

UNIQUE USAGES AND PRETENDED PRECEDENTS:
BACCHIOCCHI ON MATTHEW 10:28

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Samuele Bacchiocchi, in his *Immortality and Resurrection: A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny*, cites Mark 8:35; Matt 16:25; and John 12:25 (among others) to demonstrate that “Christ expanded the meaning of the soul—*psyche* [in Matt 10:28] to denote not only the physical life but also eternal life received by those who are willing to make a sacrificial commitment to Him.” He continues,

If [Matt 10:28] is read in the light of the expanded meaning given by Christ to the soul, the meaning of the saying is this: “Do not fear those who can bring your earthly existence (body—*soma*) to an end, but cannot annihilate your eternal life in God; but fear God who is able to destroy your whole being eternally.” (Bacchiocchi 84)

This interpretation of the verse, supposedly in harmony with Old Testament usages of “soul,” is flawed for several reasons. First, when the term “soul” designates the life of an individual in the Old Testament, its referent is never the eternal life of the individual *in contradistinction* to his temporal life. Instead, it refers to life as an individual’s physical vitality, terminated at death and restored in the resurrection. The biblical view of resurrection assumes some identification between the present life and the resurrected life, in which the individual *resumes* his state of living through resurrection.

In fact, the very verses Bacchiocchi cites in support of this expanded meaning illustrate this principle. Matt 16:25 reads: “for those who want to save their life (*psyche*) will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” In this paradoxical statement, *psyche* denotes life in *both* the present and the future; the *psyche* is first be “lost” in martyrdom (cf. 16:21,24) before its recovery in life eternal. Therefore, one cannot interpret this usage of *psyche* as eternal life in contradistinction to temporal life (as Bacchiocchi attempts): the term denotes the same state of physical vitality, however experienced either in the time or in eternity. Biblical resurrection is a “revivification.”

Furthermore, in that the soul may be “lost” [that is, killed] in martyrdom, we are aware that we are handling a usage of the term “soul” that is distinct from that found in Matt 10:28, where the soul cannot be killed in martyrdom. No Hebraic or Gospel precedent exists for the unique usage encountered in Matt 10:28.

Finally, Bacchiocchi's interpretation of the word "body" (the object of the verb "to kill") as "earthly existence," rather than as the material body itself, denies the text's most natural reading. Biblically, to "kill the body" is to inflict physical harm upon the flesh; Bacchiocchi's reading is unprecedented. Furthermore, his metonymous reading of "body" cannot be consistently applied to 10:28b, which requires that both soul and body ("eternal" and "earthly life"[?]) be cast into hellfire. (He also cannot apply his metonymies to the parallel text in Luke 12:4,5 where the "earthly life" would be destroyed a second time *in the eschatological fire*.) To avoid this nonsensical interpretation, Bacchiocchi conveniently retreats from his established definitions, rendering 10:28b: "but fear God who is able to destroy your whole being eternally." Suddenly, "soul and body" no longer refer to planes of existence (earthly v. eternal), but to the totality of human nature (as those who interpret this verse as a revelation of bipartite nature maintain).

Attempts to find an Old Testament precedent for the usage of "soul" in Matt 10:28 consistently fail. Scholars who reject a bipartite conception of human nature (such as Christ expresses in this passage) go so far as to pervert the extant Hebraic usages—recommending fabricated denotations also unknown in the Hebrew Bible. These suggestions prove equally inadequate; Bacchiocchi engineers an inconsistent (and impossible) reading of the text in order to escape an intolerable one.