

Professor Christopher Clohessy

'Living Eschatologically. A Catholic Understanding of Death'

Rooting itself in faith and reason, which Pope John Paul II described as *two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of Truth*, traditional Catholic teaching gives articulation to both natural and supernatural Revelation, by teaching us that human beings are composite creatures, composed of body and soul; the soul being the nobler component element, although without this every being permitted to reduce the value of the body; and that we are made in *imago Dei*, to the likeness and image of God, giving foundation to much of Christian ethics and to its teaching about the meaning and nature of death.

A living human body is patently not the same thing as a corpse. The soul is the fundamental difference between corpse and living being. A corpse cannot move, eat, think, self-express, or take joy in something or feel sadness. It can only disintegrate and return to dust. Something must stop our bodies from doing that in the present moment, and that is the soul. As surely as every activity must have a principle of operation behind it, the principle by which a person loves, makes rational choices, experiences happiness or grief, is a real thing. It is not nothing, less than the very body it animates. Nor is it a chemical. No forensic scientist, examining a corpse, can tell you what chemical is missing leading to its death, as if there were nothing else save chemical substances. Human life cannot be generated by a gathering of chemical substances, for it is quite patently animated by the soul or spirit.

It is this soul that survives the physical death of the body; although it may be a popular opinion in the received wisdom of our age that there is no continuance after death, a reflection upon the simple structure of the soul, upon the future administration of the sanctions attached to the moral law, upon the rectification of worldwide inequalities, and upon the teleological inclinations to a lasting and perfect good, makes it a violation of reason to deny the soul's survival. This, in and of itself, changes the whole aspect of the nature and finality of death, making the process worth re-examining.



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Christopher Clohessy is a South African Catholic priest who holds a BST from the Pontifical Urbanianum University in Rome and a PhD from the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), also in Rome. He is, at present, a resident faculty member of that Institute, lecturing there in Shīcī Islamic studies, Qur'ānic Studies, Islamic Ethics and Christian-Muslim dialogue, and is a visiting lecturer at the Pontifical Beda College in Rome, where he lectures in Fundamental Theology, Ecclesiology, Islam and Mariology. He is author of '*Fāṭima, Daughter of Muḥammad*' (2009, 2018 2ND edition), and '*Half of My Heart: The Narratives of Zaynab bt. cAlī*' (2018) and '*Angels Hastening. The Karbala' Dreams*' (2021), all published by Gorgias Press. In 2021 he was one of the recipients Iranian World Book Award, with the nomination 'Distinguished Researcher'. Prof. Clohessy is currently researching in preparation for a new book on 'Abbās ibn 'Alī.