

On Saving One's Soul

JOSEPH BLENKINSOPP, S.D.B.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF MAN AS 'SOUL'

The oldest biblical view of man, that which is contained in the *corpus* put together towards the end of Solomon's reign or the early period of the divided monarchy, brings out with a concrete and satisfying amplitude of vision and with compelling images a profound intuition into the ambiguous position which man holds in the hierarchy of nature, to which he certainly belongs but which he in part transcends; he is an animal, but he is also 'just a little lower than the *elohim*.' Yahweh God made him out of clay and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. He thus became a 'living soul' – *nefesh hayyah*. The word which is usually translated 'soul' seems to have been primitively connected with breathing, as also was 'spirit' – both words in Hebrew and cognate languages started off with the meaning 'throat'. This is fairly frequent in Ugaritic, one of the closest of these cognate languages (rather like Anglo-Saxon in relation to English only closer) and has caused some difficulty for earlier translators of the Old Testament, as for example when Jerome has 'The waters have come into my soul' instead of 'up to my neck'¹.

What makes man a 'soul' is his origin in the divine activity (Gen. 2. 7) and when he dies this mysterious God-given energy recedes with his breath, going out of him through his throat and nostrils to return to its place of origin. 'As her life went out of her' we read of Rachel, 'she called his name "Son of my Sorrow".' There is no question of the separation of soul and body; man ceases to be a 'soul' and becomes a corpse; in fact, there is no word in Hebrew for body apart from a dead body. In the light of this it is easy to see how misleading the translation-word 'soul' could be since it rather tends to make us think of man in a way foreign to this early conception. But before going on to see how this confusion of anthropologies occurs it might be a good thing to get a clear idea of what emerges on this subject in the Old Testament.

Man was not, in these texts, a soul in a body in the platonic and

¹Ps. 68.2. For other examples see Ps. 104.18; Is. 5.14; Jer. 4.10; Jonas 2.6; Hab. 2.5.

neoplatonic sense of a prisoner in a prison or a sailor in a ship; the body-soul polarisation does not occur except in the obvious and inevitable sense of the perception that bodily function and structure do not exhaust man's idea of his personality. The difference should be traced back to the basic manner of perception from which the anthropology proceeds, a perception which strove above all, as Pedersen has shown us, to grasp the totality presented by experience. The scholastics also, particularly St Thomas, present man holistically, as a unity, but they do so by means of a speculative, conceptual procedure foreign to the one we are considering. The Hebrew perception was also, moreover, intensely subjective and heightened by an emotional commitment of the subject to an extent which must be always difficult for us to enter into. Knowledge was always, if worth while at all, of this kind: direct, intuitive, often passionately committed – we should in fact call it experience rather than knowledge. Thus, in Exodus 23. 9, instead of 'You know the soul of an alien' – a literal version – we should translate: 'You have experienced what it is to be an alien'. This explains why it is there is only one verb 'to know' in Hebrew which has to cover a whole range of meanings: getting to know a person, recognition, skill, sexual relations and so on. This means that very often where the Vulgate has *anima* we should read *persona* and think *subject*. Thus the often accommodated 'Da mihi animas . . .' of the king of Sodom (Gen. 14. 21) should be translated, as in the Revised Standard Version, 'Give me the persons but take the goods for yourself.' We shall have to see later how this bears on the question of the meaning of saving one's soul.

Rather than the platonic *psyche* or even the *forma substantialis* of the scholastics, 'soul' in this early literary *corpus* should be thought of as the centre of consciousness, especially self-consciousness, subjectivity. Where Jacob, in the Douai version, asks for food 'that my soul may bless thee', R.S.V. has simply and correctly '. . . that I may bless you before I die'; and yet we should, if it were possible, use some means to fill the pronoun with an intensity and subjectivity which the form 'my soul' is meant to express, for it is only in the much later Priestly recension that it becomes merely a stereotyped formula. This is seen in an incident such as the Rape of Dinah. After the momentary outburst of passion we are told that Shekem's soul adhered to her, by which we are meant to understand that what began merely as an outlet for lust ended in a genuine emotional commitment. Thus also the 'soul' of Jonathan clove to that of David and he loved him 'as his own soul.' There is a wealth of feeling and meaning in these phrases which can easily be lost

or attenuated if we don't succeed in getting behind our usual dichotomised way of thinking of ourselves. It follows that here it is that inner core of self-awareness with all that comes from it which gives cohesion and power to a man's personality and which a false approach to the spiritual life (how misleading the very phrase can be) and the cultivation of 'the garden of the soul' can do so much to disintegrate. But we are anticipating.

It would evidently be out of place here to give an exhaustive survey of the material; this will no doubt be done when the article *psyche* appears in the Kittel dictionary. One or two examples, however, might help. In the historical books the same usage can be instanced – the *nefesh* is the root of the vital energy and dynamism of a man, and its divine origin is never lost sight of. In fact over all this moving, turbulent, often brutal world of treachery, vendetta and occasional heroism there stands as a postulate the sacrality of this vital centre. It is never forgotten that man is *genus deorum*, as in other cosmogonic myths which represent him 'half god and half brute'². It is to God that life belongs and who protects the 'soul' of his own. 'The soul of my lord' says Abigail to David 'is bound up in the bundle of life before Yahweh your God' (I Sam. 25. 29). Elijah, in a fit of depression, asks God to take back his soul. King Sedeqiah swears to Jeremiah 'by the living lord who has made us this soul'. One thing which we notice in these and other examples is that 'life' would stand equally well for 'soul' – betraying an existential rather than conceptual presentation. An important deduction from this is that the two factors of personality and life undergo a progressive and intimately correlative deepening within revelation, resulting from a continual deepening of religious experience. This is an important point, often overlooked, that progress comes about not so much by the discovery of new religious truths such as personal immortality, but rather grows out of the experience itself, in particular out of an increasingly intense and purified dialogue between the subject, often speaking in the name of the people, and God.³ There is a decisive test case for this which should be mentioned here before we go any

²Especially close to the plastic representation of Gen. 2 is that of the Babylonian *Enuma elish* in which, so far as we can make out, man is made by mixing clay with the blood of a supernatural being, Kingu, captain of Tiamat goddess of Chaos. Also the Promethean myth which sees man as compounded of clay and heavenly fire.

³Job springs to mind as an example of this dialogue, but parts at least of this book are written consciously in dramatic form; Ps. 22 with its alternation of *I* and *thou* is perhaps a more spontaneous and intense example.

further, namely, the attitude taken to the fearful reality of death and the consequent prospect of the disgregation of personality for people who had no elaborated teaching on a future state to guide them. A Christian will say, as Paul in effect did, that he dies in order to be united to God; thus for the Christian the thought of death no longer hurts. For the Hebrew at that time it was not so simple. No prayer crops up more frequently in the psalms than to be delivered from death, and not just because all find, as Agag did, that death is indeed bitter, but paradoxically because it was seen as a severance from a life lived here-and-now in union with God, especially in the shared liturgical life of the community. Hezekiah's prayer spoken at the point of death is a moving witness to this outlook:

I said, in the noontide of my days
 I must depart;
 I am consigned to the gates of Sheol
 For the rest of my years.
 I said, I shall not see the Lord
 In the land of the living . . .
 O Lord, by these things men live,
 And in all these is the life of my spirit,
 Oh, restore me to health and make me live! . . .
 For Sheol cannot thank thee,
 Death cannot praise thee;
 Those who go down to the pit cannot hope
 For thy faithfulness.
 The living, the living, he thanks thee, as I do this day;
 The father makes known to the children thy faithfulness.

(Is. 38. 9-20)

So also many of the psalms – thus in Ps. 56 the speaker has been saved from death, physical death, that his life 'may go on in the presence of God in the light of the living'. To die therefore was to lose God.

This might at first sight seem to block further progress, but that is not what happened. It meant that the breakthrough, when it came, was not brought about by inventing another life different from this in the hereafter – a 'happy land far, far away' – but by discovering in and through present experience what the real dimensions of this here-and-now life of union were, what life lived with God really implied. It is not surprising that this breakthrough is documented for us in the Book of Psalms, for the very meaning of *nefesh* implies, as we have seen, that progress towards discovery of the real meaning of the self brings with

it a parallel progress towards the ultimate significance of existence, and it is in prayer, if at all, that this discovery is made. As Stauffer says, in the spirit of Martin Buber: 'The Father whom I address as "thou" answers me with a "thou", and when that happens my real self is brought to life for the first time'⁴.

The difficulty for us who try to establish some contact with these texts is that our thinking has been so deeply and unconsciously coloured by the dualist anthropology of Plato, Plotinus, Descartes and a whole powerful stream of European thought (basically, however, oriental and religious, not occidental and philosophical) that we have a great deal of trouble to see the point of the psalmist's prayer. It is so natural for us to assume as an orthodox Christian view of destiny the myth of Er at the end of the *Republic* where the soul imprisoned in the body is represented as the inmate of a dark cave trying to make its way painfully to the point of light at the end, and to forget why Paul's apologia to the Athenians broke down precisely where it did. It might help us to recreate the situation if we consider two points at which the breakthrough spoken of occurs in these Old Testament prayers: the moral impasse which is reached when the man at prayer considers, in the presence of God, the unchecked progress of gross injustice, and the full implications of the special relationship to God which is attributed to the anointed king as a figure of the ideal king of the future. In regard to the first, we find in Ps. 73:

When my soul was embittered,
When I was pricked in heart,
I was stupid and ignorant,
I was like a beast towards thee.
Nevertheless I am *continually* with thee,
Thou dost hold my right hand.

And just as here the final solution, the *Ausweg*, is not seen in some never-never land where everything will be different, but in a deeper assessment of what the just man's association with God means no matter what may appear to the contrary, so the bond that ties the anointed king to God is seen, dimly it is true, to be of such a kind as to defy death:

Therefore my heart exults, my liver rejoices,
My flesh also will abide in tranquillity,
For you will not abandon *my soul* to Sheol,
You will not leave your loved one to see corruption.

(Ps. 16)

⁴*Theology of the New Testament*, S.C.M. (1955) p. 177.

There is, directly at least, no question of the resurrection of the body in the mention of 'flesh' in the second verse; the heart, centre of reflexion, the liver, centre of the emotive life⁵, the flesh that circumscribes all – this is an attempt to express the totality of the conscious, sentient organism that man is. It is this which must pass through the gates of death into a deeper and richer experience of the divine presence. Something of the same can be found in the great Ps. 22 which has left such an impression on the evangelical Passion story; 'my soul will live to him' the psalmist cries out in defiance, 'despite those who go down to the dust.' The self-realisation which prayer begets results in a continual dialogue . . . 'my soul panteth after thee O my God . . . my soul thirsteth for thee, the living God . . . I pour out my soul to thee . . . why art thou cast down, O my soul?' (Ps. 42).

The Deuteronomian writings introduce a new formula which is found in the *Shema*, the 'Hear, O Israel!' (Deut. 6.4 ff): 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.' This expression, often repeated, once again does not invite us to dichotomize or trichotomize the human personality; soul, together with heart (that is, mind) and strength, is a way of differentiating and expressing the sum total of vital energy at the disposal of personality which ought to go into the searching after and the love of God.

Finally, in the Priestly writings of the Old Testament we have what we might call a standardization of this key-word, for in these writings it usually stands for 'human being' quite simply, and it is no doubt because of this that we use the word in this vague way in common parlance – 'a city of 10,000 souls.' The casuist laws in Exodus and Leviticus all begin *nefesh ki* . . . 'Should any soul, that is, anyone . . . That is why there is nothing about man becoming a 'living soul' by means of the breath of God in the sacerdotal recital of Gen. 1, and the distance between this chapter and the following can be gauged from the consideration that the term *nefesh hayyah*, meaning 'living soul' in the earlier account in Ch. 2, is applied in the later one of Ch. 1 only to the animal world below man. Perhaps not enough notice has been taken of the bearing which the dietetic laws of Lev. 11 have on the Creation

⁵The Vulgate followed by Douai has 'tongue', others read 'glory'. 'Liver (*kaved*) is very similar to this latter (*kavod*) and in view of the frequent paralleling of heart – liver we read it here. For the third verse Douai has, following Vulgate literally: 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell' which brings one up against the exegetical question behind the Descent into Hell.

recital (Gen. 1). It has been generally recognized since the appearance of Fr Deimel's study of the Priestly Creation narrative of Ch. 1 that there exists an inner logical and artistic connexion between the work of the six days, and in particular between the creation of man on the sixth and that of the vegetation meant for his nutrition on the third. Later on, in the Noah covenant, man is permitted also to eat animal food but there are restrictions, and the matter of his provisioning is always surrounded with a kind of penumbra of sacrality due to the great importance of animals in the complex sacrificial system. Man is certainly different from the animal world, he is apart, *holy* (Lev. 11. 44) because of his ontological link with God who is the supremely Other (Is. 6. 3); but the deeply felt association of man with the animal world, an under-current which runs very strongly in the Old Testament and is beginning to be formulated more precisely in the modern epoch, finds strong expression in these writings. For like man they breathe and bleed, and so food which had been strangled or which still had the blood in it was taboo, for 'the blood is the life' (Lev. 17. 11; Deut. 12. 23). The fact that in the course of time the Jewish sacrificial system degenerated into a purely mechanical round of slaughter should not lead us to misconstrue the profound intuition at its starting-point – that the offering of a blood-gift is in effect the offering of life and self. This idea is basic to the understanding of the sacrifice of Christ and the doctrine of the Redemption.

One would have to go on, finally, to show how the Greek way of looking at man, so different from the Hebrew, with its doctrine of the soul's salvation *from* the body, enters the field in the Greek scriptures – both in the books written originally in Greek and in the translation of the Septuagint which is often more paraphrase or interpretation than a faithful rendering. We find it everywhere in the inter-testamentary literature, for example in the 'Address to the Soul' in the Psalms of Solomon. This encounter or, better, collision of rival anthropologies led to a series of tensions in every sphere of thought which deals with man and his destiny – witness the frequent confusion in our thinking over the question of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body⁶. The effects of this tension are still with us, perhaps more than we realize. A very considerable part of Christian thinking on asceticism has been built up on the greek *psyche* – *soma* antinomy. It is well known, for example, that the spiritual life conceived in three stages: *katharsis*,

⁶This last phrase is from the *Credo*, but the scriptures nowhere speak of a resurrection of the body, the *soma* as distinct from the *psyche*.

elapsis, henosis (the purgative, illuminative, unitive ways) goes back by direct descent to neoplatonic thought, and the great medieval mystical tradition stems from the baptized neoplatonism of Augustine and the writings of pseudo-Denis. Some of its greatest exponents, the Dominicans Eckhardt and Tauler for instance, make only marginal reference to the New Testament. The chief point here for us is that this psychological dualism has driven a wedge between our consciousness as the core of our personality and our 'soul' as somehow distinct and apart, an object of salvation in its own right, the 'ghost in the machine' if in a sense somewhat different from that of Professor Ryle. This amounts in effect to a major psychological dislocation which has produced its own conception of Christianity and its own imperatives in relation to secular life, the different aspects of our planetary existence. What we want to suggest here is that an understanding of how this came into existence brings to our attention what the biblical view of human personality in relation to salvation really is and how it can lead us to see that the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian view of existence is not exactly one of opposition but rather a question of critical awareness. This implies that the often repeated call 'to save one's soul' sometimes takes on a timbre and resonance which cannot without qualification be called biblical and which might not even be always doctrinally above suspicion.

SAVE YOUR LIFE!

One important consequence of all this is that the very often employed phrase in the Vulgate: *salvare animam* is sometimes misleading. It is used, for example, in the account of the destruction of Sodom in the words of the angel to Lot where we should translate simply: 'Save yourself, on your life!', or something of the kind. Jacob, in the mysterious scene of the wrestling at the river Jabboq, exclaims with relief when his unnamed opponent departs: 'I have seen God face to face and yet my life has been spared!' This phrase is therefore one in a series of phrases where a standard translation-word has been adopted, not always with the happiest results: to seek someone's life (that is, to try to kill him), to save life, to risk one's life (literally, to place one's life in the palm of one's hand) – these are the clearest examples where 'life' is required rather than 'soul', since it is a question of physical survival. But we have already seen that the two not only overlap but are semantically inseparable, the more so as time goes on. As we approach the New Testament there are two developments: physical survival is seen as a type of

eschatological survival in one line of development, but in the second this latter is possible only at the expense of the former; in both cases it is a question of preserving one's real identity, one's real life in a time of crisis. It is never a case of disengaging oneself from the body or from matter or from the cosmos, the clear proof being that the hope of such salvation reposes precisely upon the resurrection to a new life brought about by a great creative act of God.

To look first at physical survival as a type of eschatological survival, we note in the scene of the flight of Lot from the doomed city referred to earlier that the angel is certainly intent on securing his (Lot's) physical survival, but in escaping physical death he also escapes judgment. Both are seen on the same plane but, so to speak, at a different depth of focus. You are simply presented with the scene as it is and left to draw your own conclusions without going outside the terms of reference. It was natural enough that this should have been seen as a type or figure of the flight of the Christian community from Jerusalem just before the capture of the city, since this event was certainly seen as the crowning instance of divine judgment in action and a sort of paradigm of the final judgment.⁷ This is quite explicit in an important passage where Luke or his source describes the Day, the moment of judgment, in terms of the destruction of Sodom, following good scriptural precedent (Lk. 17. 31-2). It is fascinating to observe how throughout Old Testament history each turning-point or catastrophe (which means the same) is taken as a paradigm showing ever more clearly the nature of the goal towards which all history is moving, namely, the decisive intervention of God which implies judgment but also salvation. Thus Ezekiel takes the occasion of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 when people were evidently asking, as at other similar moments in history: 'Why has this happened to us?' to make the point that any man who is righteous, even though living like Noah, Daniel and Job in evil times, will save his life (14. 14) – meaning physical survival – while 'the soul that sins shall die' (18. 4). The life and death in question are here and now, and no attempt is made as yet to look beyond.

It must have been during the time of the Maccabees and the Seleucid persecution that the idea first forced its way in that real salvation, the

⁷Mt. 24. 15ff. There are some similarities including the injunction to flee to the mountains: cf. Gen. 19. 17. The whole point is made more firmly if, following Feuillet and an increasing number of exegetes, the whole eschatological discourse is referred to the destruction of Jerusalem.

preservation of one's real identity, might only be possible at the price of physical survival. This implied the belief in either personal immortality or in a great re-creative act of God by which the human person would be reconstituted, namely, the resurrection of the body; and it is significant that the first biblical texts to state this latter doctrine clearly – in 2 Macc. and Daniel – are in the context of the martyrs of the Maccabee rebellion. Thus Eleazar suffers in his body (*kata soma*) under the torture but feels joy in his soul (*kata psychen*) and the second of the seven martyr brothers distinguishes between what he undergoes in the present life and the eternal life which will follow the resurrection. It is evident from the words of the mother that her hope is in a new creative act greater even than the first; the *mirabiliter* of man's passage into this life will be followed by the *mirabilius* of the resurrection into eternal life. This is a decisive turning point since it resulted in the working out of a whole theology of martyrdom which had its influence on the New Testament and is described within the context of the literary technique associated with the hellenistic homily – we notice also that the last of the seven offers his *body* and his *soul* for the laws of his fathers (2 Macc. 7.37). Many other things could be discussed here, but what emerges so far at any rate is clear: saving one's soul, insofar as the subject is the individual himself, implies action in a crisis and the survival or reconstitution of the person as such, not of the soul understood in a dualist sense.

LOSE YOUR LIFE!

Christianity implies a crisis of consciousness since the Christian holds that the final reality, the ultimate self-manifestation of God, is already here in the person of Christ and compels him to a decision. Martyrdom is only the extreme form of this critical position which is implied in the very fact of being a Christian; the fact that not just theoretically but in bitter earnest the Christian must be prepared at any moment to surrender life and all that goes with it to witness to that reality means that he can never 'sit pretty', be at home in his environment. This, rather than an ascetical system of detachment from the body, is what we should have in our minds when we speak of saving our souls. At least that is what is implied in the crucial gospel saying on this subject:

Whoever would save his life will lose it;

And whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's
will save it (Mk 8. 35).

If our idea of saving our souls is to be evangelical it must attach

itself to and start from this saying. It is among the best-attested in the Gospel, occurring with slight variations six times, and is present in Mark, the Logia-source of Matthew-Luke, and John. The addition of the words 'and the gospel's' in Mark reminds us that this particular gospel was written for a Church – that of Rome – then going through its trial by fire, and that the saying is in fact a martyrdom-logion addressed to a wider audience than we might at first suppose. This is further emphasized by its being placed at the outset of the journey which was to end in the martyrdom of Jesus, a journey which the Christian assembly gathered to hear the Word of God would see itself repeating. In the preceding saying about the necessity for the disciple of a radical initial act of self-repudiation we might note how, conversely, Luke deschatologizes the idea of imminent death implied in taking up the cross by adding 'daily' (Lk. 9. 23). It is plain, therefore, that the context for understanding the idea of saving or losing one's life (the Vulgate and Douai have 'soul') is not really different from that in Maccabees, only here we have come much nearer to the cross and the deepest secret of all which really takes us beyond the atmosphere of crisis and lights up the whole of existence – namely, that the way to self-realization lies through self-repudiation (for that is, in fact, what denying oneself means). In the form which the logion takes in Lk. 17.33 we are told that 'whoever tries to *hang on to his life* will lose it, but he who loses his life will preserve it' – the same point made even more forcibly.⁸

The same saying, finally, is reported also in John at the same juncture – the prospect for Jesus of imminent death. What is interesting here is that the same truth is universalized in a way not found in the Synoptics. Some Greeks had come up to the city for the Passover, whether dispersion Jews or merely proselytes we do not know though we would more naturally suppose the latter, and asked for an interview with Jesus, approaching first the disciple with the Greek name, Philip. In answer to an unspecified question, which may however be supposed to have concerned his death, Jesus states the basic law of Christian existence in terms of the age-old pattern of the death and rebirth of the year and of the grain: 'Unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit.' (12. 24). This would lead us on to the not dissimilar way in which Paul (if this passage or

⁸Incidentally an interesting little exercise in the synoptic problem, since Luke puts it in a different context into which it does not fit very comfortably since the injunction to remember Lot's wife in the preceding verse would argue in favour of surviving physical peril and therefore preserving one's physical life.

hymn is indeed from his pen) contrasts the way of affirmation, the 'grasping' of Adam, with the self-emptying of Christ the Servant by which he enters into the fullness of life (Phil. 2. 5ff) – but this would take us beyond the limits we have set ourselves.

CHRISTIANITY CONCERNS THE WHOLE MAN

One characteristic of our Christian renewal is the attempt to return upstream to a clearer perception of biblical truth. Among the forces combining to distort this truth the earliest (already combatted in the canonical writings), the most persistent and in many ways the most alluring was gnosticism, basically an attempt to state the gospel in terms of greek dualism. We might correctly write it off now as a heresy but as an attitude of mind it is by no means exorcized and continues to stick to us in many ways and under many forms. We have been suggesting that the call 'to save our souls' is still very often redolent of the gnostic pattern of salvation even when made with the utmost conviction and sincerity, and have tried to show some consequences of this. It might not be out of place to finish off by giving one or two corollaries, more as hints or rough notes for further consideration than anything else. Thus:

The Incarnation as the pattern of our 'spiritual' life. The purpose of Christ's descent and return was to redeem man from his environment rather than from sin (note how, in the gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Logian 57 'He who has known the world has found a corpse . . .' seems to twist the gospel saying into a gnostic sense) – the purpose of our spiritual life is to get out of 'this muddy vesture of decay' and back to the Absolute . . . The orthodox view of the Incarnation implies on the other hand a descent into and transformation of matter, therefore we are to find a divine life, fully humanized, *here, where we are.*

The Creation of the whole man. Our mysterious likeness to and kinship with God is a postulate of the Christian view of man – the Catechism question, formulated according to the body-soul axis, leaves room for only one answer which though doctrinally unexceptionable is not particularly enlightening – a more biblical view would imply an intuition into that self-awareness, a certain type of consciousness, which is at the root of personality; which, while differentiating us from the animal world below us contains a faint reflexion of that perfect self-awareness in God which is expressed perfectly in his Word – just as God sees all things through his Word,

so we know and experience within this personal consciousness – Jung has stated that in his view and in accordance with his research and practice the Ego has the same numinous characteristics which traditional theologies attribute to the deity, and though theologians may feel inclined to murmur *non tali auxilio* it is not impossible that this may give us a lead as to biblical teaching on the image of God in man.

The Presence and Operation of Evil. The problem of Evil is the starting-point of gnostic speculation – its equation with matter means that the soul is saved *from* the body – this results in a very different hierarchy of sin from that of orthodox moral teaching – great prominence given to sexual aberration – marriage and conjugal relations at the best a necessary evil; the *summum bonum* is to get away from the world at all costs, as in some suspect forms of early monasticism – in this way evil is really vaporized, not faced squarely and individualized as in Job.

Human and divine Love. Characteristic of the gnostic view of love is its lack of realism – human love can never contain full commitment and feeds itself on the fiction of a ‘spiritual’ allegiance (cf. this view in Donne’s *The Extasie*) – above all, God can never love us as persons. For the orthodox Christian, on the other hand, the body is a means of union not separation because the carnal can and does contain the mystery of the spiritual – in speaking of God’s love for us we need not speak of his loving our ‘souls’; the scriptures do not flinch from representing this divine *agape* in terms of *eros* as in Hosea, Jeremiah and the Canticle.

Death and After. This misunderstanding of salvation carries with it the assumption of a complete discontinuity between this world and the next with the result that the latter is often represented in an unreal, naive light, really more pagan than Christian – we have seen that the biblical answer to death is along the line of a progressive deepening of religious experience – the idea of the soul saved from its environment makes us think of our destiny as disembodied spirits (the subject of innumerable bad jokes) rather than the final state of reconstituted personality – a real person in a real world.