

Immortality of the Soul and The Reformers

The Catholic View

Lateran Council of 1513

"Whereas some have dared to assert concerning the nature of the reasonable soul that it is mortal, we, with the approbation of the sacred council do condemn and reprobate all those who assert that the intellectual soul is mortal, seeing, according to the canon of Pope Clement V, that the soul is [...] immortal [...] and we decree that all who adhere to like erroneous assertions shall be shunned and punished as heretics."

William Tyndale (1484-1536),

English Bible translator and Martyr

In 1530 responding to Sir Thomas More's objection to his belief that "all souls lie and sleep till doomsday" he vigorously replied.

"And ye, in putting them [the departed souls] in heaven, hell and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection...And again, if the souls be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good a case as the angels be ? And then what cause is there of the resurrection ?" - William Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* (Parker's 1850 reprint), bk.4, ch.4, pp.180,181

Tyndale went to the heart of the issue in pointing out the papacy's draft upon the teachings of "heathen philosophers" in seeking to establish its contention of innate immortality. Thus "The true faith puteth forth the resurrection, which we be warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that the souls did ever live. And the pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshy doctrine of philosophers together; things so contrary that they cannot agree, no more than the Spirit and the flesh do in a Christian man. And because the fleshy-minded pope consenteth unto heathen doctrine, therefore he corrupteth the Scripture to stablish it. If the soul be in heaven, tell me what cause is there for the resurrection?" - *ibid.*, p.180

In yet another section of the same treatise, dealing with the "invocation of saints," Tyndale uses the same reasoning, pointing out that the doctrine of departed saints being in heaven had not yet been introduced in Christ's day:

"And when he [More] proveth that the saints be in heaven in glory with Christ already, saying, 'If God be their God, they be in heaven, for he is not the God of the dead;' there he stealeth away Christ's argument wherewith he proveth the resurrection: that Abraham and all saints would rise again, and not that their souls were in heaven; which doctrine was not yet in the world. And with

that doctrine he taketh away the resurrection quite, and maketh Christ's argument of none effect."
- *ibid.*, p.118

Tyndale presses his contention still further by showing the conflict of papal teaching with St. Paul, as he says in a slightly sarcastic vein :

" 'Nay Paul, thou art unlearned; go to Master More, and learn a new way. We be not most miserable, though we rise not again; for our souls go to heaven as soon as we be dead, and are there in as great joy as Christ that is risen again.' And I marvel that Paul had not comforted the Thessalonians with that doctrine, if he had wist it, that the souls of their dead had been in joy; as he did with the resurrection, that their dead should rise again. If the souls be in heaven, in as great glory as the angels, after your doctrine, shew me what should be of the resurrection?" - *ibid.* p.118

John Frith (1503-33),

associate of Tyndale and fellow martyr writes

"Notwithstanding, let me grant it him that some are already in hell and some in heaven, which thing he shall never be able to prove by the Scriptures, yea, and which plainly destroy the resurrection, and taketh away the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul do prove that we shall rise;..and as touching this point where they rest, I dare be bold to say that they are in the hand of God." - *An Answer to John Fisher*, Bishop of Rochester

Martin Luther (1493-1546)

German reformer and Bible Translator.

Regarding Luther's position Archdeacon Francis Blackburne of Cleveland; rector of Richmond states in his "*Short Historical View of the Controversy Concerning an Intermediate State*" of 1765 :

"Luther espoused the doctrine of the sleep of the soul, upon a Scripture foundation, and then made use of it as a confutation of purgatory and saint worship, and continued in that belief to the last moment in his life." page 14.

Martin Luther declared that it was the Pope, not the bible, who taught that "the soul is immortal"
Martin Luther, *Defence*, proposition 27

"Luther held that the soul died with the body, and that God would hereafter raise both the one and the other." Catholic Cardinal Du Perron, *Historical View*, p344

Here are some sample Luther citations. The first one is from a 1573 translation.

"Salomon judgeth that the dead are a sleepe, and feele nothing at all. For the dead lye there accompting neyther dayes nor yeares, but when they are awaked, they shall seeme to haue slept scarce one minute." - *An Exposition of Salomon's Booke, called Ecclesiastes or the Preacher*, 1573, folio 151v.

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"But we Christians, who have been redeemed from all this through the precious blood of God's Son, should train and accustom ourselves in faith to despise death and regard it as a deep, strong sweet sleep; to consider the coffin as nothing other than our Lord Jesus' bosom or Paradise, the grave as nothing other than a soft couch of ease or rest. As verily, before God, it truly is just this; for he testifies, John 11:11: Lazarus, our friend sleeps; Matthew 9:24: The maiden is not dead, she sleeps. Thus too, St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, removes from sight all hateful aspects of death as related to our mortal body and brings forward nothing but charming and joyful aspects of the promised life. He says there [vv.42ff]: It is sown in corruption and will rise in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour (that is, a hateful, shameful form) and will rise in glory; it is sown in weakness and will rise in strength; it is sown in natural body and will rise a spiritual body." - *Christian Song Latin and German, for Use at Funerals*, 1542, Works of Luther (1932), vol. 6, pp.287,288

"Thus after death the soul goes to its bedchamber and to its peace, and while it is sleeping it does not realise its sleep, and God preserves indeed the awakening soul. God is able to awake Elijah, Moses, and others, and so control them, so that they will live. But how can that be ? That we do not know; we satisfy ourselves with the example of bodily sleep, and with what God says: it is a sleep, as rest, and a peace. He who sleeps naturally knows nothing of that which happens in his neighbor's house; and nevertheless he still is living, even though, contrary to the nature of life, he is unconscious in his sleep. Exactly the same will happen also in that life, but in another and a better way." - *Auslegung des ersten Buches Mose*, in *Schriften*, vol.1, cols. 1759, 1760

George Wishart (1500-1546),

Greek scholar, friend of Latimer, tutor of John Knox, and martyr.

Wishart was charged with attacking auricular confession, transubstantiation, extreme unction, holy water, invocation of saints and purgatory. Charge "XVI" was for promulgating the doctrine of the sleep of the soul.

Charge "XVI": Thou false heretic has preached openly saying, that the soul of man shall sleep to the latter day of judgment and shall not obtain life immortal until that day." Blackburne, *Historical View*, p.21.

General Baptists

In his "Institutes of Ecclesiastical History" chancellor of the University of Gottingen, Johann L. von Mosheim records that the "General Baptists" were spread in large numbers over many of the provinces of England As one article of faith they held "that the soul, between death and the resurrection at the last day, has neither pleasure nor pain, but is in a state of insensibility."

Samuel Richardson (1633-1658)

Pastor, First Particular Baptist Church, of London wrote a discourse entitled :

Immortality of the Soul

"A Discourse on the Torments of Hell : The Foundations and Pillars thereof discover'd, serch'd, shaken, and remov'd. With Infallible Proofs that there is not to be a punishment after this Life, for any to endure that shall never end" 1658

John Milton (1608-1674),

"Greatest of the Sacred Poets"; Latin secretary to Cromwell.

"Inasmuch then as the whole man is uniformly said to consist of body, and soul (whatever may be the distinct provinces assigned to these divisions), I will show, that in death, first, the whole man, and secondly, each component part, suffers privation of life...The grave is the common guardian of all till the day of judgment.", "Treatise of Christian Doctrine" Vol.1, ch. 13,

And many, many more, Finally

Dr A.A. Phelps, pastor Congregational Church, Rochester, New York, and editor of "The Bible Banner", in discussing "Is Man By Nature Immortal?" (pp.639-650), presents twelve counts against the doctrine of innate immortality:

1. It has a bad history; it was introduced by the serpent in Eden, and springs from a heathen philosophy; it is not found in Jewish belief; is a compromise with Platonism; adopted and authenticated by the Church of Rome.
2. It is at variance with the scriptural account of man's creation.
3. It clashes with the Bible statement of man's fall.
4. It is opposed to the scriptural doctrine of death.
5. It is equally opposed to the physiological facts.
6. Immortality is nowhere ascribed to man in his present state of existence.
7. Immortality is a blessing to be sought, and not a birthright legacy.
8. Inherent immortality is opposed to the scriptural doom of the wicked.
9. It supersedes the necessity of the resurrection.
10. It reduces the judgment scene to a solemn farce.
11. It subverts the bible doctrine of Christ's second coming.
12. It is a prolific source of error -Mohammedanism, Shakerism, Swedenborgianism, Spiritualism, Purgatory, Mariolatry, Universalism, Eternal-Tormentism.