

IS THE SOUL IMMORTAL?

DESPITE the pains theologians, philosophers and anthropologists have taken in their researches concerning human nature, soul still remains a subject about which very many people have wrong notions and unfounded beliefs. The teaching that the soul is immortal has no basis in the Holy Bible!

As to what the soul is, definitions have been offered by both men of secular and ecclesiastical learning. According to Plato, the Greek philosopher, “the soul is that uncreated, eternal, and immaterial spirit which, itself self-moved, is the source of all motion; it is the principle of energy and life which, in death, is released from its bodily prison-house to live as separate spirit until again reincarnate in a living body”. (*The American Peoples Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 17, page 609)

Rene Descartes (1596-1650), who is said to be the founder of modern philosophy, regarded the body and soul “as separate substances that interact by means of the pineal gland in the brain”. But Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) in his own view denied interaction by any means and “asserted that soul and body are one and the same”. Since then other secular thinkers have developed various concepts of the soul without arriving at one conclusive understanding that is acceptable to all.

As should be expected, none of the worldly thinkers including Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, Gottfried Wilhelm and so on, based his opinion on the word of God, and, therefore, true Christians do not rely on their views. We as Christians cannot accept anything, no matter how academicals it may appear to be, which is not consistent with the revealed truth of God as contained in the Holy Bible.

It was St. Paul who warned: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” – Colossians 2:8.

Common Prayer

Turning to those who claim to be Christians it is sad to observe that the doctrines some are teaching concerning the soul are far from the truth. Among the Churches of Christendom it is believed that the soul is an immaterial thing in man that continues to live after a man's death, and that it can never die. In view of this understanding, these churches believe that when any of their baptised members dies his soul goes to heaven to be with God for the enjoyment of divine blessings.

In the *Book of Common Prayer* used in many Protestant Churches, “the Order for the Burial of the Dead” contains prayers in which their belief about the soul being taken to heaven after death is clearly expressed. At the burial of the dead, “while the earth shall be cast upon the body by

some standing,” the officiating priest would say: “Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God, of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed: We therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust...” Another prayer often said by the priest is this: “Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord, and with whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity...”

If it is true that the “souls of the faithful are in joy and felicity in heaven”, church-goers should have been rejoicing when their fellow- members die rather than crying and mourning as they are doing. And in that case, of course, everyone would want to die so as to go to a happier life above. But it is ludicrous that the very people who hold to this belief religiously are among those who fear more than anyone else to die; and when they fall sick they strive tooth and nail – and are prepared to spend all they have – to get themselves cured.

These are some of the things that give cause for sceptics to jeer at religious beliefs, they themselves being unable to distinguish between genuine and nominal worshippers of God.

Let us take a look at the following questions and answers from *The Explanatory Catechism* of the Roman Catholic Church:

Question 5: “How is your soul like to God?”

Answer: “My soul is like to God because it is a spirit, and is immortal”

Question 6: “What do you mean when you say that your soul is immortal?”

Answer: “When I say that my soul is immortal, I mean that my soul can never die.”

The catechism defines spirit as “an immaterial living being, having free will and understanding, as God, the Angels, our souls”.

It is a matter for regret that what the world has been pleased to refer to as “the Christian view” about soul, which millions have been taught to believe, cannot be substantiated with the Scriptures!

Living Soul

Soul, according to the Holy Bible, means a living creature such as a person or animal; it also means life, and in either of the two senses it is not immortal.

The word *soul* first appeared in the Bible in Genesis 2: 7, where it is written: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: and man became a living soul." It is abundantly clear from this text that the man himself, which is made up of the dust of the ground and the breath of life, that is the "living soul".

This lucid account of the creation of man by God gives no idea that a soul was infused into the man. Rather it is the man that is a soul. That is why it is stated that those who went with Jacob to Egypt "were seventy souls", meaning 70 persons. (Genesis 46:26, 27; Exodus 1: 5) And in Numbers 31: 28, both persons and beasts are referred to as souls.

If the soul is a "living being" in man that continues to exist in heaven or elsewhere after death, then the man is not completely dead. This is precisely what the devil implied when he, in the guise of a serpent, deceptively told Eve: "Ye shall not surely die". (Genesis 3: 2-5) It is this devilish idea that is being subtly fostered by the teaching of the immortality of the soul.

What God told Adam was quite clear. He said, "For in the day that thou eatest thereof (that is, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) thou shalt surely die." (Genesis 2: 16, 17) There was no point of another entity in man going to live elsewhere after death.

We agree that there is a spirit in man (Job 32: 8) but it is NOT a "living being, having free-will and understanding" as stated in the catechism. The spirit is the life or power of existence in the breath of man which causes the organs of the human body to function. The same thing applies to animals. Yes, both man and beast have the same breath and die alike; God said so through Solomon His prophet: "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." – Ecclesiastes 3: 19, 20.

It is when the spirit or breath of life leaves a person that he dies, and when God gives him back the spirit at the resurrection, he lives again. As it is written: "Thou (God) hidest Thy face, they (the children of men) are troubled: Thou takest away their breath; they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth Thy spirit, they are created: and Thou renewest the face of the earth." – Psalm 104: 29, 30; see also Job 34: 14, 15; Ecclesiastes 12: 7, 8.

The ordinary breath or breeze does not make a man to live. For instance, if you pump air into a dead body, it cannot be resuscitated because that air is without life. What distinguishes the

breath of life from the ordinary breath is the life. And it is the life that is sometimes referred to as soul in the Bible. We can better appreciate this from the exhortation of Jesus Christ to his disciples that they should not fear the devil and his agents who cannot destroy life. He said: "And fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." – Matthew 10: 28.

Jesus Christ made it quite clear here that the soul can die hence it can be killed in hell.

Rest in Peace?

Some people often publish advertisements in newspapers in memory of their dead parents, husbands, wives, children, relatives or friends. In such publications they are fond of writing thus: *May your soul rest in peace, or, Eternal rest grant him O Lord.* They have formed the habit of saying the same thing whenever they get to the graves of dead persons.

Anyone who has a good understanding of the Scriptures knows that such prayers for the dead are unnecessary. The Bible says that everyone who dies, whether he is good or bad, goes to a state of rest or sleep – and so to remain until the day of resurrection. (Read Job 3: 11-19; 17: 13-16.) To wish the dead man "eternal rest" in that wise is tantamount to begging that he should not be resurrected by God. You see the spiritual implication? Yes, people do many things because of ignorance arising from the misguidance of false teachers. – Isaiah 9: 16; Hosea 4: 6; Matthew 15:14.

Moreover, no amount of prayer said on behalf of a dead man has any effect on him. God will deal with the dead ONLY when they are raised to life. And even then He will judge and reward everyone according to the works he did when he was alive. If any had done evil, God's verdict of guilt upon him can never be altered by the intercessions of men. This is why people should fear God and do what is right NOW that they are living so that they may be at peace with their Creator in the day of reckoning. – Ecclesiastes 12: 13, 14; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27.

Some churches teach that the souls of the faithful at death are taken to heaven for their reward while those of the wicked go to hell for punishment. There is no place in the Holy Scriptures where it is so stated. What the Bible says is that the dead shall be resurrected in God's Kingdom and everyone good or bad shall be rewarded according to his works. Jesus Christ said: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which ALL that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (judgment)." – John 5: 28, 29.

Mortal Soul

It is indeed very wrong to say that the soul can never die. David the psalmist and prophet, said that none of the dead “can keep alive his own soul”. (Psalm 22: 29) And in Psalm 89:48, it is written: “What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?”

What is more, God himself declared: “Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (Ezekiel 18: 4, 20) Some may argue that it is only the soul that sins that will die. But we will ask who among men is not a sinner? That apart, if the soul is truly immortal then it can never die whether it sins or not.

However, the truth is that the soul is subject to death. St. Peter stated that “every soul, which will not hear that prophet (Jesus Christ), shall be destroyed from among the people”. (Acts 3: 23) Those who love the world and refuse to pay heed to the gospel of Christ shall lose their lives in that they shall not be saved. And Jesus said: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own Soul?” (that is, his life). – Mark 8: 36.

But those who are faithful and obedient to their Creator and who worship Him in truth shall spend their days in prosperity and their years in pleasures and, above all, everlasting life shall be their reward in God’s Kingdom.

It is clear from the Bible truth expounded in this sermon that the soul of man is MORTAL – IT DIES. Here again we have told you, dear reader, the truth which Jesus Christ says will make his sheep free.