clearly dualistic view about the human person, whom he described “as an immortal soul imprisoned in a mortal body” (12). For him, reality was related to another world (the “world of ideas”) from which the soul, which pre-exists the body, originates.⁶⁸ Conversely, Aristotle did not agree that the soul was a transcendent element that had pre-existence or could exist without the body (13). He understood the soul to be the *form* of the body (the *matter*).

⁶⁸ “Thus, the rational part of the soul pre-exists the body, dwelling in the transcendent realm of the forms, and returns there at death” (12-3).

Moreover, Murphy explains that early Christian authors drew upon philosophical approaches to the soul. In applying the Platonic view to his work, Augustine (whose thought influenced Catholic and Protestant theologies) considered that “a human being is an immortal (not eternal) soul using (not imprisoned in) a mortal body” (14). Thus for Murphy, Augustine’s dualistic view of the human person resulted in a devaluation of embodied existence in theological thought as a result of the influence of Platonic philosophy.

Murphy explains that, during the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas was the foremost theologian who addressed the issue of the human composition, making use of “Aristotle’s hylomorphic metaphysics as well as his thesis that the soul is the form of the body” (14). Aquinas greatly influenced Catholic theology and described more clearly and specifically the role of the soul and its functions. Murphy explains that Aquinas described a detailed hierarchy of these functions or faculties of the soul, from lowest to highest: “vegetative faculties of nutrition, growth, and reproduction;” “sensitive faculties” (exterior and interior senses); and “[t]he rational faculties [that] are distinctively human: passive and active intellect, and will” (15). Murphy affirms that Aquinas’s thought is still important today, particularly because his perspective is present in the Catholic consideration of the human person. As we saw earlier in the introduction of this thesis, Clarke interprets Aquinas’s theological understanding of the human person according to Catholic tradition, which says that the soul is the form of the body but is also responsible for intellectual acts of freedom, will, and spirituality. However, one of Murphy’s main arguments in her non-reductive physicalist account of the human being is that all of these functions or faculties attributed to the soul can be explained scientifically at the physical level.

After reviewing biblical data, Murphy asserts that the authors of the New Testament “do attest [...], first, that humans are psychophysical unities; second, that Christian hope for eternal life is staked on bodily resurrection rather than an immortal soul; and, third, that humans are to be understood in terms of their relationships—relationships to the community of believers and especially to God.” It is important to note that when she refers to the human being as a “psychophysical unity,” she does not affirm two different substances or elements; instead, she says that what is psychological in the human person is a property of the material. Murphy agrees that biblical data allows, and does not rule out, the traditional dualistic understanding of the human person; however, dualism of substance (from Plato and Descartes) and “reductionist forms of physicalism” (22) do not fit into biblical anthropological accounts. In Murphy’s view, one of the doctrines that upholds body-soul dualism in Christian thought is the doctrine of the intermediate state. She affirms that this doctrine “still serves as a motive for body-soul dualism among some conservative Christians, both Catholic and Reformed” (16). While discussing the impact of a physicalist anthropology to theology, Murphy argues that it is necessary to abandon or “finesse the doctrine of the intermediate state” and to rethink Christian understanding of resurrection, not as the “re-clothing of a ‘naked’ soul with a (new) body, but rather restoring the whole person to life—a new transformed kind of life” (23).

While contemplating how different Christian theology would be today “if a physicalist sort of anthropology had predominated rather than dualism,” Murphy affirms that “[t]here would be no notion of care of the soul as the point of Christian disciplines—certainly no concept of depriving the body in order that the soul might flourish. As some

feminist thinkers have been saying for some time: dualist anthropology all too easily leads to disparagement of the body and all that goes along with being embodied” (27). Murphy strongly criticizes the dualistic Christian notion of care of the soul (influenced by Platonism), which in her view made Christians throughout history less engaged in the transformation of concrete reality than they should be.⁶⁹ Instead, they were concerned with the salvation of the spiritual element called soul. Murphy declares that dualism modified the conception of Christianity:

Now, at great risk of oversimplification, I am suggesting that the adoption of a dualist anthropology in the early centuries of the church was largely responsible for changing Christian’s conception of what Christianity is basically all about. I am suggesting that original Christianity is better understood in socio-political terms than in terms of what is currently thought of as religious or metaphysical. The adoption of a dualist anthropology provided something different—different from socio-political and ethical concerns—with which Christians became primarily concerned (28).

This change in the major concerns of early Christianity was a direct consequence of the adoption of a dualistic understanding of the human being.

Regarding the understanding of what happens after death, Murphy offers an analysis of the consequences of the Christian idea of the immortal soul. The notions of “resurrection” and “immortality of the soul” are two contrasting accounts of the afterlife that lead Christians towards different decisions and attitudes in life. She explains: “If souls are saved out of this world, then nothing here matters ultimately. If it is our bodily

⁶⁹ At this point in her discussion, Murphy raises several questions: “Without the Neoplatonic notion that the goal of life is to prepare the soul for its proper abode in heaven, would Christians throughout the centuries have devoted more of their attention to working for God’s reign on earth? And would Jesus’ teachings be regarded as a proper blueprint for that earthly society? Would the creeds, then, not have skipped from his birth to his death, leaving out his teaching and faithful life? Would Christians then see a broader, richer role for Jesus Messiah than as facilitator of the forgiveness of their sins? If Christians had been focusing more, throughout all of these centuries, on following Jesus’ teachings about sharing, and about loving our enemies at least enough so as not to kill them, how different might world politics be today? What would Christians have been doing these past 2000 years if there were no such things as souls to save?” (27). Although she does not answer these questions, it is clear that for her, a more physicalist anthropological view would have led Christians to be more faithful to Jesus’ teachings.

selves that are saved and transformed, then bodies and all that go with them matter— families, history, and all of nature” (28-9). She is radical in considering “resurrection” and “immortality of the soul” as contrasting accounts. Murphy argues that Christian emphasis should be on the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, as this would affect all aspects of Christian life (28-9). Christian spirituality, for example, must be more incarnated and committed to the material problems of the world.⁷⁰

Another important point in Murphy’s discussion concerns how Christian spirituality should be understood according to a physicalist anthropological account. She explains that since Augustine, human spirituality has been largely understood and associated with the inner life, which is considered distinct from the person’s outer life. Murphy states that “the distinction between inner and outer is not equivalent to the distinction between soul and body.” However, the notion of the person’s self as something interior is derived “from Augustine’s reflections on the problem of the location of the soul” (30), which was conceived as the person’s inner “place” where God can be encountered. Murphy explains: “The combination of the Neoplatonic emphasis on the care of the soul with Augustine’s metaphor of entering into one’s own self or soul in order to find God constituted a complex of ideas that has shaped the whole of Western spirituality from that point onward” (31). Murphy provides the example of Teresa of Avila’s use of the image of the “interior castle” as a metaphor for the person’s soul in the fifteenth century. This soul, which is the same as the person’s self or “I,” is something that is inside the person (31-2).

⁷⁰ Murphy does not differentiate the notion of “human immortality” from that of “immortality of the soul,” as Wright and Cooper do. For the latter two authors, for example, in the Wisdom of Solomon, the notions of immortality and resurrection are not necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive. These notions can be understood as being compatible, if immortality is interpreted in light, and as a result, of God’s restorative action in resurrection.

Murphy cites theological scholars Nicholas Lash and Owen Thomas, who criticize “this tradition of inwardness” (32). Owen Thomas defines spirituality “as the sum of all the uniquely human capacities and functions: self-awareness, self-transcendence, memory, anticipation, rationality (in its broadest sense), creativity, plus the moral, intellectual, social, political, aesthetic, and religious capacities, all understood as embodied” (32-3).⁷¹ Although his view contrasts with Augustine’s inner spirituality, Owen Thomas’s goal is not to deny the inner dimension of the person, but rather to restore a balanced understanding of human spirituality that does not focus exclusively “on the soul or interior life” (34). Thomas does not want to envision the body as a means for the development of the soul.

Murphy is aware that a less inwardly focused spirituality *per se* does not guarantee Christian commitment to the reign of God. However, she points out strongly that “physicalism—along with an eschatological hope in the resurrection of the body—leads more *naturally* to a concern for the physical world and its transformation than does dualism” (35).

* * *

The second chapter of Nancey Murphy’s book is entitled “What does science say about human nature? Physics, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience.” Here, Murphy reviews three scientific theories that she considers as “three major points in Western history where science has called for a re-appraisal of theories of human nature” (40). As the title of the chapter suggests, the three points are related to the changes in the

⁷¹ Here Murphy cites Owen Thomas in footnote 45: “Some Problems in Contemporary Christian Theology,” in *Anglican Theological Review* 82, (Spring 2000), 2:267-81.

understanding of physics in the seventeenth century, Darwin's evolutionary theory, and the contemporary advances in neuroscience.

The first scientific change that redefined the understanding of the person "was the replacement of Aristotelian physics by modern physics in the seventeenth century." Murphy explains that "this called for a different account of the nature of the soul, and occasioned a return to a more radical dualism" (40).

Copernican and Galilean heliocentric theory displaced the Earth and the human person from the center of the universe. It also signified "the end of physics based on Aristotle's hylomorphic conception of matter, and soon resulted in the development of corpuscular or atomist theories in physics, which in turn called for a radically new conception of the human person" (41). Until the seventeenth century, Aristotelian hylomorphism was the basis for physics. In essence, hylomorphism was an alternative explanation for ancient atomism, a theory according to which things are composed of atoms, the smallest and undividable particles whose organization and qualities characterized matter.

According to Murphy, Aristotle's theory of matter was a combination of his hylomorphism and the ancient theory of the four elements. Hylomorphism basically means that every being is the result of the interaction between *form* and *matter*. Each *form*, according to its particular essence, shapes matter and directs it to a specific goal: "It is the form that gives a thing its operative powers and directs its development. Forms of living things are also called souls. Plants, animals, and humans, according to both Aristotle and Thomas, have nutritive, sensitive, and rational souls, respectively" (41-2). The soul or form was not considered as a substance distinct from matter but something

inherent in it. Regarding the theory of the four elements, the elements of the universe are identified as “earth, water, air, and fire” (42). The mobility of a being depends on the amount of earth in its composition. The more earth a being has, the greater the likelihood that this being will remain motionless on Earth, which was considered the center of the universe.

Like his contemporaries, Thomas Aquinas drew upon the Aristotelian theory of matter, creating his own “cosmo-theology.” According to Murphy, “[h]istorian of science Thomas Kuhn notes [...] that the very detail and erudition of these works made the new synthesis inaccessible to most” (42). Nonetheless, Aquinas’s worldview, in which the earth is the center of the universe, became accessible to ordinary people when it was poetically depicted in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* through the images of hell, purgatory, and heaven. The human being, having a “double nature,” must follow the tendencies of his/her body or his/her soul, respectively, down to the inferior spheres (to hell), or upward to the superior spheres of the world, where God is (43).

This cosmo-theological worldview was replaced by Copernicus’ heliocentric theory, which challenged the Christian view that the earth was the center of the universe; moreover, physical explanations about the movement of objects based in Aristotelian theory were no longer accepted. Aristotelian *matter-form* theory was no longer a reasonable explanation of the world or human nature and, as a new physics was needed, ancient atomism was revived. The direct consequence of this change for the understanding of human nature was “that the soul could no longer be understood as the form of the body; in this new worldview there simply is no such thing as a form” (44). Two clear responses and alternatives to the understanding of the human composition

were Thomas Hobbes's (1588-1697) physicalism—which had no great influence—and René Descartes's (1596-1650) substance dualism (44).

Descartes, claims Murphy, “chose to return to a radical dualism of mind (or soul) and body along the lines of Plato's and Augustine's theories.” For him—as explained earlier in this chapter—the human person is the union and interaction between the soul (the non-material thinking substance) and the body (the material extended substance). Murphy explains that because of the religious connotation of the term *soul*, more recent translations of the work of Descartes used instead the term *mind*. In contrast to Thomas Aquinas, who construed the rational soul as responsible for human intellect and will, Descartes said that everything regarding conscious human life “is a function of the mind, and all the other faculties (such as the ability to move) are attributed to the body.” The “shift from hylomorphism to atomism” along with Cartesian substance dualism gave rise to the unsolvable philosophical problem of how to explain the interaction between body and mind (45).

The second scientific theory that both changed the understanding of the person and presents a challenge to the Christian conception of human nature is Darwin's theory of evolution. Murphy states that, according to evolutionary theory, the human species has a very close connection with other animals and with other hominids who lived millions of years ago and are in direct or indirect line of descent to modern humans.

Murphy explains that, in order to escape from materialist conclusions that the human person is merely the result of biological evolution, many Christians (including Pope Pius XII) maintain “that God creates a soul for each individual at conception.” Along with the issue of when human beings actually appeared, another problem is that

“[c]ontemporary biologists now offer a very complex account of human origins in which there is no clear distinction between animals and humans.” The belief that only human beings have immortal souls is problematic, starting with the moment that beings became “human” in such a different way than before, that they have an immortal soul (48). Moreover, there are many hominid species who were predecessors of modern humans, which raises the question about their humanness. Therefore, “[t]he claim that humans alone have the gift of a soul seems to force an arbitrary distinction where there is much evidence for continuity” (49). The evolution from animal to human occurred so gradually and slowly over time that it is difficult to understand why human beings have souls but animals do not.

Murphy believes that the real issue is that, especially in the Western mindset, the world is hierarchically organized, such that the human being must be considered as superior to other animals (50). After exploring the theological roots of social Darwinism, Murphy concludes that “[w]e do not need to think of ourselves as having souls in order to distance ourselves from the rest of God’s mammalian creatures” (55). The fact is that a dualistic anthropology is not a solution to the problem of human distinctiveness from other animals; moreover our kinship with other animals is not a problem that threatens our Christian conceptions.

Contemporary cognitive neuroscience is the third and most important scientific theory that Murphy discusses as a challenge to body-soul dualism and as a contribution to the understanding of “the question of the make-up of the human person.” In Murphy’s view, all the properties of the soul (i.e. its function, roles, and attributes), at all levels, as described by Thomas Aquinas, have their corresponding physical explanation in

neuroscience. She explains: “My argument in brief is this: all of the human capacities once attributed to the mind or soul are now being fruitfully studied as brain processes—or, more accurately, I should say, processes involving the brain, the rest of the nervous system and other bodily systems, all interacting with the socio-cultural world” (56).

Therefore, the existence of a non-material element (or spiritual element that is considered as distinct from the material) to explain biological life or the higher intellectual functions in the human being is not necessary.

Murphy explains that, for Thomas Aquinas, the soul “[i]n the first instance is simply the life principle” (56). In the philosophy of biology, two different approaches describe life: *vitalism* and *emergentism*. The first, based in Aristotle’s principles, states that “there must be something—a vital force—to direct the formation of an organism and to account for its being alive.” For the second, “[l]ife is an emergent property that is dependent on complex organization, not on an additional entity or non-material stuff.” This last view, in which life is the result of the complex biological organization of a being, is more in line with physicalism. To the physicalist mindset, everything that was attributed to the soul by Christian tradition is, in fact, the result of a progressive and complex biological organization, “rather than properties of a non-material entity” (57).

Before discussing the impact the advances in neuroscience have had on our knowledge about the rational soul, Murphy notes that all of the faculties attributed by Thomas Aquinas to the animal or sensitive soul, such as “locomotion, appetite, sensation, and emotion” (57), can be explained by the complex organization of neurological structures. For Thomas Aquinas, the rational soul is what makes human distinctiveness possible. To this rational soul, Aquinas attributed “two sorts of intellect, passive and

active, and the will. The active intellect is the power humans have, but not animals, of acquiring abstract information from sense experience and forming judgments. Its capacities are expressed primarily in the use of language. Passive intellect is a kind of memory—a memory of facts and ideas.” Regarding memory, Murphy says that it is possible to localize brain areas responsible for it: “Neuroscientists now distinguish something like a dozen different memory systems. The two sorts of memory that St. Thomas distinguished are both classified as types of declarative memory and involve the medial temporal lobe of the brain. The formation of long-term memory requires the functioning of the hippocampus” (65). Therefore, memories are related to physiological brain structures.

Murphy is aware that several functions, such as “abstraction, judgment, and reasoning” (65), which Aquinas attributed to the active intellect of the rational soul, are less understood by neuroscience than memory is (which in Thomistic understanding, belongs to the passive intellect). However, these functions are related to the mechanisms of language which have been gradually understood, located, and mapped in terms of their neuro-biological bases or physical substrates. Murphy explains the complexity of the brain processes involved in language. She quotes Peter Hagoort, who explains the neuronal mechanism of language by describing the different physical parts of the brain involved in the process, such as the left hemisphere and two brain parts called Wernicke’s and Broca’s areas (65-6). Therefore, human characteristics such as abstraction, judgment, and reasoning also fit into neurological explanations through the understanding of the brain mechanisms of language.

Murphy associates the human “will,” defined as the intellectual capacity for moral choices, with religious experience: “since God is the ultimate good, the will also accounts for the capacity to be attracted to God” (66). She cites Antonio Damasio’s study of the case of Phineas Gage, a person who had some parts of his prefrontal cortex destroyed by a metal rod. Although Gage’s cognitive functions in general were undamaged, “he suffered a dramatic character change.” After analyzing other similar cases, Damasio concluded that the prefrontal cortex is “concerned specifically with unique human properties, among them the ability to anticipate the future and plan accordingly within a complex social environment; the sense of responsibility toward the self and others; and the ability to orchestrate one’s survival deliberately, at the command of one’s free will.” Based on Damasio’s affirmation of the prefrontal cortex as responsible for the will, Murphy asserts that “what Thomas described as the ‘appetite for the good’ appears to depend directly on localizable brain functions” (67).

Murphy agrees that the mere physical localization of brain regions responsible for what were considered as functions of the soul is not evidence that the soul does not exist. Nevertheless, it is reasonable and clear that there are explanations other than the soul for higher human intellectual faculties. Murphy clarifies her position further:

So what are we to make of all this? It is important to note that no such accumulation of data can ever amount to a proof that there is no immaterial mind or soul in addition to the body. But if we recognize that the soul was originally introduced into Western thought not from Hebraic Scripture but as an *explanation* for capacities that appeared not to be explainable in biological terms, then we can certainly say that for scientific purposes the hypothesis has been shown to be unnecessary. [...] So biblical studies and neuroscience are both pointing in the same direction: toward a physicalist account of the person. Humans are not hybrids of matter and something else, they are purely physical organisms (69).

Murphy's anthropological physicalist account understands that the human being is not composed of two different parts or realities, such as a physical and a spiritual one, but is a single physical organism, the body.⁷²

Murphy cautions against a strictly reductionist account of the human person. She affirms that “[a] reductive view would be to say that if there is no soul then people must not be truly rational, moral, or religious. What was taken in the past to be rationality, morality, and relationship with God is really nothing but brain processes” (69-70).

Eliminative materialist stances so often become reductionist. Although scientific knowledge today (especially from neuroscience) points toward physicalist explanations for what formerly was attributed to the soul, this physicalist account of the person does not mean that all of the higher human capacities are the mere and sole result of physical processes (69). Such a consideration would be too reductionist and would undermine a more faithful and comprehensive understanding of the human person. In Murphy's view, the human person is a physical being with no soul, but with the capacity of morality, rationality, and religiosity. Murphy proposes a physicalist account that does not reduce the human phenomena to mere physical explanations. But what exactly does she mean by *non-reductive physicalism*? She explains: “The nonreductive physicalist says instead that if there is no soul then these higher human capacities must be explained in a different manner. *In part* they are explainable as brain functions, but their full explanation requires

⁷² For Murphy, the term physical appears to be interchangeable with the term material; likewise physicalism is the same as materialism. She explains that she prefers to use the term physicalism because of the negative connotation of materialism. This connotation can be perceived even in her own explanation: “The terms ‘physicalism’ and ‘materialism’ are nearly interchangeable in philosophy but ‘physicalism’ is more fashionable now, and it is more appealing to Christians because ‘materialism’ has long been used to refer to a worldview that excludes the divine. So even though a materialist account of the person is perfectly compatible with belief in God, ‘materialism’ does carry those unhappy connotations for Christians” (1-2).

attention to human social relations, to cultural factors, and, most importantly, to our relationship with God” (70).

My understanding of Murphy’s stance is that being a non-reductive physicalist means believing that, although brain functions enable and explain the high capacities of humans, we cannot look to the physiological structure and processes of the brain as the only explanation for human behavior, consciousness, freedom, identity, and religiosity. All of these, while dependent on the brain, are related (and also subject) to several other factors dependent on the world surrounding the human person. A nonreductive physicalist account does not deny higher human capacities but “instead seeks to know how all of these capacities depend on the body in its relation to the world, to culture and to God” (77).

In her third chapter, Murphy defends human “free will and moral responsibility” (72), which is threatened by a reductive physicalist account of the human person. Murphy does not agree with the reductionist view, according to which “the behavior of an entity is determined by the laws governing the behavior of its parts” (77)—e.g., that the physical laws which govern the atoms that compose one being are the same laws which govern this entire being. Applying this to the human person would undermine human free will, since all human reactions and behaviors would be dependent solely on the laws that govern the neurons, for instance.⁷³

⁷³ In Murphy’s argument against reductive physicalism, she gives the example of a paper airplane, pointing out that this simple object not only follows the physical rules of the atoms that compose the cellulose or its density, but its flight depends upon a more complex interaction between the rigidity of the material, the shape of the plane, and all the environmental factors (such the ability and power of the person who throws the plane, the pressure of the air and wind at the moment, laws of physics, aerodynamics, etc.). Similarly, a person’s behaviors, consciousness, will, and decisions are not merely the result of (or dependent on the laws that govern) the physical interactions of her atoms, cells, or even complex neurobiological structures (77).

Murphy states that events, such as the behavior of an organism, can be considered according to two different principles of causation: the *bottom-up* or the *top-down* (or *downward*) causations. According to the first one, some behavior of an organism is caused by the same physical laws that rule the smaller components of this organism. In the second, the downward causation, several factors, including the environment in which the organism lives, cause its behaviors. The main issue is whether human behavior is caused by neurobiological laws (*bottom up* causation) or if it is also the result of factors from the environment (*top down* causation).

Murphy cites several philosophers of science⁷⁴ who recognize the interrelationship between the causal power of structural (environmental) conditions and the causal laws intrinsic to complex organisms that determine their behavior (80-1). This interaction between both causal powers is a better way of understanding the human person. Murphy says that human morality and responsibility depend on some abilities which “arise out of our complex neural systems, interacting with the environment, both natural and social” (91). One of these abilities is human “sophisticated symbolic language” (93), which allows “us to represent to ourselves and to pursue abstract goals, such as justice” (96). Another is the ability that humans have to evaluate the prior motives of behaviors “in light of the abstract concept of goodness as such” (97). Murphy says that the human capacity of “high[er] level-evaluative processes” (103) fostered by language interacts with the environment and allows the person to self-direct his/her behavior. Therefore, the person is not solely governed by neurobiological laws, but can go beyond the determinations of causal factors. Regarding free will, Murphy does not emphatically assert the possibility of complete human autonomy, but she does affirm

⁷⁴ E.g. Bernd-Olaf Küppers, Fred Drestke, Donald Campbell, and Robert Van Gullick.

some degree of it: “what we really want when we want free will is *some measure* of autonomy from biological drives and social forces” (109).

In her fourth chapter, while discussing the problem of human distinctiveness, Murphy explains her position thusly:

[...] if we humans have no immortal souls to distinguish us from animals, then what is it that gives us a special place in God’s creation? My answer will be that our distinctiveness lies primarily in the fact that we are able to be addressed by God and heed God’s calling and commands. [...] For humans to have experience of God, they must be capable of being affected by God in some way. Traditional views have taken the soul to be the “site” of divine action in human life. I argue instead that God relates to us through our *bodily* capacities (111).

Murphy strongly affirms that there is no need for a soul in order for a person to experience God. The capacity of the human person to have a relationship with God is a possibility allowed for by bodily existence through the faculties with which the human body is endowed. Murphy is aware that human distinctiveness is an important issue when the existence of the human soul is denied. In a reductive physicalist view, human beings would not be distinguished from other animals. In a nonreductive physicalist view, “the difference between humans and (other) animals is not found in a special immortal part, but rather in special capabilities, enabled by our more complex neural systems, language, and culture” (116). Murphy states that what distinguishes human beings from animals from a theological perspective is the human capacity for morality and “relationships, with God as well as with other humans” (118). Murphy affirms that “the theological interpretation of morality is theocentric. One does what one does because it is obligatory, and it is obligatory because it fits with God’s purposes for human life” (120). Murphy states that the Christian moral sense of self-sacrifice for others, especially for strangers or outsiders is a distinguishing factor.

With regard to the human relationship with God, Murphy argues that what makes an experience a religious experience is that the circumstances, “the consequences, and the confirmation by the community” (122) indicate that it was an experience with God. Murphy asserts that there is an assumption among Christians “that God can only communicate with something closely akin, in a metaphysical sense, to God’s own substance,” which would be the human soul (125). Although she does not elaborate on it, Murphy says that the soul is not necessary because God’s action in the world and in the human person’s life occurs at a *quantum level* (131-2).

The last topic that Murphy addresses is personal identity. The soul was traditionally considered both the locus of personal identity and that which maintained this identity over time and after death. With respect to identity during the person’s lifetime, Murphy states that, in a nonreductive physicalist explanation, “[i]t is not the body *qua* material object that constitutes our identities, but rather the higher capacities that it enables: consciousness and memory, moral character, interpersonal relations, and, especially, relationship with God” (132). Murphy may offer thoughtful critiques and constructive arguments about dualism, but her answers are unsatisfactory, especially in relation to the question of personal identity in resurrection. We cannot deny that the preservation and endurance of personal identity between death and resurrection is a persistent, and perhaps legitimate, concern present in the Scriptures, as we saw in the first chapter. However, in Murphy’s nonreductive physicalist account, the continuity of personal identity in the resurrection does not require the existence of an immortal soul. For her, questions concerning eschatology, such as personal identity in the resurrection,

cannot be completely answered.⁷⁵ Therefore, she “conclude[s] that the science-theology dialogue, however fruitful in other areas of theology, must reach a point of silence when we turn to certain matters of eschatology” (145).

After addressing the philosophical themes of human distinctiveness, divine action, and personal identity, all of which challenge physicalist anthropology, Murphy concludes by reaffirming that despite the dangers of a purely reductionist physicalism, there is no need to hold to the concept of (and belief in) the soul:

The only danger in adopting a physicalist anthropology [...] is reductionism. The concept of soul was first introduced to explain humans’ remarkable capacities for reason, morality, spirituality, and free will. If we discard the concept of the soul as unnecessary, this is not to discard higher human capacities, but rather to open ourselves to wonder at the fact that creatures made of the dust of the ground have been raised so high. What, indeed, is man that Thou art mindful of him? (146).

2.2 Discussion

My reading of Nancey Murphy’s book has been an attempt to hear and understand the different (and sometimes dissonant) voices in the contemporary Christian theological realm. I have also tried to find contributions to the Catholic theological understanding of the person. Murphy’s thesis of non-reductionist physicalism affirms that it is possible and necessary to overcome the Christian theological dualistic understanding of the human being. This dualistic conception is promoted and upheld by a sometimes paradoxical language in important Church documents and in certain official prayers, as we saw in introduction to this thesis. Even though the Church affirms that the human person is a

⁷⁵ “Many dualists object that if there is no soul then there is no way to account for how I can be the same person now as when I was much younger, or worse, how I could be the same person after the resurrection, with a very different body. This leads to a consideration of what we can and cannot know about the transformation that awaits us at the end” (112).

single nature formed by the unity of body and soul, its teaching also asserts that, in death, only the body dies, yet the immortal soul persists alive until the resurrection. However, this apparent contradiction does not mean that a doctrine taught, believed, and present in Catholic prayers throughout the centuries can be easily discarded. Moreover, language is especially limited while expressing mystagogical realities including expressions about the human makeup and the afterlife.

Despite the reasonableness of a number of Murphy's arguments, there are some debatable points. For Murphy, Christian tradition used the term soul "as an explanation for capacities that appeared not to be explainable in biological terms" (69), such as the intellectual faculties. She thinks that the term is no longer necessary today, mainly because of advances in biblical studies and in the field of neuroscience. However, *soul* was more than just a term used to express the unexplainable; it was also used in the Christian historical tradition to express the whole reality of the person. As Murphy says, Thomas Aquinas's philosophical use of the term *soul* as the *form* of the body expresses the wholeness of the person, since the soul is a reality inherent to the body and not separable from it. Perhaps the use of *soul* should be reconsidered, not because of some scientific explanation, but rather because of its possible negative consequences, such as the devaluation of embodied human existence, as Murphy has noted (28-9).

Murphy asserts that everything that is considered a function or attribute of the soul has a neural substrate or physical structure that generates it (the function or attribute). At the same time, she agrees that contemporary neuroscience is limited and cannot yet explain every single aspect of the causal relationship between neural structures (and their processes) and higher intellectual faculties. Furthermore, the fact that there are

neural correlative physical structures in the brain for each of the functions previously attributed to the soul does not mean that there is no soul or that the belief in the soul is no longer needed. The real issue of traditional Christian belief in the human soul is the affirmation of the human person as a being who is spiritual and, therefore, shares in God's reality, which is also spiritual. Human spirituality here is not understood as a mere characteristic of the physical, but as a reality that is united with the physical and is beyond it; spirituality is not only a property or an emergent characteristic produced by physicality. If the higher intellectual functions attributed to the soul are thus linked and dependent on complex material brain structures, this is yet further proof of the intrinsic and inseparable unity of spirit and matter in the unity of body and soul that forms the human person. Body and soul are neither opposing nor autonomous entities. If some specific neurobiological structure is scientifically affirmed in a direct causal relation to a higher intellectual faculty, such as the ability to make moral decisions (also considered a faculty of the spiritual soul), then this only shows how deep and intrinsic the unity of body and soul is.

Following Murphy's reasoning, however, it is a problem if Christian thought attributes the higher intellectual functions solely to the soul as a separate realm. This is one of the valuable contributions of Murphy's work. If human spirituality is predominantly related to the spiritual soul in traditional Christian thought, Murphy's nonreductive physicalism locates human spirituality in the embodied existence.

As in the past, the historical emphasis on the salvation of the soul may result today in a non-committed and unengaged stance by Catholics in particular and Christians in general, regarding the real and embodied/material problems of the world. Murphy

thinks that the Christian spiritual tradition would be different without the dualistic anthropology that gave more importance to the soul than to the body throughout history (28). Although we cannot change the past, we should try to rectify an erroneous mindset that could possibly allow a non-committed spirituality. If religiousness, lived primarily with regard to the salvation of the soul, is restricted to prayers and participation in the sacraments, and if a person's life is not consistent with his/her faith, then something is wrong. An overly spiritualistic religiosity that tacitly devalues the body or material conditions is not in accordance with Christian belief.

Nancey Murphy also argues that it is necessary to abandon or nuance the doctrine of the intermediate state (23). As shown in the first chapter of this thesis, theologians such as Peter Phan and Karl Rahner agree that this doctrine is controversial and cannot be considered as a dogma of faith while remaining open to theological debate. However, Murphy's proposal to abandon or discard some concepts or doctrines that are firmly and historically rooted in tradition and in the religious mindset (e.g. the soul, the intermediate state) might be too radical an approach. If believing in the soul or in the intermediate state somehow leads to religious practices that dichotomize faith and life, and if these practices are not engaged in the transformation of the present life according to the principles of the Gospel, then Jesus' message has been misunderstood and people need to reexamine their faith. Although we might agree that a more comprehensive interpretation of the unity of body and soul is necessary, the mere abandonment of notions such as *soul* or *intermediate state* is not a guarantee of a more incarnated faith. What matters are the consequences of the interpretation of certain concepts and doctrines, including how they shape both Christian practices and the concepts themselves.

The title of Murphy's book offers a good alternative to overcoming dualistic language with regard to the description of the human being. We are, as the title simply suggests, *spirited bodies*. Or perhaps we are, as the Thomist theologian Norris Clarke suggests, *embodied spirits*.⁷⁶ Murphy and Clarke appear to give emphasis to different dimensions of the person. In Clarke's view, the person is defined primarily as a spiritual being who is also an embodied reality. In Murphy's expression *spirited bodies*, the human person is a body that is spiritual, but not in the sense of having a spiritual element in his/her composition. The body is *per se* a reality that is able to be in relationship with God; therefore, it is spiritual. Murphy uses the word *spiritual* as a property or quality of the body. She rejects the existence of an immaterial substance or element in the composition of the human makeup. For her, the body and its own physical properties are spiritual and capable of the spiritual. She does not deny that God is a spiritual entity, yet she also does not explain what it means to be spiritual. For Murphy, the human being does not need to have an immaterial element in his/her composition in order to have spiritual experience because the physical is capable of this spiritual or religious experience (the person is able to have a relationship with God). This capacity enables us to say that the body is also spiritual.

The fact is that Murphy's nonreductive physicalist account of the human person is a provocative reaffirmation of the wholeness of the human person and of the dignity of the body. Her relocation of spirituality from the immaterial soul to the physicality of the person helps us to understand the importance of our embodied existence and our world as the only possible locus for the human encounter and relationship with God.

⁷⁶ See Clarke, 32-3.

CHAPTER 3 Karl Rahner's Understanding of the Human Makeup

In this final chapter, I will review the main ideas in three of Karl Rahner's essays, which I believe can illuminate our discussion on human nature in order to address Nancey Murphy's non-reductionist physicalism and her claim that the belief in the existence of the soul is unnecessary. In these three essays, "The Secret of Life," "The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith," and "The Body In the Order of Salvation," Rahner writes, albeit indirectly, about the human make up.⁷⁷ His interpretation of the traditional Thomistic understanding of the human makeup can help us understand better what Christian teaching about the person communicates in its description of the human being in the body-soul duality. In the conclusion of this thesis, I will reflect upon and compare Rahner's anthropological viewpoint with Murphy's in order to understand what contributions or challenges her nonreductive physicalism makes to the theological understanding of the human person.

My interest in studying Rahner's theology was prompted by the fact that he was a Catholic theologian who, throughout his works, was interested in making a dialogue possible between theology and science/culture in the modern world. Having a solid philosophical and theological foundation, he was able to defend, question, and reinterpret the Church's tenets of faith in a way that was consistent and intelligible in the modern context. His works clearly reflect his theological interest in addressing issues and questions raised by modern science (e.g. in the field of ethics) and his desire to show a

⁷⁷ Karl Rahner, "The Secret of Life" and "The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 6:141-52, 153-77; "The Body in the Order of Salvation," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 17:71-89. References in text are to page numbers of each article.

Church that is able both to face the challenges of its time and to respond appropriately to the questions raised by society.

3.1 “The Secret of Life”

In “The Secret of Life,” Rahner offers his thoughts on the nature of life. He begins the article with a biblical view of the theme and ends it with a reflection on the evolutionary understanding of life. By approaching “the biological concept of life” through theology, Rahner says that there is a near consensus among Catholic scholars in supporting vitalism, “the doctrine which teaches that life is based on a substantial form or entelechy (or whatever else one might call this principle) which is irreducible to the physico-chemical and its inner possibilities.” Rahner continues, “naturally, one emphasises in this connection also the substantial unity of this principle with matter, its correlative ontological principle.” According to vitalism, life is not explainable by chemical or physiological factors intrinsic to biological matter, but rather by the presence of a life principle that is substantially united with matter. Rahner says that neo-scholasticism uses vitalism to explain life in an attempt to defend the dignity of the human being from the threats of materialism (141). Materialism explains life through its physical causations (thus reducing life to physical processes), but vitalism is an alternative of neo-scholasticism to guarantee that life is a principle which is united to the physical and cannot be reduced to it. The problem is that physical constitution ends up being reduced to a mere instrumental role with regard to life. Rahner contends, however, that this hylomorphic vitalistic view of life is “in no way directly relevant to a Christian world-view and theology and that Christian dogmatics can therefore remain neutral on this

matter” (142). Therefore, the consideration that the life of the living being is explainable through some force principle (which is substantially united to the physical constitution of the beings) is not the position of Christian theology. Moreover, explanations regarding life found also in physical biological causality—as in the theory of evolution—are not in contradiction with theological thought.

Rahner notes that for the Old Testament, biological life is a product of the earth enlivened by the “breath” of God, which “must not be confused with a new created substantial principle.” Christian thought understands that God is related to the world as the absolute ground that makes possible the world’s development and its causal connections. God does not intervene as an agent in the world apart from created causality. But this does not mean that the human being is only a product of physical causations and nothing more. Rahner explains that, although human beings are part of the biological evolution of the world and its causal rules, they cannot be reduced to it because of their interior experience of transcendence, spirituality, and freedom. Although the human being is completely related to the material world, he/she is not reducible to it. Furthermore, Christian theology recognizes “the self-transcendence of the inorganic into life” (142) as a process supported/grounded by God.

Rahner says that the theological notion of life “has its own history within the history of revelation,” covering human experience of life, death, and final destination. This destination is called *eternal life*, and this expression is not only a merely metaphorical use of the term *life*, but refers to concrete human life and constitutes “the progressive self-unfolding” (143) of this same life. Rahner explains: “the life lived by man in his unity and as a whole is the becoming, the preparatory stage of eternal life, if it is understood

not merely as one but as a whole in its complete perfection of being” (144). *Eternal life* is, therefore, not a Christian or Biblical metaphorical use of the image of the present life; it refers specifically to its reality in a future and perfect mode. Rahner further elaborates:

The ‘eternal life’ we profess is also the ‘resurrection of the body’, i.e. the perfection of life, which was the starting-point of the history of this concept. The beatific, perfect community-with-God of personal human existence which we profess in hope, is also the perfection of the life which we experience bodily here below and which we must slowly pass through and experience in all its human breadth and depth (144).

Even the concept of *life* in its perfection—in *eternal life*—is related to human life in its concrete and embodied experience.

Nevertheless, it is also important to note that the concept of life is connected to other fundamental notions from revelation, “such as the ‘kingdom of God’, ‘community’, ‘knowledge face to face’, ‘love which remains for ever.’” These notions express other aspects of human life that the mere concept of life does not express: freedom, responsibility, and the capacity of being in dialogue and relationship. Moreover, it is particularly associated with the notion of life, the biblical concept of *ruah*—the “divine life-giving force” that fills the human being “with grace right up to the transfiguration of the body.” In the Scriptures, human life originates in God and is dependent on Him. Therefore, human concrete and embodied life is not a neutral experience that is isolated from God, but is experienced always in relationship with Him. Furthermore, it is important to note Rahner’s emphasis on the Scriptural concept of human life, which contemplates the present life and refers to the future one and “does not permit any dualistic separation into two independent substances” (144). The human person is considered in his/her whole embodied existence in the present and in the eternal life.

Rahner also recalls that, in the Scriptures, the person is considered always as a unified being. Thus, the notion of life is not related to the human soul, but to the whole person. Therefore, the human history of life and death is not the history of the relationship between God and the immortal soul. In the victory of God's action in human resurrection, neither the immortal soul nor the biological body alone, but the whole person, body and soul, enters into the mystery of God in the eternal life (146).

In the second part of his article, Rahner proposes a discourse about life that is more accessible to the contemporary understanding of the world. He states that the notion of evolution, which includes the notion of the self-transcendence of beings is acceptable in theology "under the dynamism of the divine being and under the continuous divine creative power." Within the parameters of self-transcendence, evolution "is an absolutely possible way of conceiving matter, life and spirit as one connected reality and history and even to regard the divine self-communication to the rational creature by the grace of God's *pneuma* as the highest, freely given unsurpassable step and phase of this one evolution" (149). From this evolutionary perspective, the human person, considered at once a material and spiritual being, is in the uppermost level of beings.

In accord with the evolutionary approach, Rahner says that life is understood as an inner unity or interiority of a being who is able to govern and preserve itself and to interact with the environment. Rahner explains that inorganic matter, due to its inner condition and passive openness to the outer world, is the condition of possibility of life. A being is alive when, along with its openness to the world, it is able to achieve interiority, which is manifested through self-preservation (150). From this understanding

of life based on the concepts of interiority and openness, Rahner explains that “it is quite possible to understand the spirit and person as the radicalisation and self-surpassing of life[;] interiority of consciousness becomes self-consciousness; finite openness to the environment becomes infinite transcendence towards being as such” (150-1). Thus, the human person is the living *and* spiritual being who transcends himself/herself and moves toward God and can be in relationship with Him.

Rahner emphasizes that human life is the unity of biological and spiritual lives: the finite spirit, which is infinitely open, forms along with biological life, the unity of the person—a biological reality who is “sensible *so as to* be capable of being spiritual.” Rahner says that openness and interiority allow “self-possession and self-direction” (151), which in their higher levels express the reality of the person. He explains:

Where the openness of such life becomes unbounded and there thus appears the inner unity in the form of self-disposition, proper subjectivity and freedom, there is the real life of the spiritual person. Even this is always still ‘life’ in the genuine ‘biological’ sense, a life which man has not simply ‘in addition’ side by side with his life as a spiritual person but rather as the inner, necessary moment of the life of the spiritual person itself (151).

In this view, human spirituality seems to be linked with certain characteristics of the human person, such as subjectivity and freedom. This “spiritual life,” which has God as its “secret ground,” is supported and, therefore, cannot be separated from the concrete materiality of the biological body and of the surrounding world. Thus, spiritual life is completely bound to biological life. The human person is enabled to receive the self-communication of God through His grace, understood as an innermost power in the human being. Human spiritual life is enabled by God, who is not only the mysterious and absolute ground of the whole person, but also his/her

goal and the possibility of achievement of his/her finality: the fulfillment of the whole bodily and spiritual human life in the eternity of God.

3.2 “The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith”

In “The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith,” Rahner addresses the issue of materialism by discussing what he considers to be the correct understanding of the relationship and unity between the material and the non-material realities for Christian faith. At the beginning of this essay, while explaining why he added “in the Christian understanding of faith” to the title, he states that “there is today a world-wide materialism which disputes the foundation of the Christian faith.” Materialism denies the existence of immaterial or spiritual elements in reality while affirming that everything that exists is only matter. Consequently, everything related to the human being (e.g., intelligence and consciousness) is nothing more than the result of the development or “evolution of the material world” (153). Because materialism denies the existence of the spiritual, this standpoint is in contradiction with Christian belief. However, before dismissing or judging materialism as erroneous, Rahner says that it is a duty for Christians to face up to and understand it and, in a better and more appropriate way, to address its assertions (153-4).⁷⁸

Christian faith, in contrast to materialism, believes that God created material and spiritual realities and that both orders of things have been present and united in the created world since the beginning: “Christian faith recognises a unity of spirit and matter

⁷⁸ Rahner affirms that he intends to contribute to the debate through this essay, and that his reflections “are based on the conviction that we Christians have an absolute duty and right to face up to certain basic attitudes of the man of today, and quite simply to assimilate them, and that, as long as we do this properly, we become better Christians with a more Christian faith” (153).

by their very origin, in their history and in their final end” (154). Thus, any belief that separates spirit and matter at one of these moments would not be truly Christian. This unity is based in God (“absolute mystery”), who is the common and unique ground, the cause and origin of both matter and spirit (154-5). However, Rahner states that the Christian belief in God as the source of both spirit and matter—and the “cause” of their unity—is not completely obvious and thus needs to be understood correctly. Moreover, even among Christians, matter is generally considered less than spirit, or even considered a negative reality that is contrary to the spiritual and divine:

Again and again, matter has been experienced as something dark, anti-divine, obscure or chaotic; again and again, it has been seen as something which stands in contradiction and bitter combat against the spirit understood as the true image and representative of God in the world, a combat which constitutes the history of nature and of the world. Again and again, Christianity has protested against these conceptions as incorrect and hasty interpretations of human experience and, even though not everything in this falsely interpreted human experience was wrong, has condemned them as error and heresy (155-6).

Although there are distinctions between matter and spirit, they are not contradictory realities because both have their origin in God, their ground and creator. In the creative act of God, matter is not a secondary product in relation to spirit. For Christian faith, matter is good and is not an opponent to the spirit (156).⁷⁹

Christian faith asserts that God, although defined as spiritual, is different from the created spiritual reality, as well as from the created material reality. Rahner explains God’s distinctiveness from his creation thusly:

God’s ‘spirituality’ is therefore from the very start of a qualitatively different kind from that to be found within the world; the latter is what is different from matter, that which presupposes but does not create materiality, whereas the former is the ground of spirit and matter in the world, the ground which has an equally immediate relationship to both. This ground is called ‘spirit’

⁷⁹ Rahner describes matter as “finiteness, temporality and spatio-temporal differentiation in its history and its distinction” (156).

only because the 'spirituality' experienced by us rightly appears as the higher reality within the world (156).

God as spirit is different from the spiritual created reality. The former exists in its unity with matter, and both are in relationship with their ground and creator.

Rahner explains that the Old Testament's anthropological standpoint contributes to the understanding that there is no separation between the material and the spiritual realities in the human being. He writes:

Man in the Old Testament writings is very undualistically and unplatonicly a unity in his being and history, and the world is seen from the very beginning as an environment intended for man. Man comes quite unashamedly from the earth and is therefore seen even in scripture, without detriment to the fact that he is also known to be the spiritual, responsible partner of God, called directly by God, as (to express it in a more modern idiom) the product of the material cosmos, without scripture thereby allowing this one man in the paradoxical duality of his origin to break up into two quite independent realities called spirit and matter. Consequently, for the Old Testament writings in particular, the whole man is made to suffer by death; the earthly spatio-temporal life is the life of the personal spirit for whom no other life, either before or after this life of material spatiotemporality, is available for the shaping of his freely achieved finality; and the fulfilment, to which man looks hopefully, is not a liberation of the spirit into an existence removed from matter but is the 'resurrection of the flesh', i.e. a fulfilment of human existence in which, even though in an unimaginable manner, the one whole man composed of spirit and matter reaches his perfection (160).

Thus, in the human person, spirit and matter are not separable, neither in their origin, nor in their history or finality. In the Old Testament mindset, even in the case of death, it does not make sense to think of human existence in a purely spiritual manner.

Similarly, in Christian thought, there is no human spiritual existence which is not also material. Even in the human relationship with God, who is spirit, human materiality is required: "Always and everywhere, man is regarded by Christianity, precisely in the history of his relationship to God, as a bodily, material and social being who can always only have this relationship to God in this the material constitution of

his existence” (161). In Christian faith, human materiality cannot be thought of as a temporary reality that ultimately will be surpassed, but, rather, as one that will be part of the fulfillment of creation (161). Nonetheless, although spirit and matter are indissolubly related to each other, this unity does not mean sameness. Rahner says:

In all we have said, unity has never meant uniformity, but has simply envisaged the fact that in the realm of the one and yet pluralistic reality of the world, in so far as it is distinct from God its absolutely one ground, what we call spirit and what we call matter are at least in the actual order of reality irreversibly related to one another and that together, in spite of their differences, they constitute the one reality of the world, and that they do not exist merely one beside the other as if enclosed merely by an empty space (162).

Rahner explains that, according to the Church’s magisterium, with respect to the doctrines of creation and the human being, spirit and matter are united, but spirit is not something derived from matter (163). The human soul is not a by-product of matter, but, like matter, the soul has its own source in God:

The Church’s magisterium emphasises in the general doctrine of creation, in the doctrine of man in general and in view of the question of hominisation, that spirit and matter are not the same, that the spirit is not simply the secondary product of matter as such, something which can be derived from it; it emphasises that man, because he is a spirit, takes up a metaphysically irreducible position in the cosmos and that therefore his origin in his spirituality cannot be simply out of matter as such, but that as a spiritual person, i.e. in view of his ‘soul’, he is directly referred to God as to his source (162-3).

Thus, human spirituality cannot be reduced to matter, nor be thought of as something that is produced by matter. God is the origin of both materiality and spirituality in the human being.

Although there is no precise definition of what is meant by spirit and matter in the Church’s magisterium, Rahner believes it is “necessary to know what spirit and matter really signify,” in order to understand fully the Church’s affirmations without collapsing “into an absolute dualism which would no longer be capable of understanding spirit and

matter as a unity in origin, history and goal” (163). He explains that “spirit is an *a priori* datum of human knowledge,” and it would be a mistake to think that the human being knows primarily and precisely what matter is, more than what spirit is (163). What the human person primordially knows is her/his own spiritual knowledge of an object. Therefore, the understanding of what matter is, is only possible because of this *a priori* datum in human knowledge that is spirit. Spirit is associated with the “knowing subject,” whereas matter is associated with the “object which can be known” (by the spirit). Our own basic self knowledge, in the act of knowing, is at once spiritual and material.

With respect to the materialistic view, which excludes spiritual reality from its understanding of the world and considers matter as the only existing reality, Rahner argues that even the very explanation of what matter is does not have a self-evident or simple answer. However, this is an issue for ontology, and one that can only be answered because of the metaphysical experience of the spirit (166).⁸⁰ Relying on human knowledge, Rahner contends that spirit, which can be perceived by experience, precedes matter, and thus can also explain what matter is, not the contrary: “the very question about a possible deduction of the spirit from matter has no meaning, since one

⁸⁰ “The exact nature of matter, therefore, is not at all as immediately evident as it might seem at first sight. The spirit, however, is already posited with the question about it and is already experienced in its nature; its meaning can be deduced from the question itself by a transcendental deduction. What matter is in general and on the whole, is not a question for natural science as such but a question of ontology on the basis of an existential metaphysics; such an ontology can answer this question because it already knows what spirit is and thus on the basis of this metaphysical experience of the spirit can state what the material as such is, viz. that which is closed in its individuality to the experience of the transcendence of being as such. On this basis also, it must then be made clear that ‘spirit’ cannot basically be deduced from any combination of the material, however it might be conceived, i.e. from something cut off from itself and its reference to being as a whole, and that therefore there exists an essential difference in this sense between spirit and matter” (166).

would be trying to deduce what is logically and ontologically prior from what is posterior” (166).

However, although the spirit precedes matter ontologically, Rahner insists that they “cannot be absolutely separate from one another.” The process of apprehending knowledge expresses this inner relationship between the material and the spiritual in the human person. The human spirit apprehends the material world through sense perception and, although materialism would claim that perception is a physical property, “sense perception is to be understood merely as the condition for the possibility of spiritual knowledge which the latter creates for itself by distinguishing it from itself, and thus asserts once more the ‘relationship’ between spirit and matter” (167). In this relationship, one cannot be considered separated from the other. Moreover, not only does spirit affect matter, but matter is the condition for the achievement of the created spirit, which when united with matter, is turned toward God. Therefore, all created reality, material and spiritual, is in a “relation of mutual conditioning” (168).

Rahner asserts:

Thus matter and the material are thinkable for a Christian theistic philosophy and theology only as a factor connected with and directed towards the (finite) spirit. Hence it will not be permissible to say that Christians are merely interested in bringing out the difference between spirit and matter and that they have overlooked the inner ontological essential relationship and the relation of mutual conditioning (168).

Together, unlimited spirit in limited matter, can achieve their fulfillment in the absolute spirit, which is God.

Rahner states that “matter and the material are thinkable for a Christian theistic philosophy and theology only as a factor connected with and directed towards the (finite) spirit” (168). He affirms that matter alone, due to its own limitations, cannot attain

what we consider human characteristics, i.e., “being-conscious-of-itself, knowledge, freedom[,] and transcendence towards God” (168). The material being (matter) cannot transcend its limitations except through the spirit. Rahner writes: “This unlimiting of the limited (called matter), however, does happen in the spirit, and this above all where the spirit itself enters so closely into materiality that it differentiates it from itself *and* keeps it as a factor of its own becoming as a spirit, of its becoming-conscious-of-itself, viz. in man” (169).

Matter without the spiritual soul would be only *materia prima*, merely the possibility of becoming the human being. The spiritual soul is the condition that allows matter to become the human person (body = spirit + primary matter); in other words, for matter to overcome its limitations, to actualize what was only potential, and to achieve the features that characterize the human person the spiritual soul is necessary. For Rahner,

Only in this way is it possible even in a Christian philosophy to explain the Christian dogma which tells us that the spiritual soul (precisely as spiritual) is the form of the body; for thomistic philosophy this ultimately means that every reality in man, including even every positive material reality, is the reality and expression of his spirit (169).

Although he argues against materialism, Rahner explains that this understanding of the relationship between spirit and matter has nothing to do with dualistic Platonism, stating that

the spirit (at least in its finite form) can never be conceived in the Christian sense in such a way that it must move away from anything material in order to become perfected, or that its perfection actually grows in proportion to its distance from matter (which is the eternal temptation of a false platonic interpretation of Christianity); the spirit must only be conceived in the sense that the finite spirit searches for and finds itself through the fulfillment of the material itself (169).

The soul is the created spirit seeking its achievement with and through its unity with matter. In Christian interpretations of the human being, the fulfillment of this spirit depends on the fulfillment of matter (and vice versa). Consequently, the human person is only understood as a spiritual and material being, soul and body.

From the mystery of the incarnation of the Logos—the infinite and absolute spirit in a definitive, indissoluble unity with limited and created matter—Rahner explains what matter is and restates the inseparability of spirit and matter. He writes:

Matter is, therefore, the openness and the bringing-itself-to-appear of the personal spirit in the finite world and hence is from its very origin related to the spirit, is a moment in the spirit, and indeed a moment of the eternal Logos as he freely but in fact exists, and this for all eternity. This is not meant in any way to turn matter idealistically into spirit, for by the same statements the spirit is equally originally ‘materialised’. It comes to be seen, rather, that spirit and matter cannot, like any two objects of our individual experience, be thought of as existing side by side in alien disparateness from one another. [...] Spirit and matter, even though distinct from one another, must rather be thought of—as in the first original experience—as factors of created reality indissolubly referred to one another. Thus the Christian can only really be a materialist and a spiritualist at the same time if these two words are meant to indicate that spirit and matter are not ultimately words referring to particular regions of the total reality, regions which lie side by side, but refer to factors which wherever encountered, though essentially different, are everywhere correlative constitutive moments of the one reality” (170-1).

In addressing the issue of the appearance of the human being in the history of the created world, Rahner says this is a “real problem” for theology, especially because some (such as those who uphold materialism) can affirm that the spiritual being (the human person with the ability for “self-consciousness and freedom”) is considered a product of material evolution (172). However, God is the only ground and creator of all existing reality, and the created spirit does not originate from matter. All spiritual reality comes from God’s “new and creative initiative” (173) and cannot be thought of as merely a by-product of material evolution.

Nonetheless, the issue surrounding the appearance of the spiritual soul at a specific point in the evolutionary process is important and needs to be understood in order to be addressed in an appropriately Christian and non-dualistic way. Drawing upon the narrative of the creation of the human being in the Old Testament, Rahner states that the whole person is a product of God's creative act. There is no such division of the human being into two different parts, as if the human material part (the biological structure or body) came from the earth as a result of the evolution of the world, and the other part, the spiritual (the soul), came from God, in an act completely independent of evolution (174).⁸¹

In order to address this question in a non-dualistic way, Rahner proposes the notion of active self-transcendence. There is, he contends, a kind of "becoming" in which the genuinely new appears: "Becoming is, therefore, always and of its very nature a self-transcendence of the cause, effected by the lower itself, it is an active surpassing of self" (174). In this notion of becoming, the being transcends itself and becomes more than it was. For Rahner, God is the cause of the self-becoming of the finite being, but God does not act as an external cause, rather as an inner cause (175). The absolute being makes it possible for the finite being to "cause" its own process of self becoming (becoming something more than what it was before). Rahner argues:

⁸¹ "Furthermore, the negative answer to this new question corresponds little with the non-dualistic basic outlook of the Old Testament in which the one man is a being of the earth and the result of the creative act of God, without scripture – in order to make this comprehensible – dividing man into a being originating directly from the earth and a soul coming directly from God alone. Furthermore, this division of man into a part which is the product of the evolution of the world and into another which must be kept away from such evolutionary thought, looks too much like a compromise to the feeling of the modern natural scientist, a compromise which seems rather to belong to the bad variety of compromise rather than to the good. Finally, such a negative answer which divides man into two parts only related rather too extrinsically to one another, and an answer which does far too little justice to the real essential unity of the constitutive elements of man, makes it difficult to understand what after all is today an observed fact in paleontology, viz. that man has a long preparatory history which, in ever higher steps of living forms endowed with psychic life, at least leads very closely to him" (173-4).

Since every finite causality works in virtue of the absolute being within the finite and this always and essentially, so that the finite being has its own being and activity precisely through the existence of the absolute being within it, we can and must grant causality to the finite being; even causality for what is more than itself and towards which it surpasses itself (175).

The absolute being, therefore, is the cause “from within” rather than an extrinsic causation. This cause from within makes it possible for the finite being to transcend what it is and to become more. In other words, the finite being has his own causality due to the inner presence of the absolute being, God (175).

Following this logic, Rahner proposes an understanding of evolution as a process that includes a real self-transcendence of created reality. This action cannot be observed (176), so it is not possible to point out the exact moment in which the human being emerges. However, it can be affirmed “without hesitation that a development of the material in the direction of the spirit and the self-transcendence of the material into the spirit is, both philosophically and in the Christian sense, a legitimate conception.” Self-transcendence, which happens “by the power of the dynamism of the absolute being” can bring about a “new nature” (177).

3.3 “The Body in the Order of Salvation”

In the essay entitled “The Body in the Order of Salvation”, Rahner discusses several aspects of the Church’s teaching that are essential “to form[ing] a theological concept of the human body” (71). First, the body is created by God.⁸² The body is

directly willed by God. This body is not just something that came about by chance; nor was it fortuitous in the sense that God really intended something different. It is not merely a by-product. It is not only something which came about by way of man’s history – for example, because the spirit turned away

⁸² In footnote number 2, page 71, Rahner indicates that this statement of faith can be found in the papal encyclical written by Pius XII in 1959.

from God in some history that took place before the foundation of the world, acquiring this concrete form as a result. Space and time – and therefore history – and therefore the human body – and therefore human sexuality – are not things which God did not *really* desire (72).

Therefore, the “human bodily nature of man” was desired by God and “owes its existence to God’s direct, creative intervention.” Rahner seems to argue against any negative conceptions with respect to the human body by affirming all of its dignity as something created and desired by God. Rahner is clearly saying that the body is not a product of mere chance. The body is not the result of the negative disobedience of the spirit, but is, instead, part of the intentional and creative act of God. Rahner states: “I should only like to emphasise the fact so that we can see how much the Church’s teaching authority stresses the fact that man’s bodily nature was created, willed, by the one, eternal, holy, just and incorporeal God, and puts this in the foreground of faith’s consciousness” (72).

Second, Rahner says that this body is made out of the dust of the earth (72).⁸³ Indeed, not only the body, but the whole human being was made by God out of dust: “We are told that this independent God (who in his creative activity is not dependent on any presupposition in the way of matter) made man from the dust of the earth. We are not told that he made man’s *body* out of dust—though that is our modern, platonic interpretation. He made *man* out of the dust of the earth” (73).⁸⁴ The biblical story has a profound tension that we should not deny: we are created out of dust and yet created by God.

⁸³ See Gen 2:7.

⁸⁴ “The Scriptures let us feel this tremendous tension and the problems involved, even in this simple story, in which God acts as the direct creator, who makes something out of the dust of the earth. It lets the tension and the problem remain, without softening them or trivialising them—the tension and the problem that are involved in the fact that man is created out of dust and is yet created by God” (73).

Third, original sin is transmitted through procreation (73). According to Rahner, the point of this teaching is that sinfulness is something shared by all human beings. Fourth, the Word became flesh.⁸⁵ Rahner explains that “flesh” (*sarx*) in this context means “man; but truly physical man, man indeed who bears the marks of death, suffering man, man in his tribulation” (74). In asserting that the term *sarx* refers to the whole human person, Rahner offers his theological interpretation⁸⁶ of the incarnation event and its importance for understanding the body (and the human being) theologically. He writes:

[...] that it is a fact of faith that when God desires to manifest himself, it is as man that he does so. [...] If we want to know what man is, or what flesh means, then we must, so to speak, choose this theological definition of the statement ‘And the Word became flesh,’ saying: flesh, man as a bodily, concrete, historical being is just what comes into being when the Logos, issuing from himself, utters himself. Man is therefore God’s self-utterance, out of himself into the empty nothingness of the creature (74).

It is clear that Rahner’s anthropology is guided and shaped by the image of Christ, the Incarnate Word. Jesus, the Word made flesh, defines what the human being is: the self-utterance of God in the created world. Rahner recognizes that this logical interpretation does not fully explain what the human being is, but he stresses that the human being is a mystery, just as God is an absolute mystery (75). Therefore, anthropology is connected with theology, and a discourse about God is also a discourse about the human being. As Rahner suggests:

So when we have to talk, and want to talk, about man in the ultimate, most radical and absolute sense – not about man’s spirituality, but about bodily man, man in the flesh, about the *sarx*, which always means the whole man, but in his actual, bodily nature – then we really have to talk about God. So when as Christians we ask what bodily man is, in the ultimate meaning of the word,

⁸⁵ See Jn 1:14.

⁸⁶ Rahner himself affirms that his interpretation goes beyond what Church teaching states about the Incarnation.

then—if we want to give a final answer, not a provisional one—the only answer we can give is, ‘And the Word became flesh.’ The *sarx* is what comes into being when the Logos becomes something which it is not already in itself, in its divine nature. [...]The flesh which is man is the self-utterance of God himself (75).

Rahner admits that his interpretation is not “covered by the explicit teaching of the magisterium” (75), but insists on the importance of recognizing the radical nature of the incarnation and its implication for how we understand the bodily nature of the human being and its significance for how we understand human salvation.

Fifth, all human beings are redeemed through Christ’s death (75). Without dismissing the spiritual dimension of the redemptive act of obedience and the self-giving love of Christ, it is necessary to stress that human redemption is completely and irreversibly connected to a very human and embodied event (75-6). The bodily (fleshly) nature of the redemptive event is what unites all human beings with Christ.

Sixth, Rahner discusses the resurrection of the flesh. Rahner observes that the use of the term *flesh* in the article of the creed refers to the whole human person, “body and soul, in that very unity in which man is flesh” (77).

Seventh, the human being is a unity of body and soul. The doctrine of the Church affirms the “real, true, radical, substantial, original unity of body and soul” (78), without implying “similarity” (identity) between both and without reducing one to the other. This means that there was not a “previous state” in which “soul” and “body” existed separately. Although some councils, such as the Fifth Lateran Council, emphasized the immortality of the soul, Catholic faith believes in the profound unity of body and soul (78).

For Rahner, the first consequence for a theology of the body, based on the seven previously discussed statements of faith, is that, although body and soul are different, such a “distinction excludes the possibility of an existential cleavage between [them]” (80). It is an overly exaggerated criticism of Western theology to say that it has “broken up the ancient biblical anthropology of unified man (which belongs to the New Testament as well as the Old) into a Greek duality of *anima* and *corpus*, soul and body, thus distorting or even corrupting the original biblical message” (80-1). Even though the Old and the New Testaments distinguish soul and body, this distinction is not exactly the same as the one made by the “teaching authority of the Church” (81). Rahner states that Church teaching uses the term *soul* with a meaning that is different from that used in the Scriptures.⁸⁷

The Council of Vienne defined “the substantial unity of body and soul and [stated] that the *anima* (soul) was the *forma corporis* (the form of the body)” (81). Rahner asserts that the Church’s distinction between body and soul, although legitimate, is only possible in the metaphysical and meta-existential sense, not in the existential sense. He explains further:

[...] it is a metaphysical and meta-existential distinction in the sense that in actual fact man never encounters mere body and never encounters pure soul. What we call ‘inwardness’, our innermost heart, is the inwardness of an actual, bodily spirit, an incarnate spirit. And what we call man’s externals are the external form of this very same incarnate spirit. Wherever we encounter ourselves, wherever we are within our own grasp, as it were, inwardly or outwardly, we have to do with an actual, concrete person. And we can never so to speak materially separate these two from each other. The loftiest spiritual

⁸⁷ “When the New Testament talks about the soul, it means something which does not have very much to do with what we understand by the term. According to biblical theology it is quite possible to hold that the whole anthropology of the New Testament is still entirely the same as the biblical theology of the Old; and in Old Testament theology there is really only the one, bodily person who – since he is God’s partner – is of course what we call ‘spirit’ as well, but in such a way that the Old Testament never really distinguishes between the body and the spiritual soul in our philosophical (platonic), scholastic sense” (81).

thought, the most sublime moral decision, the most radical act of a responsible liberty is still a bodily perception or a bodily decision. It is still incarnate perception and incarnate liberty – and hence, even by virtue of its own nature, it is still in interplay with everything that is not free, not spiritual, and so on. And conversely, even the most external thing about man is still something that really belongs to the realm of his spirituality; it is still something that is not just mere body (82).

Thus, it is not possible to make an existential distinction between what in the human being belongs to the soul and not to the body, and vice versa (e.g., there is no intellectual faculty that is only a product of the soul and not of the body). All characteristics of the human person are spiritual and corporeal.

The second consequence for a theology of the body is that the body and soul form an indivisible unity. Rahner reaffirms that, “[a]ccording to the doctrine of the Church, we have to go further than what we have just said. We must even maintain that an existential cleavage between the body and the soul is actually *impossible*” (82).

Therefore, body and soul only can be understood in their unity because they only exist in their unity.

At this point in his discussion, Rahner draws upon the event of the incarnation of the Word to assert the unity of the human person. According to Catholic doctrine, it is not possible to separate the obedience and love of Jesus from the redemptive embodied event of his passion. Neither his love and obedience, nor his embodied passion, are separable realities (83). From this indivisibility of the reality of the Logos made flesh, Rahner applies his conclusion to the general human condition: “In other words, the unity of man has been originally so designed by God the Creator that although man knows that he is a unity of different elements, in the existential implementation of his existence he can never, as it were, get behind this unity, so as to take sides purely with the spirit or purely with the

body” (83). Therefore, based on Rahner’s earlier statements about the body, the theological conclusion emerges that it is not possible for there to be “any existential cleavage” between body and soul (83).

The third consequence of a theology of the body is that, although it is possible to say that the human being “is made up of body and soul,” this is not an accurate statement. Rahner explains that the more fitting way to describe this “in terms of Thomist philosophy or metaphysics” is that the human being is made “out of spirit and *materia prima*, or ‘first matter’—which one might translate as empty otherness” (83). The human body is not the material part of the human person, whereas the soul is the spiritual; “bodily nature is itself the reality of the spirit” (84), it is the spirit expressing itself in matter (*materia prima*), which, by being the “empty otherness,” allows the spirit to become something more. The body is the manifestation of the created spirit in the *materia prima*—or the spirit in its self-becoming in the emptiness of otherness in space and time. At the same time, what we call the human soul is the created spirit as the *form* of matter. Rahner explains this reasoning through the example he offers—that when one sees the human body, it is also the soul that is seen: “What I see the spirit of man in space and time to be is, in an ambiguous sense, precisely what I call body” (84).

Rahner then explains that this Christian notion of the body as an expression of the spirit “bringing-of-[itself]-to-manifestation” in the empty otherness of the first matter can be criticized as a dualistic view dichotomizing “body or spirit and first matter.” However, if there is a kind of dualism in Christian anthropology, it is not Neoplatonic

dualism “because in *our* dualistic conception—if we want to call it dualism at all—we are clear that what we actually encounter is always what has already been unified” (85).

As asserted in the essay “The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith,” Rahner states that, although distinct, spirit and matter are inseparably united in the human bodily nature. For Rahner, this understanding has tremendous consequences. One of them is that the human being will always refer to a “synthesis” of spirit and matter, and never be solely one of them. There is nothing in the human being that can be deemed as spiritual that is not also material, since human bodily nature is the utterance of spirit in the otherness that is matter. But the ultimate consequence of a theology of the body is that human bodily existence is a system that is open (87) and connected with the entire material world: “we are all living in one and the same body – the world” (88).

Lastly, even though he does not touch upon the official doctrine of the Church which states that the soul is immortal and remains alive between bodily death and resurrection, Rahner simply upholds the unity of the person in the embodied nature, even in his/her final destination.

* * *

The three essays presented here show Rahner’s theological effort to describe the human person as the unity of spirit and matter, which, although they are distinct realities, form the inseparable personal embodied nature. The way Rahner construes this unity is a reliable interpretation of the Church’s teaching about the person’s composition in the

body-soul unity, and it is in accordance with the evolutionary understanding of the human person and the world. Moreover, Rahner's theological approach does not contradict scientific knowledge, which describes the human person based on physical and biological explanations. Next, in the conclusion, I will compare Rahner's and Murphy's views of the human person.

CONCLUSION

In this concluding discussion, I will try to address Nancey Murphy's nonreductionist physicalism by referring to Rahner's stance on the human makeup in the three essays I have just reviewed. Murphy argues that there is no spiritual or immaterial element such as a soul in the human makeup and that this belief is no longer needed because of the development of science, especially neuroscience, as we saw in the second chapter. Murphy attempts to establish a dialogue between Christian theology and science. Because of the advances in science, there is no longer a reason to uphold the doctrine of the existence and immortality of the soul which, according to her, was used as an explanation for the higher intellectual faculties of the human person.

Clearly, Rahner's anthropological stance involves much more than the ideas we have examined in these three essays. However, I think that this material is sufficient for us to address several points raised by Nancey Murphy's nonreductive physicalism, especially with regard to the human soul. I would like to note that, in the second essay discussed, "The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith," Rahner addresses materialism's rejection of the existence of spiritual and immaterial reality.

In these three essays, Rahner offers us a logical explanation of the Christian and Catholic understanding of the human nature as body and soul. Nonetheless, it is necessary to remember that Catholic teachings regarding the existence of the spiritual soul are not completely explained in the dogmatic formulations, which I cited in the introduction of this thesis. Thus, these teachings need to be interpreted, which is precisely

what Rahner does. An expert in Saint Thomas's theology, he re-interprets Aquinas's Aristotelian approach to human nature, which considers the soul as the *form* of the body. In doing so, Rahner attempts to address appropriately the challenges of materialism, which disregards the belief in the spiritual soul; he also enlists Aquinas to uncover the errors of Neoplatonic dualism, which dichotomizes the person.

Rahner views the human person as an embodied spiritual being who is open to the absolute mystery of God, his/her ground, and the one for whom the human being yearns. The person is the spirit in its process of self-becoming, which is made possible through and in matter, in time and space. For Rahner, Murphy's nonreductive physicalism would be in contradiction to a Christian understanding of the human nature, which is spirit as well as matter. Although Murphy qualifies the physical body as spiritual, she does not agree that the person is the unity of distinct realities, named matter and spirit. For Murphy, there is one reality, matter. The complex organization of matter as the human body is able to have a relationship with God and, therefore, can be called spiritual. She does not dismiss the spiritual, but she locates it in matter. For her, the body is spiritual; she does not abandon the spiritual, but she rejects the notion of spirit understood as a reality that is distinct from matter. As stated above, however, this spiritual is a capacity of the physical in the human person. If Murphy does argue for a spiritual dimension to the human being, it would be a dimension in the sense of a characteristic of human physicality. In this way, Murphy's stance, which asserts that there is no spiritual soul or any spiritual reality that is different from matter in the human makeup, contradicts the traditional Christian understanding that God created different realities, spiritual and material, which, although distinct, are united in their origin, history, and finality.

Murphy thinks that the notion of a non-material and immortal soul is a platonic and mistaken idea that occurred in Christian doctrine throughout history as a means of explaining the inexplicability of the higher human intellectual faculties. In order to conceive of the human person as a spiritual being, Murphy suggests that it is not necessary to believe that there is an immaterial element in the human makeup. Murphy affirms that her physicalism is nonreductive; by this, she means that what is genuinely human, such as freedom, consciousness, and spirituality are properties of the physical body and are not just the result of physical causes (the effects of physical and biological laws). Instead, they are the result of the complex interaction of the physical body and social and cultural aspects. Although the Christian tradition relates higher intellectual faculties to functions of the human spiritual soul, complex organized biological matter *per se* (without the help of some immaterial element) is what allows for such abilities, according to Murphy. She describes the human body as “spiritual” not because of the presence of a spiritual element that is distinct from matter, but because of the capacity that the human person has of being able to have a relationship with God. Thus, the “spirituality” of the human being is only a quality or property of the material body. There is not a soul that acts in the body, but simply a body, which is spiritual.⁸⁸

As I stated previously, Murphy does not deny that the human being has spirituality, but in her nonreductive physicalism, she locates this spirituality in the physical body, as a function of it. This location of the spiritual in the body is not negative for the understanding of human spirituality; instead, it deepens the insight that human spirituality can only be lived in and through the physical body. Human spirituality is an incarnated event. What

⁸⁸ Murphy does not explain how it is possible for there to be a relationship between the material human being and the spiritual and immaterial supreme being, who is God.

Murphy fails to mention, however, is that, for Catholic doctrine, the spiritual soul is important because it is the spiritual principle, which in unity with the physical body, is what particularly makes the human being in the image of God.⁸⁹ Therefore, for Catholic doctrine, the soul is not merely an explanation for higher intellectual functions; it is believed to be the spiritual principle that, despite being united, is distinct from matter.

Rahner does not address whether or not there is an immaterial and spiritual reality in the human makeup. Because the person is the unity of spirit and first matter, the human body can also be considered a spiritual reality. This unity with first matter is what makes the spirit's self-becoming possible, which results in the human bodily nature. Therefore, the key difference between Murphy and Rahner is that, for him, the human body is not merely matter, but also spirit; all specifically human features (higher intellectual faculties, self-consciousness, freedom, and spirituality) are only possible because of the action of the created spirit in unity with first matter. If we say that the body is material and spiritual, we are not simply describing properties or qualities of the body, but explaining the body as the result of the unity of distinct realities. This is why, even if neuroscience someday is able to understand and describe in detail all the causal relationships between the higher human faculties and physical correlative processes, this knowledge will not dismiss traditional Christian teaching about the soul. This teaching, which says that all higher human intellectual faculties are functions of the human soul, does not deny that these same faculties are also completely related to the physical body. The human body and soul "are" and exist while in their unity, and it is not possible to separate what belongs to the soul from what belongs to the body.

⁸⁹ See *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §. 362-363.

For Rahner, pure matter cannot achieve personhood in itself (and the same can be affirmed regarding pure spirit). Only the unlimited spirit in unity with limited matter can make matter transcend its limited nature and achieve humanness—to become turned toward the absolute spirit, who is God. The human person is the result of the self-becoming of the created spirit in the otherness of matter. This spiritual element, while the form of first matter, is the spiritual soul, and there is no human embodied existence or personhood without it. In this sense, only through the unity of matter and spirit, is the human person (embodied spirit) possible.

It is also important to stress that, in Christian thought, the spiritual soul is not considered an extrinsic power or some kind of immaterial element that animates the body and orchestrates its movements. The body is not a dummy, nor is the soul a ventriloquist. The human person does not merely have a body and a soul, but is indeed his/her body and soul.

The soul is the created spirit while the *form* of the first matter, and the outcome of this union is the personal embodied existence. The human body is, thus, the visibility of the unity of first matter and the spiritual soul. If we were to attempt an explanation of the meaning of body and soul according to Rahner's interpretation of the Christian understanding of the human makeup, we might say that the human body is first matter *in-formed* by the created spirit, whereas the spiritual soul is the created spirit *in-forming* first matter. Hence, body and soul are not distinct elements in the human makeup in the same way that the created spirit and first matter are. Although the popular Catholic viewpoint directly associates the body with what is material and the soul with what is spiritual and

immaterial, the body is not identical to matter, nor can the soul be completely identified with spirit.

It is important to note that both Murphy and Rahner are against dualistic considerations of the human person. Both contend that the Christian anthropological approach needs to consider the person as a whole and not as separable parts. However, as we have seen, their understandings of the human person are different. For Rahner, even if one calls the Christian view of the unity of spirit and matter “dualism,” this dualism cannot be interpreted as Platonic or Neoplatonic dualism because the material and spiritual realities have been united since the beginning, and will be forever.

* * *

In this thesis, I have attempted to understand the problem of whether or not the human soul exists. In the first chapter on biblical perspectives, this study demonstrates that there is no definitive answer in the Scriptures for anthropological questions such as the existence of a spiritual element such as the soul in the human makeup. Although there is a strong tendency to construe the Scriptures as endorsing a monistic anthropological understanding of the human person, there is still room for dualism in the Scriptures as seen in the analyses presented by Wright and Cooper. The diversity of the biblical understanding of the human person, leads to a recognition that there is no definitive Scriptural answer to endorse or to contradict Nancey Murphy’s nonreductive physicalism. Nevertheless, the belief in the existence of the human soul also finds its roots in the Scriptures, especially in texts supportive of the notion that something of the human person survives physical death and carries human identity until the resurrection. Moreover, Christian doctrine developed its own understanding about the soul over the

centuries. Even though this understanding does not contradict the Scriptures, it certainly goes beyond it with respect to its philosophical and theological foundations.

Now, we should return to the question posed by Nancey Murphy in the opening discussion in the introduction to her book: “Are humans immortal souls temporarily housed in physical bodies, or are we our bodies?” (*ix*). Of course, her intent in posing such a question was to present two opposing visions, dualism and physicalist monism. Dualism considers the human being to be made up of different and separable substances—body and soul; in dualistic thinking, the person is ultimately understood as the soul, and his/her body merely has the temporary purpose of “housing” the soul, which is the seat of personhood. The second view, physicalist monism, or physicalism, considers the person to be his/her physical body. In Murphy’s view, the answer to her question is a physicalist one, except that she qualifies her physicalism as non-reductionist. The main point of this non-reductionist vision resides in her consideration that the human being’s faculties, such as freedom, morality, and spirituality, are not only determined by physical causes, but also by historical, social, and cultural aspects of reality.

However, in considering Rahner’s understanding of the unity of matter and spirit in the human person, our answer to Murphy’s question might instead be “neither.” Or perhaps we might say, “we are our bodies, but not only.” And perhaps this is precisely what Murphy wants to express with her nonreductive physicalism while locating the human intellectual, moral, and spiritual aspects in the body. However, if Murphy’s intention was to address the traditional Christian understanding of the human person as the unity of body and soul, then I would prefer to restate her question differently: “Are

human beings immortal souls which temporarily remain without the physical body between death and resurrection, or are we our bodies?”

This question expresses the remaining challenge for Catholic doctrine, which teaches that the human spiritual soul, because it is immortal, survives bodily death. By considering Rahner’s understanding of the person as the indissoluble unity of spirit and matter, it is theologically problematic to conceive of a disembodied and separated soul. However, this is a matter which is beyond the scope of this work and requires further research. Perhaps additional study of Rahner will help me to interpret and understand better what the wisdom of the Church and its tradition means by this belief.

If we are “spirited bodies,” as Murphy proposes in the title of her book, or if we are “embodied spirits,” as Clarke proposes following Thomistic tradition, in either case, then we are the indissoluble unity of matter and spirit; a unity which we refer to as body and soul. There is no body without the soul, and it is difficult to understand what *soul* is without the body.

One last point to be considered is that, perhaps, the concept of *physical* might be understood in different ways for Murphy and for Rahner. For Murphy, the physical body is a reality that encompasses what we call “spirit” because it is enabled of spiritual acts. For Rahner, the physical body is the result of the unity of spirit and matter. For Murphy, the “physical” is a concept that is interchangeable with “material,” but for Rahner it is understood as the union of two different realities, spirit and matter. In Murphy’s consideration, there is only one reality, the physical or material body, which has the capacity of being spiritual; therefore, the body is spiritual. Rahner would agree with this affirmation of the spirituality of the body, but Rahner understands that the body is

spiritual because it is the expression of the unity of two distinct realities, matter and spirit.

In the end, despite the philosophical and conceptual differences, both Murphy and Rahner have a common and important goal: to understand the human being, a physical-spiritual being, in his/her integrity. Murphy's project is to locate human spirituality (or the person's capacity for a relationship with God) in the physical body. Rahner would agree by saying that human embodied existence—as the “self-utterance of God” in the world—became the way God fully communicated himself to human beings. Therefore, spirituality and corporality, despite the understanding of how it happens, are united and cannot be separated.

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