

Quotations from the Early Church Fathers

Regarding the Rest of the Dead, Prior to the Resurrection

Clement of Rome (c. 96 AD)

"All the generations of from Adam even unto this day have passed away ... and they will be made manifest at the revelation of the kingdom of Christ. For it is written, 'Enter into your secret chambers for a little time, until my wrath and fury pass away. And I will remember a propitious day, and will raise you up out of your graves.' " [Is. 26:20]

Justin Martyr (c. 160 AD)

"You may have fallen in with some who are called 'Christians.' However they do not admit this, and they venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham ... They say there is no resurrection of the dead, but rather, they say that when they die, their souls are taken to heaven. Do not imagine that they are Christians."

Tatian (c.160 AD)

"The soul is not in itself immortal, O Greeks, but mortal ... If indeed, it does not know the truth it dies. It is dissolved with the body, but rises again at last at the end of the world with the body."

"Having been born, and through death I will be existing no longer ... nevertheless, I will exist again. Just as before birth I did not exist, but was afterward born."

Irenaus (c. 180 AD)

"The heretics... do not acknowledge the salvation of their flesh... but claim that immediately upon their death, they will pass above the heavens and the Creator, and go to the mother and father that they pretend exist ...

"For they do not choose to understand, that if these things are as they say, the Lord Himself in whom they profess to believe, did not rise again upon the third day. Rather, immediately upon his expiring on the cross, he would have departed on high, leaving his body to the earth ... But the Lord observed the law of the dead, so that he might become the first begotten of the dead, and he waited until the third day "in the lower parts of the earth." [Ephesians 4:9]

"No disciple is above his master" [Matt. 10:24] Our Master, therefore, did not at once depart, taking flight. Rather, he awaited the time of his resurrection, as determined by the Father ... Likewise, we should also await the time of our resurrection determined by God."

Tertullian (c. 207 AD) *

It is appointed [by God] to afford an interval of rest to the souls of the righteous until the consummation of all things completes the resurrection of all human beings with the recompense of their reward. By 'Abraham's bosom' [Luke 16:22] is meant some temporary receptacle of faithful souls, wherein is foreshadowed an image of the future, and where is given some foresight of the glory of both judgements."

"All souls, therefore, are shut up within Hades. Do you admit this? Yes or No?"

** Notice how the biblical Hebrew definition of the word "soul" (a living being = a person's own self) was used consistently by 1st & 2nd Century Christians to refer to humans as a 'whole person' — in life or death. But by the 3rd Century the word "soul" was already beginning to take on the pagan Greek definition, as "the inner part of us that lives on after death."*

In the end, western Christianity abandoned the biblical Hebrew understanding of the soul as a 'whole person' and began to use the definition of the soul as an inner 'life force' that had been taught by the Greek philosophers. What was called "heresy" among the first Christians, later became the common popular belief — which, unfortunately, remains true to this day.