



Publication Date: September 20, 2025
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

Examining the Concepts of Here and Hereafter in Relation to the Immortality of the Soul in Christian Theology

Simeon Abiodun Ige, PhD

Department of Religious Studies,
 Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba
 Kogi State-Nigeria.

Pastorige@yahoo.com

And

Shaibu, Abdul Michael (PhD Student)

Department of Religious Studies,
 Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba
 Kogi State - Nigeria

abdulshaibumichael@gmail.com

Abstract

The concept of the immortality of the soul and the relationship between the "here" and "hereafter" in Christian theology has been a subject of significant theological debate and interpretation. While these concepts are central to Christian eschatology, their understanding varies across different Christian traditions, leading to diverse perspectives on the nature of the soul, the afterlife, and the final judgment. This variation presents a challenge in articulating a cohesive Christian doctrine on these fundamental issues. This study aims to assess the concept of "here" and "hereafter" as it pertains to the immortality of the soul in Christianity. It seeks to explore the scriptural foundations, theological interpretations, and historical developments that have shaped these beliefs, as well as the theological debates and diverging views that continue to influence contemporary Christian thought. The study employs historical and analytical methods to examine the evolution of the concepts of "here" and "hereafter" within Christian theology. The historical method traces the development of these ideas from early Christian thought to modern theological debates, while the analytical method critically examines the interpretations and doctrinal positions across different Christian traditions. The study reveals that the concepts of "here" and "hereafter" are deeply interwoven into Christian eschatology, with significant variation in interpretation across different traditions. The immortality of the soul is a core belief, but its understanding varies, with debates surrounding the nature of the soul, the specifics of the afterlife, and the relationship between the body and soul. The study recommends that contemporary Christian theologians continue to engage with both traditional and modern perspectives on the "here" and "hereafter," integrating insights from various disciplines to enrich the understanding of these concepts. Further interdisciplinary research that incorporates advancements in science, philosophy, and ethics is encouraged to foster a more holistic and nuanced approach to Christian eschatology.



Publication Date: September 20, 2025
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

Introduction

The concept of immortality has been a central tenet in religious and philosophical discourse throughout human history. This enduring fascination with the persistence of the self beyond physical death speaks to humanity's deepest existential concerns and spiritual aspirations. Across diverse cultural and religious traditions, the idea of an immortal soul or some form of continued existence after death has played a pivotal role in shaping belief systems, ethical frameworks, and societal structures (Ciocan 234).

In ancient civilizations, from Egypt to Mesopotamia, the afterlife was a dominant theme in religious practices and funerary rites. The Egyptian Book of the Dead, for instance, provided intricate instructions for the soul's journey in the afterlife, reflecting a complex understanding of post-mortem existence. Similarly, ancient Greek philosophy, particularly through the works of Plato and Aristotle, introduced sophisticated arguments for the soul's immortality, influencing subsequent Western philosophical and religious thought. In Eastern traditions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, the concept of immortality takes on different forms. The Hindu belief in reincarnation posits a cyclical view of existence, where the atman (soul) transmigrates through multiple lives. Buddhism, while rejecting the notion of an eternal, unchanging self, nonetheless engages with concepts of rebirth and the continuity of consciousness across lifetimes. Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – have developed their own distinct but interrelated perspectives on immortality. These traditions generally conceive of a linear timeline of existence, encompassing creation, earthly life, death, and an eternal afterlife. However, the specifics of how the soul persists and the nature of the afterlife vary both between and within these faith traditions (Bonwick, 256)

The concept of the immortality of the soul is a cornerstone of Christian theology, deeply embedded in its doctrinal teachings and reflected in the religious practices of its adherents. Christianity posits that human existence is not limited to the temporal realm but extends into an eternal dimension that begins after physical death. This belief is encapsulated in the concepts of the "here" and the "hereafter," which together form the foundation of Christian eschatology and ethics. The "here"



Publication Date: September 20, 2025
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

refers to the present life, a transient phase where human beings live out their earthly existence, while the "hereafter" denotes the afterlife, a state of eternal existence where the soul either experiences communion with God in Heaven or separation from Him in Hell (Danquah, 23).

The immortality of the soul is not merely a peripheral belief in Christianity; it is central to the faith's understanding of human nature, salvation, and divine justice. The Bible, the primary text for Christian belief, offers numerous passages that affirm the soul's continued existence after death. For instance, in Ecclesiastes 12:7, it is stated, "and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (New International Version). This passage underscores the belief that the physical body may perish, but the soul, being of divine origin, returns to its Creator. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus' promise of eternal life to those who believe in Him, as found in John 3:16, provides the bedrock for the Christian hope in the resurrection and life everlasting. Theological reflections on the "here" and "hereafter" have been pivotal in shaping Christian moral and ethical behavior. The transient nature of the "here" is seen as an opportunity for spiritual growth and preparation for the "hereafter." This temporal life is understood as a testing ground, where individuals are called to live in accordance with God's commandments, with the hope of achieving eternal life. This view is deeply rooted in the teachings of Jesus, who emphasized the importance of living a righteous life as preparation for the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).

Moreover, the concept of the "hereafter" serves as a source of comfort and hope for Christians, offering assurance that death is not the end but a transition to a new form of existence. The Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, eloquently describes the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the mortal body into an immortal one (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). This teaching not only affirms the immortality of the soul but also the resurrection of the body, highlighting the comprehensive nature of Christian eschatological hope. Throughout Christian history, various theological interpretations have emerged regarding the nature of the soul's immortality and its journey in the afterlife. Early Church Fathers, such as Augustine of Hippo, argued for the natural immortality of the soul, influenced by Platonic thought, while later theologians like Thomas Aquinas integrated Aristotelian philosophy to explain the rational basis for the soul's eternal existence (Henry, 88). These theological discourses have significantly shaped Christian



Publication Date: September 20, 2025
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

understandings of the "here" and "hereafter," influencing everything from liturgical practices to ethical teachings. This article aims to explore the Christian understanding of the immortality of the soul by examining how the concepts of "here" and "hereafter" are interpreted in Christian theology. By analyzing scriptural references and theological perspectives, this study will provide insights into how these beliefs shape the Christian worldview, ethical conduct, and hope for the future.

Ancient Roots of the Concept of Immortality of Soul

1. Greek philosophical influences (Plato, Aristotle)

The concept of soul immortality in Western thought owes much to ancient Greek philosophy, particularly the works of Plato and Aristotle. Plato's dialogues, especially the "Phaedo," present some of the earliest systematic arguments for the soul's immortality (Plato, trans. 1892). In this work, Plato argues that the soul, being immaterial and the source of life, cannot be subject to death (Robinson, 217). His theory of Forms further supports this view, suggesting that the soul, akin to the eternal Forms, exists beyond the physical realm (Silverman, 24). Aristotle, while diverging from Plato in many respects, also contributed significantly to the discourse on soul immortality. In "De Anima," Aristotle presents a more naturalistic view of the soul as the form or essence of a living being. While he does not argue for personal immortality in the same way as Plato, his concept of the active intellect (*nous poietikos*) as eternal and separable from the body has been influential in later philosophical and theological discussions of immortality (Shields, 206).

2. Jewish eschatological traditions

Jewish eschatological traditions, particularly those developed during the Second Temple period (516 BCE - 70 CE), played a crucial role in shaping early Christian concepts of the afterlife and soul immortality. The Book of Daniel, dating from the 2nd century BCE, contains one of the earliest clear references to resurrection in the Hebrew Bible: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2, NRSV). Intertestamental literature, such as the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, further developed ideas of the soul's immortality: "For God created us for incorruption, and made



Publication Date: September 20, 2025
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

us in the image of his own eternity" (Wisdom 2:23, NRSV). The Dead Sea Scrolls also provide evidence of diverse afterlife beliefs among Jewish sects during this period (Collins 26).

Development of Christian Thought on the Soul

1. Early Church Fathers' Perspectives

The early Church Fathers grappled with synthesizing Greek philosophical concepts, Jewish eschatological traditions, and the emerging Christian doctrine. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 CE), in his *"Dialogue with Trypho,"* argued for the soul's immortality while rejecting the idea of its pre-existence (Justin Martyr, trans. 1885). Origen of Alexandria (c. 184-253 CE) proposed a more complex view, suggesting a pre-existence of souls and a final restoration of all beings to God (apokatastasis), ideas which were later controversial (Ramelli, 2013). Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) played a pivotal role in shaping Western Christian thought on the soul. In *"De Immortalitate Animae,"* he argues for the soul's immortality based on its participation in immutable truth, reflecting both Platonic influences and Christian doctrine (Augustine, trans. 1947). His work significantly influenced subsequent medieval theology (Teske 21).

2. Medieval Scholastic Debates

The medieval period saw intense scholastic debates on the nature of the soul and its immortality. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), in his *"Summa Theologica,"* sought to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with Christian doctrine. He argued for the soul as the form of the body, yet capable of existing separately after death, awaiting reunion with the resurrected body (Aquinas, trans. 1947). The debate intensified in the 13th and 14th centuries, with figures like Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308) and William of Ockham (c. 1287-1347) offering alternative views. Scotus emphasized the will over the intellect in his understanding of the soul, while Ockham's nominalism challenged the realist foundations of much soul theory (Cross, 204). These medieval debates not only refined Christian thinking on soul immortality but also set the stage for later philosophical and theological developments, including the upheavals of the Reformation period and the challenges posed by Enlightenment rationalism (McGrath 26). This historical context demonstrates the complex interplay of philosophical, religious, and cultural influences that shaped Christian concepts of soul



Publication Date: September 20, 2025
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

immortality. From ancient Greek philosophy and Jewish eschatology to the sophisticated arguments of medieval scholasticism, the idea of the soul's immortality underwent significant development and refinement, laying the groundwork for ongoing theological and philosophical discussions in Christianity

Biblical foundations

i. Old Testament References

The Old Testament does not present a unified or explicit doctrine of soul immortality. Instead, it offers a complex and evolving understanding of the afterlife and the nature of human existence beyond death. Early Hebrew thought often depicted Sheol, as a shadowy underworld where the dead existed in a diminished state, without distinction between righteous and wicked (Psalm 88:10-12; Isaiah 38:18) (Segal, 2004). However, several passages hint at more developed concepts of afterlife and resurrection: a) Job 19:25-26 expresses hope in a redeemer and seeing God after death, though interpretations vary. b) Psalm 16:10 and Psalm 49:15 suggest God's power over death and Sheol, potentially implying some form of afterlife for the righteous. c) Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:2 present clearer ideas of bodily resurrection, marking a significant development in Jewish eschatology (Collins 93). The development of these ideas in the Old Testament reflects changing theological perspectives and possible influences from surrounding cultures, particularly during and after the Babylonian exile (Levenson, 110).

ii. New Testament Teachings

The New Testament presents a more developed theology of the afterlife and soul immortality, centered on the resurrection of Jesus Christ: a) Jesus' teachings: Christ often spoke of eternal life (John 3:16) and the resurrection (John 11:25-26). His parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) implies conscious existence after death (Kreitzer, 1994). b) Pauline theology: Paul's writings are crucial for understanding early Christian beliefs about the afterlife. In 1 Corinthians 15, he elaborates on the resurrection, describing a transformation from physical to spiritual bodies. In 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, he speaks of being "away from the body and at home with the Lord," suggesting an intermediate state (Harris, 2005). c) Other New Testament



Publication Date: September 20, 2025
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

writings: The Book of Revelation presents visions of the afterlife, final judgment, and eternal states (Revelation 20-22), contributing to Christian eschatology (Bauckham, 93). These New Testament teachings formed the basis for subsequent Christian doctrine on soul immortality and the afterlife.

Challenges in the Understanding of an Immortal Soul

The notion of an immortal soul has faced various challenges from philosophical, scientific, and theological perspectives. Some biblical scholars argue that the idea of an immortal soul owes more to Greek philosophy than to biblical teaching, which emphasizes resurrection rather than innate immortality (Green, 20). This critique suggests that the concept of the soul's immortality might not be as central to Christian doctrine as traditionally thought. Philosophical objections to the concept of an immortal soul include conceptual issues and mind-body dependence. For example, philosophers have raised questions about the coherence of disembodied existence and the nature of time in eternity, challenging the idea of a soul existing independently of the body. The apparent dependence of mental states on brain states has led some to question how the mind or soul could survive bodily death, given the close correlation between brain function and consciousness.

Scientific challenges to the concept of an immortal soul include perspectives from evolutionary biology and neuroscience. The evolutionary origin of human consciousness raises questions about the uniqueness and immortality of the human soul, suggesting that if consciousness evolved, it might not be inherently immortal. Neuroscientific findings linking specific brain areas to cognitive and emotional functions further challenge traditional notions of an independent soul, as these functions appear closely tied to the physical brain. Theological alternatives to the concept of an immortal soul have also emerged. Some theologians propose annihilationism, arguing that immortality is not innate but a divine gift, and that the wicked may cease to exist rather than suffer eternal torment. Others emphasize bodily resurrection rather than soul immortality as the core Christian hope, viewing immortality as a future gift rather than an inherent property of the soul. This focus shifts the emphasis from the soul's inherent immortality to the resurrection as the central hope of Christian eschatology.



Publication Date: September 20, 2025
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

Challenges to the concept of soul immortality also raise ethical questions about the basis for human dignity and the meaning of life in the face of mortality. If the soul is not inherently immortal, this may impact how we view human worth and the significance of our actions in this life. These debates reflect the complex interplay between philosophical reasoning, scientific discovery, and theological reflection in Christian thought. They demonstrate that the concept of soul immortality, far from being a static doctrine, continues to evolve in response to new insights and challenges. The ongoing nature of these debates underscores the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue in addressing questions of human nature, personal identity, and ultimate destiny. It also highlights the need for nuanced and carefully articulated positions that can engage with both traditional Christian teachings and contemporary intellectual challenges.

Conclusion

The exploration of the concept of "here" and "hereafter" within Christian theology, particularly as it pertains to the immortality of the soul, reveals the depth and complexity of Christian eschatological beliefs. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul is not merely a peripheral aspect of Christian thought but is central to the faith's understanding of human existence, morality, and the ultimate destiny of individuals. Through an analysis of scriptural foundations, theological interpretations, and historical developments, it becomes evident that these concepts are deeply interwoven into the very fabric of Christian belief. The Christian view of the "here" is profoundly shaped by the understanding that life on earth is a temporary phase in a larger, divinely orchestrated plan. The teachings of Jesus, as well as the writings of the Apostles, emphasize that while the physical world is transient, the soul is eternal, and the choices made in the "here" have lasting implications for the "hereafter." This understanding infuses the Christian moral and ethical framework with a sense of urgency and purpose, encouraging believers to live in accordance with God's will, with the knowledge that their earthly actions bear eternal consequences. The beliefs surrounding heaven, hell, and the resurrection of the body are not just abstract theological ideas but serve as the bedrock of Christian hope and existential meaning. The promise of eternal life with God, as well as the warning of eternal separation, has motivated countless generations of



Publication Date: September 20, 2025
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

Christians to live lives of faith, love, and service, all in anticipation of the ultimate fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.

Works Cited

- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Cincinnati: Benziger Bros., 1947.
- Aristotle. "De Anima." The Basic Works of Aristotle, edited by Richard McKeon, Manhattan: Random House, 1941.
- Bacchiocchi, Samuele. *Immortality or Resurrection: A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny*. Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1997.
- Bauckham, Richard. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Bonwick, James. *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*. Indiana Hills, CO: The Falcon's Wing Press, 1956.
- Ciocan, C. T. (2019). The value of the soul in the religious views. An overview targeting the salvation of an individual. *Dialogo*, 6(2), 233-244.
- Collins, John J. *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Cross, Richard. *Duns Scotus's Theory of Cognition*. Oxford UP, 2014.
- Daley, Brian E. *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*. Michigan : Baker Academic, 2002.
- Danquah, J. (2023). The Concept of the Immortality of the Soul: A Biblical-Theological Study. *E-Journal of Religious & Theological Studies (ERATS)*, 9(11).
- Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. 3rd ed., Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Fudge, Edward, and Robert A. Peterson. *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Henry, Carl F. H. "Death and the State of the Soul after Death." In *Basic Christian Doctrines*. New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1962.
- Levenson, Jon D. *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life*. Yale UP, 2006.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 5th ed., Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Murphy, Nancey. *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* Cambridge UP, 2006.



Publication Date: September 20, 2025
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

- Robinson, T. M. *Plato's Psychology*. 2nd ed., U of Toronto P, 2017.
- Segal, Alan F. *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*. New York: Doubleday, 2004.
- Shields, Christopher. "Aristotle's Psychology." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2016 ed., Stanford U, 2016.
- Silverman, Allan. "Plato's Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2014 ed., Stanford U, 2014.
- Teske, Roland J. "Augustine's Theory of Soul." *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, edited by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, Cambridge UP, 2001, pp. 116-123.
- van Inwagen, Peter. "The Possibility of Resurrection." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1978, pp. 114-121.