

PHILOSOPHY 115  
THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN PERSON  
HANDOUT #3

THE CONCEPT OF “SOUL” IN THEOLOGY

Concept of Soul & the Bible

From John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Image):

Hebr *nepesh*

“The word ‘soul’ is used in Eng Bibles to translate the Hb *nepesh*. The translation is unfortunate; soul in common speech reflects a complex of ideas that go back to Gk philosophy as refined by medieval scholasticism.... Hb *nepesh* reflects none of these ideas.”<sup>1</sup>

“The *nepesh* is distinguished from the flesh, but not precisely as noncarnal in the sense in which spirit is opposed to flesh.... [it] shares the experiences of the flesh.... The association of the *nepesh* with life is so close that the word is often best translated as life; but to think that the *nepesh* means life is as deceptive as it is to think that it means soul.... In a large number of phrases *nepesh* can best be translated by ‘self’ or by the personal pronoun.... The *nepesh* is the seat of the appetites.... The *nepesh* is occasionally th subject of mental and volitional processes.... The *nepesh* is not subject to sensations....”<sup>2</sup>

Gk ψυχή (*psyche*) in the New Testament

“still the totality of the self as a living and conscious subject, and it is the totality of the self which is saved for eternal life”

The Concept of the Soul in the Teaching of the Church<sup>3</sup>

Creeds:

“I believe in ... the resurrection of the body and life everlasting” — The Apostles’ Creed

NB: *not*, explicitly, immortality of the soul

Ecumenical Councils:

“The human creature is constituted jointly of spirit and body.”

—4th Lateran Council (1215)

“The rational & intellective soul is *per se* and essentially the form of the human body”

— Council of Vienne (1311-1312)

against a Franciscan theologian whose views undermined the essential unity of human nature (by keeping the body and soul too loosely connected)

“Every human being possesses an intellectual soul.”

—5th Lateran Council (1512-1517)

condemnation of the propositions that the human intellective soul is mortal or that there is just one that is common to all men

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<sup>1</sup> P. 836

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, pp. 96-100, but watch the translations.