

Joseph Ratzinger's Apologia for the Concept of the Soul

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Abstract: This article aims to show the rationale behind Joseph Ratzinger's defence of the concept of the soul in his theological reflection. Since Ratzinger did not produce a separate text justifying the need to maintain the concept of the soul yet justified it when discussing other issues, primarily those related to the Christian profession of faith, a distinction was made between biblical and philosophical-theological arguments to analyse his thought. The analysis indicated that J. Ratzinger saw two fundamental paths in the biblical tradition leading to the formation of the concept of the soul. The first is that which discovers God as the Life-Giver more powerful than death. The second involves the maturing of the profession of faith in the resurrection and the fact of Christ's resurrection. The concept of the soul, to be developed later, will be based on these two fundamental truths attested to by the Bible and will be the drawing of anthropological conclusions originating in the most important truths of the faith, such as the resurrection of the body or belief in the Last Judgement. Ratzinger also examines other statements of the Church's Magisterium or those handed down by philosophical and theological tradition from this standpoint. Hence, for him, the concept of the soul does not so much belong to particular anthropology as it derives from a profession of faith that calls for a clear and simple message that is not confined to the expert considerations of theologians.

Keywords: Joseph Ratzinger, soul, apologia

A perusal of Joseph Ratzinger's work reveals a notable issue. Ratzinger does not devote a separate text to the concept of the soul, even though he was asked to write a series of short articles for the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* on eternal life, the resurrection of the body, eternity, heaven and hell, as well as Benedict XII's bull on the Beatific Vision.¹ While J. Ratzinger never reflected on the concept of the soul in a separate text, he did refer to and defend it on several occasions, above all, when discussing issues concerning eschatology. Ratzinger wrote about the soul as early as his *Introduction to Christianity*,² and there are also extensive passages devoted to this concept in his later publication *Eschatologie. Tod und ewiges Leben* (1977), which was reissued several times until as late as 2012.³ He also refers to this concept in a whole

¹ Cf. Gózdź – Górecka, "Od wydawcy," 656–657.

² Cf. Ratzinger, *Introduction to the Christianity*, 348-357. The first edition of *Einführung in das Christentum* was published in 1968.

³ The first edition of *Eschatologie. Tod und ewiges Leben* (1977) was released as part of the *Kleine katholische Dogmatik* series; the last was released in 2012 (reworked with an appendix) by the same publisher.

range of other texts, such as those dealing with the polemic against the thesis of resurrection in death.⁴

A chronological examination of how J. Ratzinger wrote about the soul points to a certain evolution of his thought. Indeed, it can be seen that the *Introduction to Christianity* places a stronger emphasis on the unity of the human being as a person and initially “seems to avoid using the concept of the soul.”⁵ But later, in texts that were more polemical or explicitly discussed the question of eternal life opening up to man passing through death and awaiting the resurrection, Ratzinger expressed his conviction of the need to maintain the concept of the soul more firmly.⁶

This paper aims to present the rationale used by J. Ratzinger to defend the concept of the soul. We will approach this task without focusing on reading his texts from a chronological perspective. The chronological criterion would not be the best to achieve the stated objective. In an essence, Ratzinger’s thought is internally consistent, despite some evolution in terms of emphasizing the concept of the soul. Indeed, he does not examine the soul in isolation from the issue of the resurrection and eternal life but undertakes to reflect on this concept and defend its meaning from the perspective of the creed. This is already the case in the *Introduction to Christianity* and then in later texts — especially in his most comprehensive study of eschatology.⁷ If there occurs a certain development in that he increasingly emphasises the importance of the concept of the soul, it is a direct result of the polemics and in-depth research undertaken. Yet in this respect, Ratzinger’s anthropology is strictly theological with a Christocentric orientation, with the Scripture remaining a special and obligatory point of reference.⁸ Therefore, the present study tries to capture all the most salient rationales which, according to Ratzinger, support the need to maintain the concept of the soul.

There are several notable studies among those that discuss Ratzinger’s understanding of the concept of the soul. This includes Marcin Składanowski’s book

4 Cf. Gózdź – Górecka, “Od wydawcy,” 655–656.

5 Składanowski, *Ciało, dusza, duch*, 80. Nevertheless, one only needs to recall the passage below to realise that while cautious about the very concept of the soul at this stage, J. Ratzinger does not wish to abandon an approach that discerns two different dimensions of the human being. He states the following in his “Introduction”: “Here English cannot fully convey the enigmatic character of the biblical Greek. In Greek the word *soma* means something like ‘body,’ but at the same time it also means ‘the self.’ And this *soma* can be *sarx*, that is, ‘body’ in the earthly, historical, and thus chemical, physical, sense; but it can also be ‘breath’ — according to the dictionary, it would then have to be translated ‘spirit’; in reality this means that the self, which now appears in a body that can be conceived in chemico-physical terms, can, again, appear definitively in the guise of a transphysical reality. In Paul’s language ‘body’ and ‘spirit’ are not opposites; the opposites are called ‘physical body’ and ‘spiritual body’” (Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 357).

6 Cf. Ratzinger, “Jenseits des Todes,” 381–386.

7 Szetela – Osiński, “The Concept of ‘Dialogical Soul,’” 204.

8 Cf. Grzywocz, “Główne rysy antropologii,” 207; Blanco Sarto, “Myśl teologiczna Josepha Ratzingera,” 26.

published in Polish,⁹ as well as a book by G. Nachtwei,¹⁰ which discusses in depth both the essence of Ratzinger's views on eschatology and anthropology and the evolution of his views on this matter. Several other publications examine these issues, whether partly or by taking into account the views of other theologians.¹¹ Nonetheless, these publications fail to comprehensively discuss the apologia of the concept of the soul that is noticeable in Ratzinger's thought. As such, it seems useful to showcase this aspect.

1. Maturation of the Concept of the Soul Due to the Discovery of God the Life-Giver

Joseph Ratzinger's theology is developed and profoundly integrated in biblical terms and according to S. Hahn, there has been no other Catholic theologian in the last century, or perhaps ever, who has practised theology in this way.¹² This feature can also be seen in Ratzinger's texts in which he defends the concept of the soul, as they are largely based on biblical data.

In his texts, J. Ratzinger points to two paths in the development of biblical thought that lead to the conclusion that the concept of the soul cannot be regarded as something alien to the biblical tradition. The first one concerns the Bible's view of the issue of human death. Ratzinger believes that the initial lack of a clear idea of life after death and the slow emergence of the conviction that man does not pass into nothingness after death was due to the need to strengthen the profession of faith in the one God and to combat the cult of the ancestors that was prominent in the neighbouring cultures.¹³ Hence, the chronologically earliest biblical texts do not immediately make it clear that a human being's death does not mean his or her complete end. Ratzinger considers the so-called Israelite "Enlightenment," whose thought is expressed in the Book of Wisdom, to be the first moment of change in this regard. Here, Ratzinger recalls in particular the Books of Ecclesiastes and Job, in which the close connection between success in mortality and God's blessing is negated, leading either to pessimism (cf. Eccl 2:16f., where death is seen as a seal of the vanity of all things and

⁹ Składanowski, *Ciało, dusza, duch*.

¹⁰ Nachtwei, *Dialogische Unsterblichkeit*.

¹¹ Cf. Góźdz, "Człowiek jako tajemnica," 258–274; Kaethler, "The (Un)Bounded Peculiarity of Death," 84–99; Adjiwanou – Gbenouga, *La théologie contemporaine*; Gavin, "On the Intermediate State of the Soul," 925–939; Liszka, *Dusza ludzka*; Bartnik, *Ludzka dusza, jaźń i osoba*.

¹² Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 14.

¹³ Joseph Ratzinger (*Eschatology*, 84) states: "The ancestor cult presented an attraction which Israel was obliged to resist if her concept of God was not to be destroyed. Thus the comprehensive, exclusive claims of Yahweh, while incorporating the idea of the indestructibility of divine communion, demanded in the first instance an absolutely uncompromising ruling out of the cultus of the dead in whatever form."

an equaliser of the fate of the wise and the foolish) or to a confession of faith in a God able to save man despite destruction, which is expressed in some hope for life beyond death (cf. particularly Job 19:22–25).¹⁴

According to J. Ratzinger, a second important moment in the maturing of the awareness that death cannot be the end of one's life is the prophetic tradition describing the meaning of suffering and the death of the righteous (especially Deutero-Isaiah). With regard to this tradition, he states the following: "death and Sheol remain phenomenologically identical. Thus death no longer appears as the end, as irreversible falling into nothingness and doom. Rather does it stand out as a purifying and transforming power. Sickness and death are now the way and lot of the just wherein justice becomes so profound that it turns into the mercy of vicarious service."¹⁵

Two other Psalms are cited by J. Ratzinger as a testimony to the maturing awareness of the continuance of man in spite of death. The first of these is Ps 16, with its verse 9 reading as follows: "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay." The second Psalm referred to by Ratzinger is Ps 73, especially verses 24–26,¹⁶ according to which communion with God is stronger than the disintegration of the body. According to Ratzinger, it is exactly at this point that the Old Testament most transitions into the New, because it speaks of overcoming death not so much by referring to the idea of the soul or the resurrection, but starts from the concept of God and the experience of communion with him in prayer.¹⁷

In this context, J. Ratzinger also cites another group of texts that outline the idea of resurrection. These include the Old Testament's most prominent text — Dan 12:2¹⁸ — but also Wis 3:1f.¹⁹ and 16:13,²⁰ as well as 2 Macc²¹. All these passages

¹⁴ Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 85–86. Interestingly, J. Ratzinger does not refer to other texts, e.g. Eccl 3:20, which mentions that everything turns back to dust or Eccl 9:3–5, where the end of life is considered as something final. He also concludes the reference to Job 19 with verse 25, even though the content of the next two verses, referring to seeing God in a renewed body, is the most obvious. Arguably, J. Ratzinger may have omitted these verses because the biblical text is tainted here.

¹⁵ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 87–90.

¹⁶ These verses read: "You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

¹⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 87–90.

¹⁸ Dan 12:2: "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."

¹⁹ Wis 3:1f.: "But the souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure was taken for misery."

²⁰ Wis 16:13: "For it is thou, O Lord, that hast power of life and death, and leadest down to the gates of death, and bringest back again" (the original incorrectly cites Wis 16:3).

²¹ One example is the account of the martyrdom of the seven brothers, which repeatedly refers to the belief in the resurrection of the body — a fact that is well summarised by the words of their mother: "Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things,

share a common conviction, although they express it in different categories. Ratzinger remarks on it in as follows:

communion with God came to light as the locus of true life. By comparison with this crucial departure-point, the utilization of an Oriental thought pattern about resurrection in Second Maccabees and Daniel, or a Greek one concerning the fate of the soul in the Book of Wisdom, is altogether secondary. Though such patterns are indeed drawn on to fill out the picture, the real point lies deeper, in the experience that communion with God means a life stronger than death.²²

Thus, it is the profession of faith in God that ultimately underpins the hope that man does not perish in death. The Old Testament tradition expresses this hope without doing away with the tragedy of death. In contrast, the New Testament tradition, according to J. Ratzinger, does not so much bring in new categories of thinking, but above all makes Christ's resurrection the centre of focus. The resurrection is seen as the fulfilment of the hopes contained in Ps 73 or the confidence of the Maccabees and as a concrete response to the cry of faith experiencing death. At the same time, it signifies that the Righteous One has entered Sheol, and so the realm of the dead is no longer a land abandoned by God.²³

Besides, J. Ratzinger believes that such a view of God the Life-Giver is perfectly evident in the thinking of Jesus himself. This can be seen in Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees on the resurrection of the dead (cf. Mark 12:18–27), where Jesus argues that God is not the God of the dead but of the living. States Ratzinger: "those who have been called by God are themselves part of the concept of God. One would turn God into a God of the dead and thus stand the Old Testament concept of God on its head if one declared that those who belong to him who is Life are themselves dead."²⁴ This expresses the idea of man's existence despite his experiencing bodily death, as can also be seen in Jesus' parable of Lazarus (cf. Luke 16:19–29) and the last statement spoken by Jesus on the cross to the thief (cf. Luke 23:43); however, it is particularly the latter passage that opens up a completely new perspective since life with God becomes closely linked to communion with Jesus.²⁵

will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws" (2 Macc 7:23); another is the sacrifice made for the sin committed by the fallen soldiers for the sake of a future resurrection (cf. 2 Macc 12:43–45).

²² Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 91.

²³ Cf. Ratzinger *Eschatology*, 92–93.

²⁴ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 113–114.

²⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 117; Ratzinger, "Jenseits des Todes," 381–382.

2. Maturation of the Concept of the Soul Due to Belief in the Resurrection

The path of development of biblical thought leading to the formation of the soul concept is closely linked to the maturation of belief in the resurrection of the dead. In discussing this issue, J. Ratzinger points out that the Old Testament belief in the resurrection of the dead was, to some extent, already expressed in the texts cited above (especially the reference to the suffering of the Servant of Yahweh and the suffering of the martyrs). However, he points out that this belief also used the Judaic tradition of the intertestamental period as its point of reference.²⁶ Ratzinger points only to examples in the Ethiopic Book of Enoch (c. 150 B.C.), the Fourth Book of Ezra (c. 100 B.C.) and the Dead Sea Scrolls,²⁷ where it is said that after death, the dead (or rather their spirits or souls) reside in a world which is not so much an indefinite realm of the dead but rather a place where there exists a clear distinction between the righteous and those awaiting final damnation. Thus, the concept of souls awaiting a universal Last Judgement and the idea of an already initiated individual punishment or reward experienced by the soul after death is already known at this point.²⁸

According to J. Ratzinger, the New Testament belief in the resurrection and eternal life manifests itself within this Judaic vision of the world and man's fate after death. This is indicated by the two statements of Jesus already mentioned, namely the parable of Lazarus (cf. Luke 16:19–29) and Jesus' words to the thief (cf. Luke 23:43). At the same time, Ratzinger sees here the outline of a fundamental new aspect that is characteristic of the Christian outlook. This is because paradise begins to be construed as a reality that depends on Jesus and not just some random place. This is why the dying Stephen's request that Jesus receive his spirit (cf. Acts 7:59) perfectly expresses this evolution and the new understanding of what happens after man's death. In this context, Ratzinger states the following:

Jesus himself is paradise, light, fresh water, the secure peace toward which human longing and hope are directed. Perhaps we may remind ourselves in this connection of the new use of the image of "bosom" which we find in John's Gospel. Jesus does not come from the bosom of Abraham, but from that of the Father himself (John 1:18). [...] The Christian, in his faith and love, finds shelter on the breast of Jesus and so, in the end, on

²⁶ Ratzinger does not discuss this issue further, instead directing those interested in the matter to the findings of Paul Hoffmann's *Die Toten in Christus*.

²⁷ The Qumran Caves Scrolls, also known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, were found in the 1947–1956 period and are dated to the time of the end of the Second Temple and the dawn of Christianity. The discovery of these texts is considered the greatest discovery of biblical archaeology of the 20th century — cf. Kapera, "Qumran," 1001–1008.

²⁸ Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 121–123.

the breast of the Father. "I am the resurrection": what these words mean emerges here from a new angle.²⁹

In J. Ratzinger's discussion of the biblical data that allows one to defend the concept of the soul, it is still necessary to recall the issues related to Paul's writings. This part of Ratzinger's analysis also strongly voices his conviction that Paul's written legacy must be read with the above-mentioned principle in mind: "The risen Lord became, so to speak, the canon within the canon: the criterion in whose light tradition must be read."³⁰

With this in mind, J. Ratzinger first points out that Paul does not develop some new concept of the soul or introduce Greek dualism into his thinking on man's existence after death. Ratzinger proceeds to cite a series of indications that led him to this conclusion. First, Ratzinger notes that despite a certain evolution in Paul's thought, leading from the expectation of imminent Parousia (cf. 1 Thess 4:13–5:11 and 1 Cor 15:12–58) to the realisation that he would meet death sooner, Paul's ideas about the intermediate state and the resurrection were not affected by this process of development. Indeed, they remained unchanged. Even when Paul uses the image of sleep to describe the state in which the dead are in, he does not focus on the content of the metaphor itself, but simply uses it in its ordinary sense. Hence, it is impossible to draw conclusions about Paul's understanding of man's existence after death based on a semantic analysis of the word sleep.³¹

Second, in his argumentation, Ratzinger refers to Pauline texts in which it appears certain that Paul sees death as "being with the Lord" (cf. e.g. Phil 1:23; 1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 5:1–10), and at the same time, it is evident that he does not want to develop any kind of anthropology to explain the different stages of human life. According to Ratzinger, Paul starts with Christ, who is the life, and "in the presence of such a certainty, the anthropological 'substrate' of Paul's thinking lies necessarily outside his focus of attention, in shadow. To Paul this must have been unproblematic, since he shared the common presuppositions of his fellow Jews. His task was simply that of formulating the novel element, the reality of Christ and relationship with him, in all its dramatic importance."³²

In the conclusion of his analysis of the New Testament data, which he believes indicates the validity of using the concept of the soul, Ratzinger formulates several conclusions. First of all, these texts testify that the perception of life after death characteristic of Jesus' time is accepted in the New Testament tradition. In early Christianity, all the images used in Judaism to represent the intermediate state of man after

²⁹ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 125.

³⁰ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 113.

³¹ Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 125–126; cf. also Ratzinger, "Jenseits des Todes," 382.

³² Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 128–129.

death (Abraham's Womb, Paradise, the Altar, the Tree of Life, Water, Light) are retained. In this respect, the Church did not shift away from Judaic to Hellenistic views but rather preserved the Jewish tradition. Nonetheless, there has been a notable correction. The Risen Lord is seen as the One who Lives, and his resurrection has meaning for all people. While this truth is strongly emphasised, it is not denied that people still await a universal resurrection after death. The image of the "sleep of death" that is used in this context expresses the belief in the life of the dead in Christ.³³

Therefore, it is significant that the New Testament links the problem of the soul to the hope of resurrection and views man's fate after death from a Christological perspective. Ratzinger stressed this already in his *Introduction to Christianity*, stating that "[...] the hope for the resurrection of the dead simply represents the basic form of the biblical hope for immortality; it appears in the New Testament not really as a supplement to a preceding and independent immortality of the soul but as the fundamental statement on the fate of man."³⁴

In reading the biblical data cited to defend the concept of the soul, J. Ratzinger is guided by several important hermeneutical assumptions. The first of these assumptions is the conviction that the concept of the soul cannot be examined without a proper understanding of its place in the profession of faith in God. For Ratzinger, the recognition of Christ's resurrection lies at the heart of the Christian faith, to which the Bible bears testimony. Christ's resurrection is a Christological confession of faith in God, and as such, has a primarily theological significance instead of focusing on some kind of anthropology. Thus, the creed is not linked to specific anthropology but rather is a criterion for evaluating all other attempts to construct one.³⁵

The second assumption explicitly indicated by Ratzinger is expressed in the conviction that the Scripture not so much emphasizes the distinction between man's body and soul — as Greek philosophy does — but that "the decisive dividing line for Scripture runs not through man but between Creator and creature."³⁶ Based on this, Ratzinger concludes that even if it is possible to speak of some "dualism" in the biblical view of man, this is not an ontological dualism but rather a personalistic one so that a distinction is made between a bodily and a spiritual dimension within man construed as a unity.³⁷

³³ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 129–132.

³⁴ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 348.

³⁵ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 118–119; cf. also Ratzinger, "Jenseits des Todes," 381–384.

³⁶ Ratzinger, "Auferstehung und ewiges Leben," 320.

³⁷ Ratzinger, "Auferstehung und ewiges Leben," 320. It is worth recalling what J. Ratzinger wrote as early as his *Introduction to Christianity* (349): "The Greek conception is based on the idea that man is composed of two mutually foreign substances, one of which (the body) perishes, while the other (the soul) is in itself imperishable and therefore goes on existing in its own right independent of any other beings. Indeed, it was only in the separation from the body, which is essentially foreign to it, so they thought, that the soul came fully into its own. The biblical train of thought, on the other hand, presupposes the undivided unity of man; for example, Scripture contains no word denoting only the body (separated and distinguished

The third assumption guiding J. Ratzinger's interpretation of the biblical texts that form the basis for an apologia for the concept of the soul is the conviction that one must not contrast the biblical culture with the Greek culture. Ratzinger formulates this opinion in the context of modern views, which link the emergence of the concept of the soul with the influence of Greek views on the original thought of the Bible, which portrays the human being as a unity.³⁸ He states: "the contrasting of cultures and thought forms as though these were fixed quantities – in this case Greek versus biblical – makes no historical sense. Great cultures, and the thinking which grows up on their soil, are not static formations with settled boundaries."³⁹ Ratzinger believes that it is impossible to read biblical testimonies with the assumption that one could isolate "pure biblical thought" from other cultural influences that are deemed foreign.

It should be noted that J. Ratzinger does not make a detailed semantic analysis of biblical texts in his works; for example, he does not address the striking dualism of Matt 10:28 ("Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell [...]").⁴⁰ His analysis of the biblical data focuses on the underlying trend of the development of biblical thought rather than focusing on individual texts. Ratzinger himself offers a good conclusion to this analysis: "The concept of man's continued life after death, developed in the ancient Church, is based on the Christologically oriented Judaic traditions passed on by the New Testament which speaks of man's existence in Sheol."⁴¹ This conviction that the concept of the soul stems from the biblical tradition and is not a distortion or Hellenisation of it is also reflected in a 1990 statement included in the appendix to Ratzinger's *Eschatology*. At a later time, he also added the following:

from the soul), while conversely in the vast majority of cases the word soul, too, means the whole corporeally existing man; the few places where a different view can be discerned hover to a certain extent between Greek and Hebrew thinking and in any case by no means abandon the old view."

³⁸ Joseph Ratzinger believes that this idea was spread by Carl Stange (1870–1953) and Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938) in the early 20th century, with Paul Althaus joining this trend later by publishing his eschatology, first released in 1922. In their views, these authors referred to the position of the Bible and Luther in stating that the separation of body and soul in death, as assumed in the teaching of the immortality of the soul, is Platonic dualism. In keeping with the Bible, it would only be correct to say that man "perishes with body and soul" in death because this is the only way to maintain the nature of the judgment of death, which the Bible clearly speaks of. This is why one should speak not of the immortality of the soul per se, but rather of the resurrection of man as a whole — cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 104–105.

³⁹ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 75.

⁴⁰ While M. Składanowski (*Ciało, dusza, duch*, 36) notes that Rev 6:9 and 20:4 still resound in a similar sense, this mode of expression serves to emphasise the importance of the resurrection of the body instead. Nonetheless, it would seem that these texts also do not express the Hellenistic conception as much as they express the Hebraic anthropology, which did not profess monism but did distinguish between man's bodily and spiritual dimensions within the conception of man as a unity — cf. Jankowski, *Eschatologia Nowego Testamentu*, 180–181; cf. also: Ravasi, *Breve storia dell'anima*, 98–100.

⁴¹ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 146; cf. Ratzinger, "Between Death and Resurrection," 246–247.

Studying the sources and reflecting on their correct interpretation, however, gradually led me to such convictions as I have tried to present in this book: the perspective introduced in the time of the Church Fathers, brought to somewhat of a culmination in Thomas Aquinas, which, starting from the belief in creation, shows man as a binary being composed of body and soul, and which was developed according to the logic of the genesis; whoever wants to remain faithful to the logic of the genesis cannot deviate from it. Trying to do without the concept of the soul does not renew biblical faith, but destroys it.⁴²

3. The Rationale behind the Need for a Concept of the Soul in Theology

For J. Ratzinger, the concept of the soul is closely linked to the Christian profession of faith. It is the unity of faith, which is the fruit of the Church's faith, that is the most important criterion here. This unity may comprise multiple expressions of the same faith and one should not seek some more primordial, non-Hellenised understanding of the concept of the soul.⁴³ This is precisely why Ratzinger believes that the maturation of the concept of the soul, which came after the events described in biblical data, does not contradict this data but rather complements it and responds to the need to preserve the essential reference points of the Christian faith. Hence, as emphasised by M. Składanowski, since the faith of the Church is the main point of reference when discussing the concept of the soul, it is difficult for Ratzinger to separate the image of the soul contained in his texts from the issues of death and resurrection.⁴⁴ Besides, for Ratzinger, this late elaboration of the concept of the soul within Christian reflection exemplifies the primacy of the creed. He states that:

People did not bother themselves too much about the anthropological tools at the service of such assertions. Only as a result of a very slow process was the Christian concept of man as a body-soul unity formulated on the basis of these basic data of faith. Describing how the 'soul' is the bearer of the intermediate state was an even more protracted business. One can say that the formation of this concept first reached a degree of completeness in Thomas Aquinas, and so in the high mediaeval period.⁴⁵

While analysing J. Ratzinger's most important texts on the soul, one may identify several arguments that, in his view, defend this concept. The first is the conviction that the concept of the soul is needed and must be defined, including in the philosophical

42 Ratzinger, "Zwischenbericht zur Diskussion (1990)," 238.

43 Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 44.

44 Składanowski, *Ciało, dusza, duch*, 66.

45 Ratzinger, "Between Death and Resurrection," 246.

dimension, and thus not only within the area of theological reflections. Although Ratzinger stipulates that the philosophical elaboration of the concept of the soul was not an end in itself, he emphasises that the integrity of faith and proper theological reflection depend on the accuracy of philosophical thinking.⁴⁶

Hence, according to J. Ratzinger, St Thomas Aquinas' presentation of the concept of the soul by means of a reference to Aristotelian thought was not a Hellenisation of Christian thought per se, but rather an entirely new philosophical synthesis to better express Christian truth. After all, St Thomas combined the idea of the immortality of the soul — expressed more strongly in the Platonic tradition — with the idea of the soul as a form of a body inherent in the Aristotelian tradition, thus seeking to preserve the distinction between man's corporeal and spiritual dimensions while maintaining the strict unity of man.⁴⁷

The understanding of the soul developed by St Thomas Aquinas strongly influenced the entire later theological tradition and the statements of the Church's Magisterium. According to J. Ratzinger, this influence can be seen as early as the statements of the Council of Vienne, which rejected any doctrine casting doubt on the substance of the rational soul being a form of the human body,⁴⁸ and as late as the statements of the Church's Magisterium, such as the "Letter on Certain Questions Concerning Eschatology" of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.⁴⁹

Also of note is the fact that Ratzinger himself considers it possible to construct a reflection that refers to a philosophical approach different from the Thomistic one. His conception of the soul as man's dimension that is open to dialogue with God and his dialogical understanding of the soul's immortality are examples of references to personalist thought.⁵⁰ This is well reflected in the following passage:

For "having a spiritual soul" means precisely being willed, known, and loved by God in a special way; it means being a creature called by God to an eternal dialogue and therefore capable for its own part of knowing God and of replying to him. What we call in substantialist language "having a soul" we will describe in a more historical, actual language as "being God's partner in a dialogue". This does not mean that talk of the soul is false (as is

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, "Appendix II," 269.

⁴⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 147–191; cf. also Ratzinger, "Between Death and Resurrection," 242. While on the issue of the perspective of philosophical reflection on the concept of the soul, a comprehensive article by Vittorio Possenti titled "Anima, mente, corpo," which contains a thorough overview of philosophical thought with a focus on contemporary issues, is worth recommending in this context.

⁴⁸ Council of Vienne, "Errors Attributed to Peter John Olivi" 902. Notably, Robert Woźniak (cf. "Jakiej koncepcji duszy," 181–182) believes that in interpreting the statement of the Council of Vienne, J. Ratzinger did not sufficiently demonstrate that it refers to the thought of St Thomas Aquinas.

⁴⁹ Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter on Certain Questions Concerning Eschatology* (May 17, 1979) – original in: AAS 71 (1979) 939–943.

⁵⁰ Cf. Składanowski, *Ciało, dusza, duch*, 157. For more on how J. Ratzinger understands this dialogical nature of the soul, see *ibidem*, 95–100; Szetela – Osiński, "The Concept of 'Dialogical Soul,'" 207–209.

sometimes asserted today by a one-sided and uncritical biblical approach); in one respect it is, indeed, even necessary in order to describe the whole of what is involved here. But, on the other hand, it also needs to be complemented if we are not to fall back into a dualistic conception that cannot do justice to the dialogic and personalistic view of the Bible.⁵¹

This may lead one to conclude that although Ratzinger accepts the concept of the soul developed in Thomistic philosophy, he prefers and is open to a personalist approach. Thus, it can be seen yet again here that the starting point for Ratzinger in reflecting on the concept of the soul is not a particular philosophy, but precisely the profession of faith, especially as attested by the inspired text of the Bible.

It should also be added that J. Ratzinger sees the “tendency to believe in immortality,”⁵² which is well-rooted in the philosophical tradition, as an important argument here; however, he also believes that it is possible to draw on more recent philosophical reflection, above all, that which makes it possible to oppose monist and materialist tendencies and to take account of new developments in the sciences, including those dealing with the study of the brain and the mind.⁵³

Yet the most important argument for the necessity of maintaining the concept of the soul relates to theological arguments. Indeed, J. Ratzinger emphasises that without the concept of the soul, making it impossible to speak of the total death of man, the dogma of the body’s resurrection cannot be maintained. If man were to die completely, he would need to be created anew and not resurrected.⁵⁴ Ratzinger also deems the concept of the soul to be necessary for discussing the hypothesis of resurrection in death. Proponents of this hypothesis, formulated to counter the understanding of the soul as being able to exist without any link to the body, considered it more sensible to say that the soul immediately receives a resurrected body upon death. Ratzinger addresses this position as follows: “The true function of the idea of the soul’s immortality is to preserve a real hold on that of the resurrection of the flesh. [...] Denial of the soul and affirmation of resurrection in death mean a spiritualistic theory of immortality, which regards as impossible true resurrection and the salvation of

51 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 355. Another section contains the following reasoning: “One could actually define him as the being capable of God: what theology tries to designate with the term ‘soul’ is of course nothing other than the fact that man is known and loved by God in another way than all the other beings below him — known in order to know in return, loved in order to love in return. This sort of staying in God’s memory is what makes man live forever — for God’s memory never ends; it is what makes a human being man and distinguishes him from animals; if this is ruled out, then, instead of man, only a more highly developed animal is left” — Ratzinger, “The Sacramental Foundation,” Point 3: “The Christian Sacraments,” paragraph 5.

52 Ratzinger, “Die Auferstehung Christi,” 368.

53 Cf. Ratzinger, “Between Death and Resurrection,” 255–256. For example, J. Ratzinger refers to the works of Josef Seifert, John C. Eccles and Karl R. Popper. For more see Nachtwei, *Dialogische Unsterblichkeit*, 146–153; Składanowski, *Ciało, dusza, duch*, 86–89.

54 Cf. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 104–106.

the world as a whole.”⁵⁵ In defending the realism of the profession of faith in the body's resurrection, Ratzinger thus pointed out that the above hypothesis does not take seriously enough the belonging of the human body to a history that is not yet complete.

Ratzinger believes that another crucial argument supporting the necessity of preserving the concept of the soul is a properly understood “fundamental language of faith.” Referring to the 1979 *Letter on Certain Questions Concerning Eschatology* issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Ratzinger states that: “The word ‘soul’ as a tradent of a fundamental aspect of Christian hope is thus counted here as part of the fundamental language of faith anchored in the prayer of the Church, which is essential for communion in the reality covered by faith, and hence, it is simply not up to the theologian to dispose of it.”⁵⁶

While J. Ratzinger does not explicitly specify what he means by the term “fundamental language of faith,” the context of this statement makes it evident that the term refers to the language used in preaching and in communicating the fundamental truths of the faith, as well as the language used in liturgy and prayer. He believes that such language cannot be too specialised. Moreover, it must also retain the ability to communicate in the diachronic dimension, i.e. to understand and express the faith in the same way as past generations. Hence, the concept of the soul must be kept in use since abandoning it would breed uncertainty and confusion as it would prevent Christians from finding familiar vocabulary and concepts. On this occasion, Ratzinger stresses that while theology — as a science — can demand and use a specialised language, a common linguistic basis must be preserved and cannot be arbitrarily changed, especially in the area of preaching and expressing the universal faith of the Church.⁵⁷ Since the concept of the soul is firmly rooted in the texts of the Church's Magisterium, the worldview of many of the faithful, as well as in the liturgical tradition, Ratzinger comes to its defence and opposes abandoning it.⁵⁸

Conclusions

Although J. Ratzinger did not devote a separate study to the concept of the soul, he did refer to this concept and defend its validity in many of his texts on eschatological issues. This paper indicates that the basis for the Catholic understanding of the concept of the soul is primarily the biblical tradition. Within this tradition, Ratzinger distinguishes two fundamental paths leading to the formation of the concept

⁵⁵ Ratzinger, “Appendix II,” 267. For more on the concept of resurrection in death and J. Ratzinger's discussion of this hypothesis, see Bokwa, “Zmartwychwstanie w śmierci.”

⁵⁶ Ratzinger, “Between Death and Resurrection,” 245.

⁵⁷ Ratzinger, “Between Death and Resurrection,” 244.

⁵⁸ Cf. Woźniak, “Jakiej koncepcji duszy,” 190; Trojnar, “Znaczenie pojęcia duszy,” 197.

of the soul. The first is that which discovers God as the Life-Giver more powerful than death. The second involves the maturing of the profession of faith in the resurrection and the fact of Christ's resurrection.

Joseph Ratzinger is aware that the concept of the soul has not yet been definitively formed at this stage and the Bible does not define it either. But the subsequent shaping of this concept in theology has been a consistent drawing of anthropological conclusions from the most crucial truths of the faith. This is why, for Ratzinger, the concept of the soul does not so much belong to particular anthropology as it derives from a profession of faith that accepts with all seriousness the dogmas of the resurrection of the body and the future Last Judgement, as well as the statements developed by the Magisterium, and the philosophical and theological tradition of past centuries. Thus, the notion of the soul is defended first and foremost by the profession of faith and the need for clear and simple communication of faith that is not confined to the complex and specialised considerations of theologians.

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