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CHRISTIANITY AND THE AFTERLIFE

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“I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”
(Psalm 27:13)

“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:20-21)

“As all Christians believe in the resurrection of the body and future judgment, they all believe in an intermediate state. It is not, therefore, as to the fact of an intermediate state, but as to its nature that diversity of opinion exists among Christians.” (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Part IV. Ch. 1 “State of the Soul after Death,” 724)

Lisa is a middle-aged female who has worked all of her life as a server in a cafe. One day, while its rainy and cold, she has a car accident with an 18-wheeler truck. The truck slams into the side of her car pressing her against the side rails. She loses a lot of blood and is rushed to the hospital. Her husband meets her there. Realizing that it is too late and that death is near, he comforts her with these words, “your pain will be gone soon.” June is 90 years old. One day her daughter, Becky, comes to see her. June conveys to Becky that she will be leaving soon. Becky, in an attempt to comfort her, says, “you will have a new body one day, and I can’t wait to see you again.” Frank is 45 years old and has lung cancer. While on his death bed, his son Joel meets with him and says, “Dad, you will be with God in heaven soon and I look forward to the day that I can see you again.” All three stories represent a different view of the afterlife. My objective is to explore the variety of Christian views on the afterlife.

The Christian view of the afterlife includes two states, the interim state and the everlasting state. The former is, at present, underexplored in the literature, so my goal is to explore some of the options situated in its wider eschatological context, advance one underappreciated view in the literature, and discuss its ontological implications concerning the everlasting state. I recommend a view that I call the Disembodied Hope with Resurrection Hope (i.e., that immortality and hope are achieved, in one sense, during the disembodied interim state and the process is complete in the physical resurrection). I suggest that this view is in keeping with the Protestant-Reformation concerning the

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afterlife (yet, it is also commonly held in Medieval scholasticism and is represented in Roman Christianity).

In the present chapter, I will answer two questions concerning anthropocentric afterlife, one is primary and the other is secondary. First and primary, I give an answer to the question on the nature of Christian hope and immortality from a Reformed perspective. Second, I answer a question that is ancillary to the first question and a corollary to it, namely: what does it mean to be a human? The second will shed light on the first and offer an accounting of the first. To the first, the debate surrounds the question of whether Christian hope/immortality is concerned with immortality of the soul or the resurrection of the body, which correlates with the question of whether humans are souls, bodies, or souls and bodies. By specifically addressing the intermediate state, I argue, instead, that we have both dogmatic and philosophical reasons, which recommend both the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the physical resurrection of the body. The consensus of Reformed Christianity favours the intermediate state and the immediate presence of God upon somatic death with its ancillary doctrine of the soul. I begin by situating the discussion of the afterlife in Christian theology. Next, I address what seem to be unacceptable views of the Christian afterlife. Finally, I advance an underappreciated model of the intermediate state in light of its alternatives and suggest which corresponding ontologies provide a satisfactory accounting.

Eschatology and the Afterlife

In what follows, I take it that all of Christian thought presumes theological realism with respect to the afterlife. By this I mean to convey the notion that when a statement is made that persons exist in some state beyond the present earthly state, I am making a statement that is actual and obtains as a state of affairs regardless of whether other human minds believe it to be the case or not.¹ Where *x* is a term for something, there is a *y* that *x* exists in, within, or in a larger framework. As Michael Rea articulates it, he says, “where ‘*T*’ refers to the linguistic expression of some claim, theory, or doctrine, to *interpret or treat T realistically* is (a) to interpret *T* as having an objective truth-value (and so to interpret it as something other than a mere evocative metaphor or expression of tastes, attitudes, or values); and (b) to interpret *T* in such a way that it *has realist truth-conditions*—i.e., it is true only if realism about the *x*s and *F*s putatively referred to in the theory is true.” When a particular claim, say in theology, is true or real is when it obtains in the world.² For example, where *x* (representing the claim that persons will die somatically, yet live on in a different state) is related to *y* (where *y* is reality) as obtaining

¹ The reader may ask, what about divine idealism? In this case, it is true to say that all things are ideas in the mind of God (i.e., Berkeley or Edwardsian idealism), but we ought to make a distinction between ideas God has of actual things that exist and ideas of fiction.

² See Michael C. Rea, “Realism in Theology and Metaphysics,” in *Belief and Metaphysics*, ed. Conor Cunningham and Peter Candler (London: SCM, 2007), see 323-324.

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in y, so x is interpreted within a larger framework and is not constrained by a particular discipline, is not humanly mind-dependent nor is it an illusion.³

With that in mind, the afterlife is situated in a larger framework called eschatology. Eschatology is the study of last things or the summing up of all of God's actions. More specifically, eschatology is the study of God's redemptive actions. The apostles and Nicene creeds teach us that the center of all of God's action concerning his creation is redemption in Christ, which culminates in God's consummative act of bring his Church to glory. As the creed states, "he came down for us and for our salvation." In other words, given God's actions are centrally located in Christ (i.e., the Christ-event), and Christ came to save us-humans, the story of eschatology is about the summing up of redemption. As the creed states toward the end, "We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age (i.e., world) to come," and the Apostles creed refers to the final state as "Life everlasting." This is the purpose or expectation of our redemption. The afterlife, then, is related to God's consummative action of redemption as it pertains to the state of humans in the afterlife.

There are two ways to look at eschatology, spatially and temporally.⁴ Spatially, we are considering God's actions, from his vantage point, as he invades the life of humans in the Christ-event and brings to conclusion the end and purpose for which he created humanity. God's actions are not necessarily temporally construed in the sense that God acts and his eschatological acts impact present human experience. Temporally, we can consider eschatology in a manner consistent with linear or historical progression toward the end of the world, the present world. In this way, humans are not only concerned with God's eschatological actions that effect the present, but also his actions that effect the future of the human race and the rest of God's creation. We are asking here: what is going to happen eschatologically in the future? Part of the answer is given in the creed, as listed above: we are looking forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world or age to come. God's spatial activity is centered on Christ as redeemer consummated in Christ's resurrection, which has effects in the afterlife of humans (i.e., temporal eschatology). More specifically, I am concerned with what is called personal eschatology (i.e., the state of humans in the afterlife).⁵ Where do humans

³ I realize by making this claim up front that I am necessarily ruling out Friedrich Schleiermacher who is an important figure in the Protestant-Reformation tradition who affirmed an anti-real view of the afterlife. I suggest that there is reason to affirm a realist view of the afterlife. First, it seems rather natural and intuitive to read Divine revelation (as codified in the Christian Scriptures) as speaking of a real afterlife. Second, there is no reason to think that prior to modernity (of which Schleiermacher is the father of modern theological liberalism) would have spoken of the afterlife in anti-realist terms.

⁴ See Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), see chapter 4 especially p. 99.

⁵ The literature on this subject is growing. For a representative sampling, see the following. See several entries in Jerry L. Walls, *The Oxford Handbook to Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Walls is one of the foremost defenders of the "traditional" Christian view of the afterlife. Walls, J., *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); *Heaven: The Logic of*

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go when they die? What is the hope of where we are going when we die? Such a question, while related to the creation story, is not a merely a repetition of what we find in creation, but greater.⁶ Before addressing the main concern of the chapter via the intermediate state, I address a series of afterlife views that are inconsistent with the Christian afterlife.

Christian Afterlife: What it is not!

Stephen T. Davis rightly, in my opinion, suggests there are four broad ways to carve up the afterlife, which include (1) Death ends all, (2) Reincarnation, (3) Immortality, (4) Resurrection.⁷ The Death ends all theory might be associated with what is often referred to as a naturalistic theory of death and the afterlife (well, not really an afterlife at all).⁸ Naturalism, is the view that the world is a closed physical system, and all physical/biological things exist in a causal nexus of physical causes and effects closed off from the outside. Such a view is necessarily excluded from the Christian vantage point, if we are to assume the Creation narrative given above and the Church's reception of it, then there is a Being that exists outside of the natural causal framework. Furthermore, that Being (we call God) is the agent that gives life and blesses that life in creation and throughout all of redemption. Characteristic of God's actions are the giving of life and blessing to his creatures in the eschaton (i.e., the age to come), so the death-ends-all sits outside the boundaries of Christian afterlife.

Eternal Joy, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); "A Philosophical Critique of Talbott's Universalism" in *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, R. Parry and C. Partridge (eds.), (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 105–124; "A Hell of a Choice: Reply to Talbott," *Religious Studies*, 40 (2004): 203–216; "A Hell of a Dilemma: Rejoinder to Talbott," *Religious Studies*, 40 (2004): 225–227. Michael Murray ed., *Reason for the Hope within us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Collins, 1976). Hans Küng, *Eternal Life?* E. Quinn, (trans.), (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984). Richard Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell," in *The Existence & Nature of God*, ed. by Alfred Freddoso, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 37–54. Thomas Talbott, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," *Faith & Philosophy*, 7.1 (2000): 19–43.

⁶ The story of creation itself implies that the image has purpose and destiny, but the specifics are left for later parts of revelation to unfold. See Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), chapter 1. In it, Cortez shows that the concept of covenantal representation is central to the meaning of "image" and that this has a function throughout scripture because God is using his image bearers in the context of covenant to bring about his final plan. Also see John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), see especially the latter part of chapter 3 and chapter 6. Herein, Kilner convincingly makes the case that the image concept is fulfilled in the age to come where the incarnate one enters the human world. Where Christ becomes the perfect representative to carry out God's plan, and, in a sense, restates the intentions of creation.

⁷ See Stephen T. Davis, "Eschatology and Resurrection" in *The Oxford Handbook to Eschatology* ed. by Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 386.

⁸ For a unique naturalist view of the afterlife see Eric Steinhart, "Digital Afterlives," in the present volume. He affirms that we can affirm the possibility of a personal life after death by adopting not scientific materialism, but digitalism. Digitalism is the view that rejects substance metaphysics and affirms that information and computation are fundamental to substance, matter and energy. Thinking about bodies and persons as comprised of "bits" allows for the possibility of some kind of survival so long as the necessary and sufficient "bits" are gathered together.

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There are other theories that affirm naturalism, but see death not as the complete end of all but the extension of some kind of life-force (e.g., Buddhism).⁹ Generally speaking, the continuation of a life force is antithetical to what the Christian Scriptures and the broader teaching within Church history have affirmed. Instead, the affirmation is that there is a real afterlife where persons persist in a loving community that is able to experience the goodness of the triune God everlastingly or persons persist in a state of punishment. So, with this in mind, I will leave further discussion of this view to other chapters in the volume. Next and similar to the life-force continuation view, is the view called reincarnation. Raynor Johnson offers a description of reincarnation,

By the term “soul” we mean that individualised aspect of the Self, including buddhi—the Intuitive self—and Higher Mind, all of which are regarded as immortal.) We should of course bear in mind that what is meant by the phrase “have lived before” is not that the physical form Raynor Johnson has lived on earth previously but rather that Raynor Johnson is only a particular and temporary expression of an underlying immortal soul which has adopted previous and quite possibly different appearances.¹⁰

Such a view has been subjected to numerous philosophical objections from the simplicity of the soul as substantial self to the unlikelihood of actual persistence from this life to the next. More important for our purposes, whilst reincarnation has few adherents within Christianity, it is generally treated as antithetical to Christian theology because the Churches reception of the Creation narrative has tended toward the view that human life was created with the creation of the world and persons will persist as numerically identical objects. With the assumption in mind, I proceed to other views of the afterlife. What does it then mean? What is the hope of the Christian?

“Life Everlasting”

The Apostles Creed states this about the afterlife, “The resurrection of the dead: and the life everlasting.” Similarly the Nicene Creed states this about the afterlife, “The resurrection of the dead: and the life of the age (or world) to come.” Recall that the nature of divine action in redemption is brought about through the Christ event whereby God brings about life and blessing for his chosen people consummately. But, what does it mean to experience life everlasting? Some understand it to mean immortality of the soul and others understand it to mean explicitly immortality through resurrection of the body.

Oscar Cullman, reflecting on a longstanding question in Christian thought, raises the famous question – “Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Body?” He argues

⁹ See Mark Johnston, *Surviving Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Raynor Johnson, “Preexistence, Reincarnation and Karma,” in *Immortality* ed. by Paul Edwards (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 192-193. Also see John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

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that the Christian view is tied to the resurrection of the body as the hope of humanity. He states the following,

There is a radical difference between the Christian expectation of the resurrection of the dead and the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul. . . . Although Christianity later established a link between these two beliefs, and today the average Christian confuses them completely, I see no reason to hide what I and the majority of scholars consider to be the truth. . . . The life and thought of the New Testament are entirely dominated by faith in the resurrection. . . . The whole man, who is really dead, is brought back to life by a new creative act of God.¹¹

As Cullman sees things, the immortality of the soul is a product of Greek thought and not a product of Christian thought as it is depicted in the New Testament.¹² Often the notions of immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body are pitted against the other. These divisions commonly emerge between philosophers and theologians, or so it has been suggested.¹³ The question of immortality and resurrection are at the heart of God's intentions for humanity. But, what do these mean within the Christian story? Immortality minimally means "endless survival", as Peter Geach articulates. Given, however, the fact that human persons seem to die physically, one must first ask the question as to whether or not it is sensible for persons, or some part of persons, to survive physical death (i.e., where the physical organism ceases all functionality).¹⁴ What does it mean, then, to live forever according to Christianity? I take it that this claim includes both the immortality of the soul and the physical resurrection of the body, as I argue in a moment. Yet, what one means by immortality will vary depending upon how one construes the interim state in relation to the everlasting state.

What most Christians mean by immortality is, arguably, distinct in some important respects from the earliest Greek defender of immortality, namely, Plato. Plato held to a strong substantial dualism where the person is the soul that happens to exist in a

¹¹ Oscar Cullman, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead: The Witness of the New Testament", in Krister Stendahl (ed.), *Immortality and Resurrection: Death in the Western World: Two Conflicting Currents of Thought*, (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 6.

¹² The charge of unnecessary or unhealthy Greek influence on Christian theology is a common one that is still at work today. First, it is unwarranted because Christian theology as it is communicated in the Old and New Testaments is, generally, unsystematic and requires systematization. The Bible, itself, does not articulate metaphysical issues, but, instead, yields certain metaphysical views or requires a metaphysical grounding. Second, given Second temple Judaism literature, it is nearly impossible to separate Greek philosophical categories from Jewish tradition, which is part of the background behind the New Testament. See Matthew Levering, *Jesus and the Demise of Death*, chapter 1, especially p. 9. Also see Brian E. Daily, S.J., *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹³ See Murray Harris, "Resurrection and Immortality: Eight Theses," *Themelios* 1.2 (Spring 1976): 51.

¹⁴ Such a question is taken up in the classic and useful treatment given Peter Geach, "Immortality" originally published in *God and the Soul* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), cited from *Immortality* ed. by Paul Edwards, 225.

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body, which is a variation of what I have called pure substance dualism. Pure substance dualism is the view that persons are essentially souls that happen to interact with bodies, contingently, and there is no obvious or intuitive relationship uniting the two substances together.¹⁵ Yet, Plato makes an additional claim in the *Phaedo*, as in other places, that the soul is made of the same stuff as what comprises heavenly beings like God, and is a part of the heavenly universal realm. As such, Plato moves beyond what some might construe as natural immortality to a kind of necessary and essential immortality such that souls just have existed prior to embodiment and will, by necessity, continue existing unhindered after the body dies (hence, arguably, violating the creator-Creature distinction in the Creation narrative). Instead, some Christians have held that persons as soul substances will naturally exist forever; assuming that the Divine being does not act in such a way as to snuff the soul out of existence (i.e., natural immortality). Alternatively, some might construe the existence of the soul as contingent upon an additional Divine act where God extends life to the soul as a gift; otherwise the soul would simply cease to exist at biological death or at some time after biological death – say in hell (i.e., annihilationism).¹⁶ Whilst Christians often disagree with Plato, I suggest that the immortality of the soul and the resurrection are not incompatible Christian concepts, but the contemporary inclination is to exclude the soul and its immortality altogether.

Mere Resurrection Afterlife

Characterizing contemporary Christian ethos, there has been an overwhelming emphasis on the body and the physical world as the primary emphasis of the afterlife (and its correlating creational emphasis). As of late, there has been a contemporary tendency both to see humans as solely material creations of God and the nature of hope as material resurrection. There are other potential reasons for such an emphasis upon the body and the physical world, but for purposes here I will set aside this interesting question in favor of the task at hand, namely, the traditional balancing of both soul and body.¹⁷ The interim and everlasting states have corresponding relations to or correlate to various human personal ontologies as their ground. These include the intermediate state and the everlasting state. Both states are situated in this age and the consummation of the final

¹⁵ See Joshua R. Farris, “Pure or Compound Dualism? Considering Afresh the Prospects of Pure Substance Dualism,” *ARGUMENT* 3.1, (2013): 151-159. Also see, Joshua R. Farris, “Considering Souls of the Past for Today: Soul Origins, Anthropology, and Contemporary Theology,” in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* vol. 57 n. 3 (2015).

¹⁶ For a recent collection, see Christopher M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, and Joshua W. Anderson, *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014). For the classic treatment see Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment third ed.* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

¹⁷ For interesting proposals on this topic see the following. See Caroline Bynum, “Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist’s Perspective”, in *Critical Inquiry* 22, 1995, pp. 1-33. Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996). See Sarah Coakley, “The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God” in *Modern Theology* 16:1, January 2000, 61-73.

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age, that which is to come. The intermediate state or stage is that stage that occurs in between the present life, which ends at somatic death and the next life—the everlasting state.

Several views are on offer that I categorize under a “mere resurrection” model of the afterlife, including *soul sleep*, *temporary non-existence* or *extinction and re-creation view*, and the *immediate resurrection view*.

First, *soul sleep* is the view that persons exist in the mind of God or something similar. Some materialists refer to their view of the interim period as “soul sleep.” This seems mistaken, however. As Davis has pointed out,

The term is misleading because (1) the soul does not actually sleep during the interim period; it simply does not exist; and (2) sleeping is essentially a bodily activity, and during the interim period the body is incapable of any activity (except perhaps rotting away, if that is an activity).¹⁸

In other words, the materialist variation of soul sleep really is not the view that the soul or person is actually existing anywhere in some real sense.¹⁹ One might refer to soul sleep, as a mind-body dualist, where the soul exists in some attenuated sense as a non-functioning entity.²⁰ Having said this, the materialist is simply affirming that the soul/person ceases to exist, which leads more accurately to the next view.

Second, the *extinction and re-creation view* is the view that holds that humans, as material creations, die (i.e., cease to exist) at somatic death, and must be re-created by God at the resurrection. The view espoused above by Oscar Cullman is one example of the *extinction and re-creation* of humans at resurrection. John Hick advocates a view called the recreation view. He argues that humans are a psycho-somatic wholes and only persist as whole beings.²¹ Such that when the body dies the soul seems to die as well, thus if we are to uphold traditional Christian belief in the afterlife we must affirm some kind

¹⁸ Stephen T. Davis, “Redemption, The Resurrected Body, and Human Nature,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology* ed. by Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), 299. For example, Oscar Cullman has affirmed “soul sleep” as the teaching of the New Testament, “Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?,” in K. Stendahl, ed., *Immortality and Resurrection* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 57. John Cooper has helpfully pointed out in the context of discussions of 1 Thess. 4:13-18 that the reference to sleep is simply a metaphor for death. See Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, p. 137.

¹⁹ See Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993).

²⁰ This is a rather strange view.

²¹ Calling humans psycho-somatic wholes is rather fuzzy, although, not uncommon in the theological literature. When philosophers or theologians use this term they are referring to the integrity of both the mind and body in operation. While this term is often used in order create distance between human nature as ontologically holistic or monistic from substantial dualistic conceptions of human nature it is not entirely clear to many substance dualists that it does create the kind of distance suggested. However, substantial dualism can, arguably, account for a psycho-somatic whole if in fact the mind and body are treated as functionally integrated although not ontologically identical.

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of re-creation, but the position encounters significant challenges. Hick recognizes the challenges. Drawing from Derek Parfit in *Reasons and Persons* he lays out the problem in part,

Suppose, for example, that the cells of my brain are surgically replaced one by one, under local anaesthetic, with physically identical cells. My consciousness and other characteristics continue essentially unchanged throughout the operation. When only 1% of the cells have been replaced we shall probably all agree that I am the same person. But what do we say when 50% have been replaced? And when 99% have been replaced? And what when they have all been replaced? Is this still me, or do I no longer exist and this is now a replica of me? Or again, consider the teletransporter (somewhat as in *Star Trek*) which scans my body, including the brain, records its state in complete detail, and then destroys it, the next moment forming an exact replica on Mars. The Mars replica's consciousness is continuous with that of the earthly me; but nevertheless is it me on Mars? Have I been teletransported, or has someone different been created in place of me? This is a question for decision. My contention is that the best decision, the one that best satisfies our intuitions and that gives rise to the fewest practical problems, is that the replica on Mars is me; and also that the John Smith "replica" in the resurrection world is John Smith.²²

Hick argues that a decision must be made to determine that the resurrected person is the same person or a different person, but a move of this sort reveals what is lacking in materialism. There is no fact of the matter concerning the persistence of material objects across long periods of time.

This view has come under attack in the recent literature, and rightly so, for it amounts to a closest continuer theory of personal persistence. The person just is not the same person even if the physical parts have been gathered up and the person looks the same. The defender may respond and claim that the closest continuer is all we need to make sense of persistence.²³ Additionally, one might attempt to account for some loose continuity between the pre somatic death person and the post resurrection person by suggesting that some of the bits of matter hold continuously between the states, but I hardly think this is what we are after.²⁴ No, instead, our *desire*, and the presupposition of

²² John Hick, "The Recreation of the Psycho-physical person," in *Immortality* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 241.

²³ See Eric T. Olson, "Immanent Causation and Life after Death," in *Personal Identity and Resurrection* ed. by Georg Gasser (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2010).

²⁴ Something like a Stoic view of humans, which, while not wholly materialist in the modern sense, has some similarities to materialism, but the material world exists eternally. This is different, however, from the view that persons exist forever, as is what we are after in Christian afterlife.

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scripture, is that we would exist as the same individuals here and in the life to come. So, we will consider other options now.

Third, the theory called *immediate resurrection* is the view that humans, upon somatic death, are resurrected. The defender of *immediate resurrection* could tell a story wherein God resurrects the corpse that previously composed the person and makes it alive once again (similar to the creational description in Genesis 2:7). The advantages attending the immediate resurrection of bodies/persons is that it can account for passages of scripture that seemingly yield an interim period of personal existence between somatic death and somatic resurrection by either collapsing the intermediate state into resurrection or by advancing a distinct kind of resurrection from the final resurrection, thus coherently making sense of material intermediate state existence.²⁵

What all of these “mere resurrection” views have in common is that they yield, or are made sense of by, or are motivated by materialist views of human nature. Having said this, there is a challenge for these views. If Eric Olson is right that what dies is strictly speaking not able to be created again, then the materialist lacks the resources to sustain personal persistence in the afterlife. There is not much *hope* here without some sort of immortality. In fact, some sort of ground that persists between somatic death and somatic resurrection is required to account for numerical identity between pre somatic death and post resurrection.²⁶ What is required, arguably, is a soul to account for the continuity between the two stages. In fact, most divines in Christian tradition assume something other than non-existence of the soul or soul sleep; most affirm a literal persistence of persons and/or souls.²⁷

Intermediate State

The intermediate state often described by the church is normally understood to convey not non-existence but soulish or personal existence. The support for such a view is found in several passages of scripture commonly garnered as support for the intermediate state of disembodied existence.²⁸

²⁵ Kevin Corcoran advances an intermediate bodily state view in his *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 130-134.

²⁶ See Eric T. Olson, “Immanent Causation and Life after death,” in *Personal Identity and the Resurrection* ed. by Georg Gasser (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), chapter 3.

²⁷ In fact, the belief in the afterlife as two stages where the first is an interim state of disembodied existence while not held to creedal standards as an essential Christian truth is held to the standard of dogma in both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Furthermore, it is the common view within Protestantism. See Terence Nichols, *Death and Afterlife* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), chapter 3. He shows that it is the common view throughout church history. Mathew Levering has shown that this is a dogmatic truth in Rome and in the East. See Levering, *Jesus and the Demise of Death*, chapter 1, especially 20-25. Levering argues that taking Christology as our starting point, Rome dogmatically affirms that Christ descended to preach to those in hell. With that, the views of hell, heaven and, even, purgatory are dogmas.

²⁸ For a defense from the biblical material see John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). See also John Cooper, ‘Biblical Anthropology and the Soul’, in *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons* ed. by Kevin Corcoran (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 227-228. For a

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With Davis, I affirm the immortality of the soul as a metaphysical precondition for affirming the intermediate state of disembodied existence. In disagreement with Cullman, Davis summarizes Cullman's rejection of the soul's immortality,

He radically separated the two theories and argued that only resurrection is a genuinely Christian notion. Immortality of the soul, he claimed, is an alien concept. It was imported from Greek philosophy by certain church fathers, played no role in biblical or primitive Christian conceptions of the afterlife, and ought not to be part of Christian thinking about the afterlife today.²⁹

If in fact the Christian view includes an intermediate state of personal or soulish existence between somatic death and somatic resurrection, then it follows that some variant of the immortality of the soul doctrine follows.³⁰ Going back to Geech's insight, if the body dies then the natural question is whether the person or some part of the person persists and if so, then immortality of the soul follows because the body dies. If the theologian wishes to distinguish this kind of immortality from the one described in the scriptural story line, then one could affirm a weaker immortality thesis (i.e., disembodied souls; where souls persist without their bodies) and a robust immortality thesis (i.e., where souls exist in union with God experiencing all the blessings God intends for his image bearers) to account for the distinctions.

In keeping with these immortality distinctions, Joseph Ratzinger has summarized quite well the Church's position that unites the assumptions of philosophers with those of theologians. He says, "Clearly, then, what the Church had to maintain was, on the one hand, the central certainty of a life with Christ that not even death can destroy, and, on the other hand, the incompleteness of that life in the time before the definitive "resurrection of the flesh."³¹ In other words, some *thing* must account for the persistence of persons as the ground for resurrection hope where humans experience all the blessings God intends.

One important symbol of the Protestant tradition representing a common conviction in Church history is the Westminster Confession of Faith, which supports the immortality of the soul as the ground for intermediate disembodied existence. It states:

contrary opinion on the biblical data see Joel Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). Green delivers a strong case in favour of the biblical data yielding not dualism but monism, but dualists do not find his case finally persuasive. It is important to note that Green's interpretation of the biblical data is revisionist in nature from the common traditional interpretations of scripture.

²⁹ Davis, "Eschatology and Resurrection," in *The Oxford Handbook to Eschatology* ed. by Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 389.

³⁰ Ibid. 389.

³¹ Joseph Ratzinger, "The Immortality of the Soul," *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 1988), 147.

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The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect of holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Beside these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.³²

John Calvin supports the belief in the immortality of the soul as a central tenet of the Christian faith. He states the following,

Moreover, there can be no question that man consists of a body and a soul; meaning by soul, an immortal though created essence, which is his nobler part. Sometimes he is called a spirit. But though the two terms, while they are used together differ in their meaning, still, when spirit is used by itself it is equivalent to soul, as when Solomon speaking of death says, that the spirit returns to God who gave it (Eccles. 12:7). And Christ, in commending his spirit to the Father, and Stephen his to Christ, simply mean, that when the soul is freed from the prison-house of the body, God becomes its perpetual keeper.³³

Several passages, arguably, support the disembodied interim state doctrine.³⁴ Knowing that bodies die excludes the possibility of persons as bodily substances persisting, but why think that persons as soul's might persist.³⁵ The great 19th century Reformation theologian, Charles Hodge, dealing with many of the scientific concerns confronting us today, albeit in seed form, affirms the doctrine of the intermediate state and its ancillary doctrine of the soul as that affirmed by all Christians. He says, "As all Christians believe in the resurrection of the body and future judgment, they all believe in an intermediate state."³⁶

³² WCF 32.1. This statement excludes purgatory, but my intent is not so much to exclude purgatory, necessarily, from the interim state only to highlight the emphasis on the immortality of the soul.

³³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* ed. by John T. McNeil and trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, trans. 1960), vol. 1, 15, 2, p. 161.

³⁴ Passages traditionally appropriated as signalling the intermediate state include the following: Gen. 3:19; Acts 13:36; Luke 23:43; Eccl. 12:7; Heb. 12:23; 2 Cor. 5:1,6,8; Phil. 1:23 with Acts 3:21; Eph. 4:10; Luke 16:23,24; Acts 1:25; Jude 6,7; 1 Pet. 3:19.

³⁵ For a general defense of substance dualism there are three recent collections, two of which are more negative critiques of materialism and one of which is a positive defense of substance dualism. Robert C. Koons and Georg Beeler (eds.), *The Waning of Materialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Benedikt Paul Gocke, *After Physicalism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012). Andrea Lavazza and Howard Robinson, *Contemporary Dualism: A Defense* (New York: Routledge Press, 2014).

³⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 2003), 724. Another important modern Reformer is Karl Barth, but his view of the afterlife is less than clear.

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Why think Soul's would survive the death of bodies?

I have to this point, to some extent, taken it for granted that if materialism encounters overwhelming problems concerning the nature of survival in the afterlife that one ought to affirm the doctrine of the soul (i.e., the immortality of the soul) to account for the transition from somatic death to somatic resurrection. I have done so because the doctrine of the soul is often referred to as a common sense view, which seems naturally compatible with survival in the afterlife.³⁷ In order to briefly motivate this conception of the afterlife, analytic philosophy of mind comes into play when we consider the subject of survival and the afterlife. Both issues emerge in the context of discussing either disembodied existence or bodily resurrection.

Charles Taliaferro offers an argument in favor of dualism (i.e., substance dualism). He says, "1. If I am the very same thing as my body, then whatever is true of me, is true of my body. 2. But my body may survive without me (it may, for example, become a corpse), and I may survive without my body (I might have a new body or exist in a disembodied state). 3. Therefore, I am not the very same thing as my body."³⁸ If this is true then there is no problem in suggesting that persons survive in the afterlife. The crucial premise is premise 2, which can be buttressed by the experiences one has of self in contrast to body. Upon reflection, I intuitively believe that I am not strictly speaking my body, but could be separable from my body. One can motivate this intuition by considering the various objects of the body in relation to who I am as a soul. I instinctively believe when I visually perceive my feet that I am distinct from my feet and, in fact, I could lose my feet and still be me. If this is true, then dualism (construed as the soul having a distinct kind of substantial existence) can conceivably account for the interim state doctrine. Added to this, if the soul is distinct from the body as a metaphysically simple thing and does not divide like material entities, then the ontology of souls allows for the possibility and conceivability of persistence.

Taliaferro's argument is helpful in that it motivates the coherence of dualism and the intermediate state. But, what about the distinction between a soul that is severely diminished while disembodied and a soul that is able to flourish, in some sense, while disembodied. Two distinct models seem to emerge. Davis, in a recent article, agrees that

³⁷ See a defense of substance dualism as an accounting for the afterlife in Taliaferro and Hasker's article, Hasker, William and Taliaferro, Charles, "Afterlife", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/afterlife/>. [cited on July 29, 2015]. Hasker and Taliaferro are not exclusively concerned with a Christian view of afterlife, but they are concerned with afterlife teaching more broadly concerning the possibility of survival. Herein, the authors suggest that dualism is the common sense view that is often naturally assumed as an accounting for the afterlife, see especially section 2, "The Possibility of Survival—Dualism."

³⁸ Charles Taliaferro, "Human Nature, Personal Identity, and Eschatology," *The Oxford Handbook to Eschatology*, see 539.

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there is an intermediate state of disembodied existence, thus requiring the soul and its immortality, but he proceeds to articulate what I call a “Mere Resurrection Hope” view of the afterlife.

Mere Resurrection Hope

Davis has defended the immortality of the soul as an accounting for the interim state in addition to the physical resurrection doctrine, but, for Davis, the nature of Christian hope is the physical resurrection of the body alone.³⁹ Toward the end of Davis’s recent article on the afterlife he summarizes his position as follows,

Once again, resurrection points the way for us. If you believe both in a general resurrection that is essentially bodily and in the continuing incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, you will have no trouble accepting the idea that the blessed, in the eschaton, can literally see God. But will the blessed also see the Father and the Holy Spirit? Here Christian theology comes to the end of its tether. The only answer we can give is perhaps.⁴⁰

Davis describes the hope of humanity as physical resurrection not the heavenly state of disembodied existence. While Davis recognizes an interim state, he does not say much about it, but views the state as a highly deficient kind of human existence.⁴¹ In another place he favorably cites Aquinas on the need for the soul’s resurrection body, “Man cannot achieve his ultimate happiness unless the soul be once again united to the body.”⁴² Davis understands Aquinas to affirm that the hope of the Christian is the beatific vision, which occurs in the resurrection state. However, the key word for Aquinas is “ultimate”. Aquinas does, in fact, hold a kind of hope for the Christian that one can experience during the intermediate state, which has an intimate relationship to the everlasting state. To this we turn.

³⁹ Wright has a similar perspective. See Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: Harper One, 2008).

⁴⁰ Stephen T. Davis, “Eschatology and Resurrection,” 396.

⁴¹ Assuming we do much of anything, it is not clear what we do. On this view, the interim state is treated as a kind of hold over until we get to the good stuff, namely, physical resurrection of the body. As noted earlier, the tendency to highlight the physical world and the body is common in our contemporary times, which is reflected in this view. Davis, however, is only one representative contemporary example affirming this “mere resurrection hope” view. See also N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*. See also the interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5 from Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), p. 391. Witherington recognizes that 2 Cor. 5 yields an intermediate state interpretation, hence substance dualism, but does not view the state positively. Thomas Aquinas, also, recognizes a view of this sort in the famous commentary called the *Gloss* in his *Summa Theologiae*, III.59.5.

⁴² See Stephen T. Davis, “Redemption, Resurrection Body, and Human Nature,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, 299. He is referring to Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Charles J. O’Neill (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1979), IV, 79. However, this needs to be balanced with Thomas’s claim that, at least, some humans experience the beatific vision during the disembodied heavenly state.

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Disembodied Hope with Resurrection Hope

David Hentschel re-advances one respectable traditional theological reading of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 by retrieving it from Thomas Aquinas's works.⁴³ Contrary to the contemporary sentiment that the interim state is bleak, dark, and non-functional, he suggests that one way to read 2 Corinthians 5 is to understand that Paul is laying out a hopeful intermediate state. For Paul, the hope of the believer is that, on such a reading, the believer will experience union with God as the initial beatific vision. I suggest that we have here a model of the afterlife distinct from Davis's model. Instead, on this model, humans can truly function, and, even, experience union with God during the disembodied state. As such, on one's death bed he/she can rest in the hope of *immediate union* with God.

Aquinas is not the only one who views the interim disembodied state as desirable. Terence Nichols has convincingly shown that disembodied hope is a common traditional view and is reflected in the martyrs hopeful expectation that they would be drawn up immediately to heaven upon death.⁴⁴ This model is the common Protestant view. The Westminster Confession of Faith states,

The souls of believers are, at their *death*, made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory [The Larger Catechism (86) and Confession (1) say, "into the highest heavens"]; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection. At the *resurrection*, believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in full enjoying of God to all eternity.⁴⁵

Theological eccentric William Shedd summarizes and codifies the Reformation view. He says,

The substance of the Reformed view, then, is, that the intermediate state for the saved is Heaven without the body, and the final state for the saved is Heaven with the body; that the intermediate state for the lost is Hell without the body, and the final state for the lost is Hell with the body. In the Reformed, or Calvinistic eschatology, there is no intermediate Hades between Heaven and Hell, which the good and evil inhabit in common. When this earthly existence in [*sic*: is] ended, the only specific places and states are Heaven and Hell.⁴⁶

Charles Hodge in agreement with the Reformed tradition states,

⁴³ David Hentschel, 'Thomas Aquinas, 2 Corinthians 5, and the Christian Hope for Life after Death', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 8.1 (2014), see especially 73-77.

⁴⁴ *Death and Afterlife*, p. 57.

⁴⁵ Shorter Catechism, 37, 38.

⁴⁶ William Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* vol. 2 chapter 1; Intermediate State.

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The common Protestant doctrine on this subject is that “the souls of believers are at their death, made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.” According to this view the intermediate state, so far as believers are concerned, is one of perfect freedom from sin and suffering, and of great exaltation and blessedness.⁴⁷

In other words, the common Reformed view of hope is heaven, which begins upon death and finds completion in the resurrection. Naturally, this raises the question as to the nature of Christian souls that are not prepared for heaven. Some have argued that the Reformation view for which I will call the immediate-glorification-on-death view is incomplete, possibly incoherent, requiring a doctrine of purgatory.⁴⁸ My contention is not to rule out either purgatory or immediate-glorification-on death, but to consider these as variants of the model advanced. My only point is that the nature of Christian hope is not mere resurrection hope, but disembodied interim hope, which has fallen on disrepute in the contemporary discussion.

The model I propose not only carves out a place for the immortality of the soul as disembodied interim existence, but construes the interim state as the initial hope of the Christian. This leads to the final question worth considering.

Anthropological Models and Disembodied Existence

Thus far, I have shown that immortality of the soul grounds the interim state in relation to the resurrection state, making materialism an unlikely option for Christian afterlife. Furthermore, I advanced a disembodied hope view of the afterlife. In light of this there are several anthropological models worth considering, all of which have an immaterial essential core and could broadly be construed as variations of mind-body dualism.⁴⁹

The first is substance dualism. Substance dualism is the view that humans are comprised of two substances (i.e., property-bearers) that are separable. There are variations of substance dualism. I have mentioned two earlier. One of which one might call pure substance dualism because it maintains the strict integrity of the substantial soul from the bodily substance. While not off the table for consideration the view has difficulty accounting for a unity of body and soul, which the intermediate state only

⁴⁷ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 724.

⁴⁸ Purgatory is commonplace in Rome. For a definitive Protestant treatment see Jerry L. Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Walls presents a persuasive case for the doctrine of Purgatory that he argues is consistent with Protestant doctrine.

⁴⁹ I am less inclined to describe idealism as mind-body dualism because there is nothing substantial about bodies on this view, but some would categorise it in this way. I prefer to describe idealism as a variation of monism that has the benefits of substance dualism because of the person’s immaterial nature.

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exacerbates. Another view is what I will call compound substance dualism.⁵⁰ I suggest that the two substances are distinct and separable as with pure varieties, but that one can tell a story that maintains a more natural and intuitive union relationship between soul and body. One could construe souls as bearing a kind-nature related to bodies. By way of contrast, a relational soul is a soul that has no kind-nature but can adapt to a variety of differing biological organisms. Kind souls, then, naturally exist in a larger dynamic structure inclusive of the body. One would have a distinct option from pure or relational varieties of substance dualism. While the body, is technically speaking contingent, it is necessary for a complete human nature.

Alternatively, one could affirm some variant of Thomism.⁵¹ Thomism, similar to compound substance dualism, holds a stronger unity of body and soul.⁵² That unity is one where the soul exists as an organizing principle for the matter it inheres. On this view, souls can persist between somatic death and somatic resurrection. The challenge for the view is its ability to make sense of personal persistence because both soul and body are required for a human being to exist.

Finally, a view that is almost completely excluded from discussion is the view called idealism. By idealism, I am referring to an Edwardsian or Berkeleyan variant of idealism, which says that only minds and their ideas exist. Both Edwards and Berkeley affirm that God exists along with other created minds and the only thing that is substantial is the mind, which is an immaterial substance.⁵³

One immediate objection/worry comes to the fore. How do we make sense of the bodily resurrection if disembodied souls experience Christian hope without the body? It is a fair concern, and for the sake of space I will very briefly offer a response.

The first way to respond is to suggest that the soul's powers are weakened or diminished during the intermediate state, yet the soul's state of being objectively in union with God is not. So the resurrected body would complete the nature of the human person and enhance the subject's experience of its own state before God.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ See Richard Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Also see Charles Taliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Taliaferro refers to his position as "integrative dualism" to maintain the functional integrity of soul and body. His view, as I construe it, is a variation of compound dualism.

⁵¹ I use the term Thomism to avoid confusing the view with substance dualism. Although, there is some debate about whether Thomas was a materialist or dualist, I take it that materialism is an odd coupling with Thomism because of Thomas's clear assumption that humans are comprised of an immaterial part that can exist separable from the body.

⁵² See Eleanore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003). See Brian Leftow, "Souls Dipped in Dust," in *Soul, Body and Survival* ed. by Kevin Corcoran (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁵³ Things are slowly changing. See Joshua R. Farris and S. Mark Hamilton, *Idealism and Christian Theology* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2016).

⁵⁴ Marc Cortez advances something like this solution in the context of defending Jonathan Edwards's idealist conception of the afterlife. See Cortez, "Idealism and Resurrected Body," in *Idealism and Christian Theology*.

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Second, one could respond similarly by arguing that disembodied souls exist in a perfect state of existence in union with God, but not in terms of the finite good attained *via* the kind nature respective of the soul. In commenting on Thomas's view of disembodied hope, Christopher Brown offers an interesting response to the insignificant body worry. He states,

The takeaway from this text for our purposes is clear: St. Thomas teaches here that the separated soul's desire for the glory of the body *is not a desire for the essential reward*, since the desire for embodiment has a created good for its object and the object of the desire for the essential reward is the uncreated good, i.e., God. The separated soul's desire for embodiment is therefore a desire for a part of the accidental reward and so embodiment is a part of the accidental reward and not the essential reward.⁵⁵

Added to this, it is fitting that God would supply the body to the soul at resurrection in order to complete the human. In the end, for Thomas the body is a finite, created and accidental good, and so it follows in the afterlife that it is a finite, created, and accidental reward.

Conclusion

I began the chapter with a variety of stories that shape one's expectation of the afterlife. Recognizing its relevance to the human condition, I proceeded to explore the relationship between the intermediate state and the final state within Christian thought. I argued that a Reformed view of the afterlife, dogmatically understood, affirms the immortality of the soul and the physical resurrection of the body. Furthermore, I surveyed a variety of models or views on offer concerning Christian afterlife. While not definitively excluding Christian materialism as an option, I did suggest that it encounters significant biblical and philosophical challenges and is in tension with what we find in the broad consensus of traditional Christianity. In this way, the immortality of the soul seems to be a necessary precondition for the resurrection of the body. Finally, I advanced one under-appreciated model of the afterlife and its ancillary ontologies. The view or model I recommend maintains not only that disembodied immortality of the soul is assumed in a doctrine of the afterlife, but that the initial hope of the afterlife occurs during the interim state of personal existence. Much more could be said about the assumed ontologies and its relationship to both the interim state and the everlasting state, but additional reflection on the implications of personal ontology and the afterlife remains a topic for another day.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Christopher M. Brown, "St. Thomas, the Interim State of the Saints in Heaven, and some Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives," (unpublished) presented at the Interim State Workshop, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Thank you to Cameron Moran for carefully reading through a first draft and offering insightful comments and helpful suggestions for clarity and structure. Also, thanks to those at the HBU colloquia who offered insights and suggestions on a previous draft.