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ΑΘΑΝΑΣΙΑ / ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΣ: THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

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In this essay in speculative biblical theology on immortality/resurrection, the anthropological presuppositions need to be examined in both Hebrew and Greek usages, requiring an understanding of the absolute nature of death in its biblical context. While the notion of the resurrection took hold in post-Exilic Palestine, Socrates exulted in the immortality of his soul and the body–soul dichotomy, in terms of which early Christianity read the NT. Yet the NT itself neither teaches nor presupposes this immortality of the soul, but rather that identifiably the same 'I', who dies wholly and totally, is raised up to a newness of life, a new creation.

This is an essay in speculative biblical theology from the data of the NT. It is an 'essay' simply because it is no more than an attempt to exercise the imagination on a given in the Christian tradition. It is 'speculative' in the strict acceptation of the term, for it tries to imagine a what-might-have-been: the 'road not taken', what the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century disputants on divine predestination and free will called a 'futurible'.[1] That it is an essay on speculative 'biblical theology' needs the reminder that the topic of resurrection/immortality in the Bible is inextricably linked with questions of philosophy and of philosophical anthropology, whether on the part of the biblical authors themselves or that of the exegete.[2]

It is necessary to make these preliminary observations in order to assuage any misgiving one might have about the integrity of the faith. To make an essential point about all such 'roads not taken', Aristotle cites a couplet from a vanished work of the poet Agathon: 'Choice', Aristotle writes, 'is not concerned with anything that has happened already . . . what has happened cannot be made not to have happened. Hence Agathon is right in saying

[1] See F. L. Sheerin, 'Futurible', *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 6.230.

[2] See the recent work of M.-É. Boismard, *Faut-il encore parler de résurrection? Les données scripturaires* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), which makes much use of Pierre Masset's philosophical study of the question, 'Immortalité de l'âme, résurrection des corps', *NRT* 105 (1983) 321–44.

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This only is denied even to God.
The power to make what has been done undone.'[3]

Two remarks need to be made at the outset in order to situate the question about 'immortality' and 'resurrection' in biblical usage:

Remark 1. Only the Book of Wisdom employs the term ἀθανασία: 'their hope is full of immortality' (3.1–4); 'the memory of virtue is ἀθανασία' (4.1; 8.13, 17; 15.3). For completeness's sake, 4 Macc 14.5 and 16.13[4] ought also to be mentioned.[5] The NT is even more parsimonious in its use of the term: 1 Cor 15.53b–54 has 'this mortal (θνητόν) nature must put on ἀθανασία'.[6] The first part of the same verse, it may be recalled, sets in contrast the φθαρτόν with ἀφθαρσία (corrupt . . . incorruptibility), which latter term has a slightly greater frequency (five as against two times) in the NT than in the LXX. Thus, for instance, 'What is raised is imperishable' (1 Cor 15.42); 'the perishable does not inherit the imperishable' (1 Cor 15.50).[7] But to speak of love as 'imperishable', as does Eph 6.24, is too well known a literary topos to require comment.[8]

The only other instance of the use of immortality is in the Pastorals' sturdy affirmation of the monotheistic faith in the 'only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality (ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν)' (1 Tim 6.15–16).[9] That our Saviour Christ Jesus 'abolished death and brought life and immortality (ζωὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν)' (2 Tim 1.10) is most remarkable, not for

[3] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.2.6 (Loeb 19.330f).

[4] In the encomium on the seven brothers, who 'as though running the course toward immortality, hastened to death by torture' (4 Macc 14.5), and of their 'God-fearing mother', who gave 'rebirth for immortality to the whole number of her sons . . . implored them and urged them on to death for the sake of religion' (16.12–13). The LXX has εἰς ἀθανασίαν ἀνατίκτουσα, of which H. Anderson's translation makes better sense than the RSV with 'bringing her . . . sons to birth into immortal life', in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2.561. Except where noted otherwise, the RSV is the text cited throughout.

[5] Only in the LXX apocrypha, remarks R. Bultmann, is the term 'used to describe the expected eternal life of the righteous (Wis 3.4; 15.3; 4 Macc 14.5), and only here is the ψυχή described as ἀθάνατος (4 Macc 14.6; 18.23)'. R. Bultmann, 'ἀθανασία', *TDNT* 3.24.

[6] In the NT 'ἀθανασία is found only in two passages. In 1 Cor 15.53f the incorruptible mode of existence of the resurrected is called (ἀφθαρσία and) ἀθανασία as in Hellenistic Judaism, the thought being not merely that of eternal duration but of a mode of existence different from that of σάρξ and αἷμα . . . and equivalent to what is elsewhere called δόξα'. Ibid., 3.24–5.

[7] In his article on φθείρω, Günther Harder remarks that in the NT the word group is 'often used to denote the corruptibility of man, his subjection to death . . . Man is φθαρτός (Rom 1.23) precisely in antithesis to the ἄφθαρτος θεός . . . τὸ φθαρτόν is man's existence in the world as this is controlled by the σάρξ. ἀφθαρσία, a new mode of being, must be imparted to him, 1 Cor 15.53' (*TDNT* 9.103–4).

[8] The ratio of usage, oddly enough, is almost the inverse of that in the LXX, where ἀθανασία occurs seven times as against ἀφθαρσία's four times.

[9] In 1 Tim 6.13–16 the ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν is indisputable, and not really the object of the argument.

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the term 'immortality' it does not in fact employ, but for the parallelism it sets up between the abolition of death and the bringing of life and incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία).

But, in point of fact, the present essay is not a discussion of the terms 'immortality' and 'resurrection'. Nor, it should be added, is it a denial of the fact that the NT speaks in the Hellenistic accents of its day. The statistics are noted merely to call attention to the scarcity of 'immortality' in biblical usage. What is of interest here is how one and the other term can be properly understood only if we understand their respective anthropological presuppositions. That is to say, we must be aware of the response one would make to the Psalmist's 'What is man? (τίς ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος)' (Ps 88.49). Both 'immortality' and 'resurrection' presuppose, indeed require, an anthropology for their proper comprehension.

Remark 2. Consequently, the terms of biblical anthropology must be recognized as neither synonymous nor coterminous with those of Hellenistic, metaphysical anthropology, save perhaps only incidentally. Thus, when the terms 'body' (σῶμα), 'soul' (ψυχή) and 'spirit' (πνεῦμα) are used either in the LXX to render בָּשָׂר, נֶפֶשׁ, and רוּחַ respectively in the Hebrew text, or in the NT itself, they do not refer to constituent parts of the human being, but rather to aspects under which this human being can be viewed. This merely constates a fact. It does not pretend that one world was impervious to the influence of the other. Indeed, the presence of Hellenistic influence is there for all to see in both the LXX and the NT. The point at issue here is primarily theological: the datum of a revelation.

What concerns us most, however, is the fact that, as has often been noted, the 'I' does not *have* a body, a soul, or a spirit, but rather *is* a body, a soul and a spirit.[10] We must, therefore, keep in mind that, in the NT, when the 'I' dies, then all of me dies: my body, my soul and my spirit. In death none of me and nothing of me survives. 'Oh I know', said the poet, 'I too shall cease to be as when I was not yet' (Samuel Becket).

This is why, at the very start of any such discussion of immortality or resurrection, an understanding of the absolute nature and totality of death is indispensable. I can do no better than recall

[10] Thus, '*soma* is not a something that outwardly clings to a man's real *self* (to his soul, for instance), but belongs to its very essence, so that we can say man does not *have* a *soma*; he *is soma*, for in not a few cases *soma* can be translated simply 'I' (or whatever personal pronoun fits the context); thus, I Cor 13.3; 9.27; 7.4 . . .' Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1952) 194.

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some scriptural verses which underlie this insufficiently noted fact. That death is the common fate of all mortals is a tautology underlying all OT thought, to say nothing of other literatures. Not only the ineluctable fact of death itself, 'We must all die' (2 Sam 14.14); 'Who can deliver his soul [MT נֶפֶשׁ; LXX ψυχή] from the power of Sheol?' (Ps 89.48), but its utter irrevocability: 'We are like water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered again' (2 Sam 14.14); 'If a man (גֶּבֶר, ἄνθρωπος) die, shall he live again?' (Job 14.14);[11] 'when you take away their breath (רוּחַ, πνεῦμα), they die and return to dust' (Ps 104.29); 'They are dead, they will not live; they are shades (רְפָאִים), they will not rise' (Isa 26.14).[12]

What is most to our purpose here is that, in addition to its universality and its irrevocability, death is understood principally as a severance of all relationships with God as well as with everyone and everything on the face of the earth. 'The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence' (Ps 115.17); 'I said I shall not see the Lord in the land of the living; I shall look upon man (אָדָם, ἄνθρωπος) no more among the inhabitants of the world' (Isa 38.11). 'For in death there is no remembrance of you,' says the Psalmist, 'in Sheol who can give you praise?' (Ps 6.5); 'Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?' (Ps 30.9).

Moreover, not only are the dead cut off from God, they are beyond his reach:

> Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up to praise you?
> Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
> Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness? (Ps 88.10–12).

The dead themselves are as nothing:

> For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, but the memory of them is lost. (Eccles 9.5)

This is not inspired cynicism, but hardy realism. It lead Qoheleth to reflect on how utterly the dead perish:

> Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and they have no more for ever any share in all that is done under the sun. (Eccles 9.6)

Such sobriety in the sage's reminder is at the opposite extreme of pessimism: 'for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom

[11] The NRSV's politically correct rendering of 'If mortals die' in Job 14.14 is useless as a translation, save for those who are innocent of philology and ignorant of the etymology of 'mortal'.

[12] The LXX misreads, 'But the dead shall not see life, neither shall physicians (ἰατροί) by any means raise them up (οὐ μὴ ἀναστήσωσιν).'

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in Sheol, to which you are going' (Eccles 9.10). The dead are unable to remember, and therefore incapable of praise: 'For Sheol cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness' (Isa 38.18). They are destitute of a future, and therefore of hope. The dust can neither praise God, nor tell of his faithfulness (Ps 30.9). This is why Isaiah's ringing affirmation is of such import to any discussion of death in the Bible: 'The living, the living, he thanks you, as I do this day' (Isa 38.19).

Life, then, is the supreme good, without which nothing else can be good. It is the presupposition for the enjoyment of all God's gifts and blessings. Israel, wrote G. von Rad, understood 'elemental life quite radically in terms of grace', as a gift.[13] 'I am continually with you; you hold my right hand' (Ps 73.23). Death is quite simply the end of all life. In the Bible, unlike our liturgy of the dead, *vita tollitur non mutatur*, life is taken away, not altered. In its biblical acceptation, life is not mere survival, existence under one form or another. It is always and everywhere in the Bible, life *with*: 'I will call upon [the Lord] as long as I live . . . I walk before the Lord in the land of the living' (Ps 116.2, 9); 'Make your face shine upon your servant' (119.135); 'Hide not your face from me, lest I be like those who go down to the Pit' (143.7); 'We used to hold sweet converse together; within God's house we walked in fellowship' (55.14); 'you have delivered my soul from death . . . that I may walk before God in the light of life' (56.13). Thus, truly to live is to walk 'in the light of [the Lord's] countenance' (89.15), to walk in 'his ways' (128.1). Life for God's people was and always is life in function of his word to them: 'Seek the Lord and live' (Amos 5.6).

Death, therefore, is the death of 'body, soul and spirit' all at once, the severance of all relations with the living, and above all with the living God. This is why 'a living dog is better than a dead lion' (Eccles 9.4). Death is never partial, but total. Between being dead and being alive, no other possibility exists. The 'I', both as subject and object of relationships, ceases to be; and therefore we the living weep, not for the departed, as we pretend, but for ourselves. We weep because of the void any irrevocable absence leaves in our lives.

Because death is such an absolute, every generation in every age seems to have attempted to devise some means of escape from its unseemly finality, to find some solution to Ps 89.48, 'Who can live and never see death? Who can escape the power of Sheol?' (NRSV).

[13] G. von Rad, in G. von Rad, G. Bertram and R. Bultmann, 'ζάω, ζωή (βιός, βίου), κτλ', *TDNT* 2.845.

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By the time the ineluctable descent of all the living into Sheol had proved to be increasingly unsatisfactory, the returned exiles from Babylon (*c*.539 BC) brought with them, along with the paraphernalia (in the literal meaning of the term: the gifts added to the bride's dowry) of apocalyptic, some notion – as likely as not, Persian in origin – of the resurrection from the dead.[14] That, of course, was one possible solution.

About a century later, farther to the west, Socrates (399 BC) rejoiced to anticipate a life more real than the one he knew in the body, the life of his immortal soul. By definition, 'immortal' means not mortal, hence does not die. So, Socrates could dispassionately disregard his own death because he knew that his soul, the important part of the real him, that 'immortal diamond', was about to break free at last to a real life, untrammelled by the shackles of the mutable, corruptible and, therefore, mortal body.[15]

In his Ingersoll Lecture (1955), Oscar Cullmann called attention to the great difference between the death of Socrates and that of Jesus.[16] There is, on the one hand, the majestic leave-taking of the dying Socrates, lightheartedly intent on fulfilling the votive offering of a cock to Aesculapius (*Phaedo* 118) before quitting his disciples; and, on the other, the death of Jesus with a loud cry, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15.34).

An unalterable fact of history is that the elaboration of the message about that same Jesus had ready to hand a world-view, a philosophy, admirably suited to its purpose. To the good news of the resurrection, the bearers of the Christian message brought their Hellenistic tenets – Platonic in origin but largely neo-

[14] 'The OT recounts individual resurrections in 1 K. 17.17 ff.; 2 K. 4.18 ff.; 13.20 f. There was inward preparation for the hope of general resurrection in its eschatological form (Ez 37.1–14; Is 53.10; Job 19.25 ff.; Ps 73), but this did not come to formulation apart from Persian influence. It first becomes palpable in Is. 26.19 . . . and Da. 12.2 . . . and is then more comprehensively developed in Apocalyptic.' Albrecht Oepke, 'ἀνίστημι – ἀνάστασις', *TDNT* 1.369–70.

[15] See the closing words of Plato's *Apology*, 'But now the time has come to go away. I go to die, and you to live; but which of us goes to the better lot, is known to none but God' (42A; Plato in Loeb, 1.145). The immortality of the soul proper is the subject of the *Phaedo*, but so too is suicide. Socrates, before taking the poison, reminds Simmias that 'all who have duly purified themselves by philosophy live henceforth altogether without bodies, and pass to still more beautiful abodes . . .' (*Phaedo* 114C; see also 66E; 'the soul . . . freed from the body as from fetters (ἐκ δεσμῶν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος)' 67C–D; 'Well then, this is what we call death . . . a release and separation from the body (λύσις καὶ χωρισμὸς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος)' 67D, in Loeb 1.391, 231,233,235). It might be well to recall here how Cato, who had sided with Pompey against Caesar, received in Utica the news of the latter's victory and Pompey's death, read Plato's dialogue ΠΕΡΙ ΨΥΧΗΣ (the *Phaedo*) and committed suicide. See Plutarch, *Lives*, Phocion and Cato the Younger, 68–70, in Loeb 8.400–7.

[16] Oscar Cullmann, 'Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead. The Witness of the New Testament', in Krister Stendahl, ed., *Immortality and Resurrection* (New York: Macmillan, 1965) 9–53. For the 'contrast' between Jesus and Socrates, see pp. 16–17.

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Platonic in formulation – about the immortality of the soul. Almost inevitably, the early Christian theologians read the death of Jesus through the optic of the immortality of the soul. Through this optic, they understood, not just his death, but all else about him, including his resurrection (hence, incidentally, the importance they attached to the empty tomb motif). The whole life of Jesus of Nazareth achieved its intelligibility through the terms of that Hellenistic philosophy which was so accommodatingly ready to hand.[17]

But even when Christian thinkers were most concerned with the resurrection of the body as such, their understanding of 'body' remained Hellenistic or, to use the nineteenth-century coinage, 'Neoplatonic'.[18] They regarded the body as part of the σῶμα–ψυχή anthropological dichotomy, and not at all in its biblical acceptation. Though they knew only too well the inevitability of death, they were incapable, or unwilling, to contemplate its totality. They refused to countenance it as the definitive end of existence, the severance and termination of all relationships. For, despite the fact that the NT view of life and death as well as its anthropology were biblical and ought to have found their intelligibility in the categories of OT anthropology, the writings of the NT were read through the Neoplatonic view of the world of the nascent faith.

So, whether the resurrection was discussed from the point of view of the body or of the soul, the body–soul dichotomy remained, not merely operative, but determinative. If with the rediscovery of Aristotle and the reintroduction of Plato[19] into the mainstream of Western theological discourse, the soul, its unity and immortality, came to dominate the discussion of death and resurrection, then it is thanks to those very controversies that later popes and councils felt the need to 'define' and 'condemn'.

The Franciscan Petrus Iohannes Olivi (Olieu) was the occasion

[17] Despite the inevitable prevalence of the vocabulary of resurrection, the frequency of ἀθανασία in the early centuries is indicative. Thus Hippolytus and Irenaeus each uses ἀθανασία six times, Ps-Justin ten times, Ignatius of Antioch thrice, and Origen 44 times. (This information is culled from the *Thesaurus Linguae Graece* CD ROM). None of these statistics is cogent. They are cited merely to indicate the currency of the notion of immortality from the earliest times.

[18] Saint Augustine's influence remained dominant throughout the Middle Ages. His definition of man as 'animal rationale' (*de Trinitate* 8.7) remained operative to the modern period. 'Homo igitur, ut homini apparet, anima rationalis est mortali atque terreno utens corpore' (*De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* 1.52, text in Etudes Augustiniennes 1re série, 1939, p. 54). One should keep in mind the extensive influence of Plotinus on the saint. 'Plotinus', wrote his disciple Porphyry in the *Life*, 'seemed ashamed of being in the body' (in the first volume of the Loeb *Plotinus*, pp. 2–3).

[19] The Latin Middle Ages' direct acquaintance with Plato was limited to the *Timaeus* in the Latin version of Chalcidius. But the dominant source of 'Platonism' remained, of course, St Augustine and, to a lesser degree, Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* (*c.* 524).

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for the Council of Vienne (1311–12) to reject 'any doctrine or opinion which rashly asserts that the substance of the rational and intellectual soul is not truly and of itself (*vere ac per se*) the form of the human body (*anima rationalis seu intellectiva . . . forma corporis humani*)'.[20] It was, however, the Fifth Lateran Council, under Leo X, which, in its Bull 'Apostolici Regiminis' at the end of 1513, solemnly condemned and reproved (*damnamus et reprobamus*) 'all those who assert that the intellectual soul is mortal . . . or who raise doubts in this matter'.[21]

This, however, was but the outer manifestation of a far more basic conviction. The Neoplatonic anthropology through whose particular optic the message of salvation was read, by concentrating on the body–soul dichotomy, inevitably understood the resurrection of the body in the context of the immortality of the soul.[22] In so doing, the effects were and continue to be pervasive in every domain of Christian thought and life, in theology, in moral and liturgical life, in ascetics and spirituality. The immortality of the soul is – or seems to be – an unalterable part of the Christian's world-view, an indispensable presupposition for reading the gospel.

We come now to the substance of the NT teaching in itself, i.e. independently of the use to which it was put by the tradition. The NT teaching on the subject of death and resurrection can be summed up briefly in four points:

1. The NT neither teaches nor, in and of itself, presupposes that the immortality of the soul is an exegetically verifiable fact. One of the salient obstacles to this is our habitual reading of Matt 10.28,[23] 'And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul;

[20] Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (34th edn) no. 902. The Fifteenth Oecumenical Council under Clement V was held in Vienne, in southern France, at the time of the Avignon Captivity, and not in Vienna as J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Alba House, rev. edn 1982) 120 have it. The English text cited is in Neuner and Dupuis, no. 405.

[21] The eighteenth Oecumenical Council, Lateran V, was convoked by Julius II in 1512 and closed under the pontificate of Leo X in 1517. The Bull 'Apostolici regiminis' was issued principally to combat the errors of the 'neo-Aristotelians'. See Denzinger-Schönmetzer, no. 1440; Neuner and Dupuis, no. 410, 'The intellectual soul is not only truly, of itself and essentially, the form of the human body, as it is stated in the canon of Clement V, our predecessor of blessed memory . . . but it is also immortal . . .'.

[22] Such statement, of course, is in need of nuance. See Cullmann, 'Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead' (n. 15 above), and the more recent work of Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University, 1995) 5 and n. 9; and, more specifically on 1 Cor 15, the monograph of Maurizio Teani, *Corporeità e risurrezione: L'interpretazione di 1 Corinti 15,35–49 nel Novecento* (Aloisiana 24; Rome: Gregorian University; Brescia: Morcelliana, 1994).

[23] See also Luke 12.4; 1 Cor 13.3; 2 Cor 5.6, 8; 12.2, 3; Phil 1.22–4.

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rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα ἀπολέσαι ἐν γεέννῃ).' But a moment's reflection ought to suffice for seeing in this essentially biblical statement the fact that God, and God alone, is the 'fountain of life' (Ps 36.9). For, as Ps 68 reminds us, 'Our God is a God of salvation; and to God, the Lord, belongs escape from death' (Ps 68.20). Matthew's logion is but a reminder – perhaps to persecuted believers – of Deuteronomy's basic affirmation: 'See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive' (Deut 32.39, so too in NRSV).[24] The point to keep in mind, however, is not that the NT does not employ Hellenistic categories, but that the immortality of the soul is not among its tenets.[25]

That the NT text, and Matt 10.28 in particular, have been used, even by the highest authorities, to prove a philosophical tenet, however ancient, pedigreed and venerable, is no guarantee of the accuracy of the exegesis employed to that end. No exegesis is authoritative in direct proportion to the authority that undertakes it, but solely in its fidelity to the text and context which it interprets. There is no such thing as a 'privileged' exegesis. So, even were we to concede, *per impossibile*, the justness of the traditional interpretation of Matt 10.28, then that in itself would not argue against what is there plainly to see in the rest of the NT.

2. That the NT does not presuppose, let alone teach, the immortality of the soul, is not open to factious dispute. Nor can it be falsified by contrast with dogmatic assertions, however solemn. Authority, even the most sacred, cannot unmake a given fact. This assertion, I realize, poses an extremely grave problem for which I myself have no acceptable solution.

3. This problem is further aggravated by a thesis, my thesis, that the immortality of the soul is incompatible with the NT teaching of resurrection.[26] Not only is the body–soul dichotomy alien to the NT

[24] 'In Mt. 10.28, however, the reference to God's power to destroy the ψυχή and σῶμα in Hades is opposed to the idea of the immortality of the soul . . . For it is again apparent that man can be thought of only as a whole, both ψυχή and σῶμα . . . the ψυχή, i.e., the true life of man as it is lived before God and in fellowship with God . . . God alone controls the whole man . . . ψυχή is ultimately life in the authenticity which God intended and which has still to be regarded as bodily life even in hell' (E. Schweizer, 'ψυχή κτλ', *TDNT* 9.646).

[25] Let alone that of Christ, *pace* Boismard, *Faut-il encore parler?*, 8.

[26] This is counter to the opinion that was expressed, for instance, by Werner Jaeger in the Ingersoll Lecture of 1958, 'The Greek Ideas of Immortality': 'Although this belief in the immortality of the soul, the ψυχή, is not the same as the Christian idea of man's resurrection in the flesh or in a transfigured body, both religious ideas have a natural affinity with each other; and it is therefore easy to understand that the Platonic belief in immortality was regarded as an anticipation of the Christian resurrection and helpful to the faithful who might wish to check their emotional expectations of a future life after death by rational reflection.' Jaeger's lecture is

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understanding of the individual as an integral, indivisible whole, but every such dichotomizing is ultimately at the expense of the body, the 'corruptible' σάρξ.[27] The immortal soul–corruptible body dichotomy misunderstands death and, therefore, is unable to understand life rightly. It cannot but reduce the resurrection of the body to an ornamental increment to a life that is already there. I suspect – and it is no more than a suspicion – that most Christians would have preferred to do without this unwelcome reunion with their bodies after death. Isn't this why, from the earliest times, they asked questions about the age the body will have at the resurrection (30?), the state of its health, the fate of the handicapped? Indeed, had Carthage been Carthage, MO (ZIP code 64836), foremost among the questions put to Tertullian would have been the avoirdupois of the resurrection body and the possibility of deliverance from obesity.[28]

4. That the NT teaches the resurrection of the dead (ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν) (Rom 1.4; 1 Cor 15.12, 13, 21, 42; Phil 3.11) is the professed creed of Christians.[29] By the resurrection of the dead the NT understands the resurrection of identifiably the same individual who died – body, soul and spirit. What comes to be at the resurrection is the same body, i.e. the same subject of all the relationships which death severed definitively with God, with others and with creation.

The 'I' who died wholly comes to newness of risen life wholly. The risen one is identifiably the one who died. Indeed, this identity is precisely the object of the resurrection appearances in our gospels. Jesus of Nazareth, the very Jesus whom the disciples heard and followed, conversed and ate with, touched and loved, is identifiably

in Stendahl, ed., *Immortality and Resurrection*, 97–114; see p. 97 for the passage cited.

[27] See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University, 1988). The image, of course, was not all one-sided. Thus, towards the end of his treatment of the desert Fathers, and citing John Climacus, Brown concludes: 'Of all the lessons of the desert to a late antique thinker, what was most "truly astonishing" was "that the immortal spirit can be purified and refined by clay["]' (237).

[28] To all of which questions Tertullian responds, 'Ita nihil aliud est mortuum resuscitari quam integrum fieri, ne ex ea parte mortuus adhuc sit, ex qua non resurrexerit' (*De resurrectione mortuorum* 57.66, in Tertulliani *Opera*, pars II. Opera Montanistica, CCSL 2 [1954] 1004). The *integrum fieri*, the becoming whole, is the real point. Being raised from the dead is nothing other than being restored wholly, in one's entirety, lest one part remain dead while the other is raised.

[29] The credal formula more commonly used from the earliest times was not so much ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν as σαρκὸς ἀνάστασις, *carnis resurrectio.* This, I suspect, was more an insistence on the reality of the resurrection in a polemic against its being a merely 'spiritual' phenomenon, than any particular fidelity to the biblical datum. See Denzinger-Schönmetzer nos. 2, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 42, 46, etc. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (3rd edn; London: Longman, 1979) 163–5: 'A belief in the resurrection of the body had been integral to Christianity from the beginning' (163).

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the Risen Lord. For, try as we might to evade it, his resurrection and ours are not and cannot be a resuscitation, nor a restoration. They can be neither a conjunction of severed principles, nor a happy reunion of constitutive parts. They are and can only be a new creation and, therefore, from nothing.

The God whose definition in the NT is the 'God . . . who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist' (Rom 4.17b) is a giver of life and a creator. The statement in Romans only underlines, by its strict parallelism, the oft forgotten fact that this God, in whom we believe, is ever a saving God, is always the Creator out of nothing. We insist on this every time we confess our creed: the God in whom we believe is always the saving God who creates *ex nihilo*, whether this creation be deliverance from the nothingness of primeval chaos, from the chaos of sin, or from the absolute *nihil* of death.

That God raises the dead, no less than that God creates, can only be the object of revelation, not the result of ratiocination upon philosophical givens.[30] The NT insists on the reality of Jesus' death, on its totality. This is the significance of the burial, just as it is of the pleonastic 'he died and he descended into hell' in the creed, a phrase which has caused so much confusion in the minds of many. Both the burial and the descent into Sheol underline the reality of the death. The empty tomb does not, in and of itself, prove the resurrection. That the tomb was empty is open to sundry interpretations, none of which necessarily points to the resurrection itself. Even the Gospel of Matthew knows this.[31] But Paul insists that the risen Christ is the ἀπαρχή, 'the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Cor 15.20).[32] His resurrection from the dead means our own resurrection from the dead, God calling us out of the nothingness of death to be identifiably the same 'I', to have the same relationships that bound us to the Lord, to all those who loved us, and to all whom we loved.

[30] Responding to the question whether Christ had to appear in another likeness (*alia effigie apparere*), St Thomas says, 'resurrectio Christi manifestanda fuit hominibus per modum quo eis divina revelantur' (*Summa Theologiae* 3 q. 55, a. 4). The resurrection of Christ was made known to human beings the same way all divine things are revealed.

[31] Matt 27.64, 'lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, "He has risen from the dead" ', which, in all likelihood, was to counteract a rumour even at that early date.

[32] When St Thomas asks, 'Whether the resurrection of Christ is the cause of the resurrection of our bodies', he responds, having recourse to Aristotle's 'illud quod est primum in quolibet genere, est causa omnium eorum quae sunt post (that which is the first in any genus is the cause of all those that follow)', 'Verbum Dei primo attribuit vitam immortalem corpori sibi naturaliter unito, et per ipsum operatur resurrectionem in omnibus aliis' (*Summa Theologiae* 3 q. 56, a. 2).

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Now the immortality of the soul is not and cannot be the object of faith, since it is not, and – as a philosophical principle – it cannot be, the object of revelation. Hence the eagerness of so many exegetes to find its hidden traces in Wisdom and the apocrypha, in the prophets, in the Psalms and throughout the NT. You cannot 'believe' what you know or can demonstrate. The evident requires no revelation. The resurrection, on the other hand, can only be the object of a revelation. This is why the disciples could not recognize the risen Jesus without some revelatory identification. Their 'eyes were held' precisely for lack of such revelation (Luke 24.16, 31). Our faith in the resurrection of the dead rests squarely on that revelation of Christ the Lord risen as 'the first-fruits'. This faith is not and cannot be founded on the demonstrability of the immortality of the soul, but solely on the revelation of the resurrection of Christ: 'if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile' (1 Cor 15.14, 17).

However, if you take the immortality of the soul as a point of departure for the understanding of the revelation, then 'life' cannot be the goal and object of Christian living. For, if indeed the soul does not die, then it lives and *non datur tertium*, there is no other choice. What my soul has by its nature cannot be the object of its striving. Indeed, how can 'eternal life' be a gift to one possessing an immortal soul? The object of the believer's striving, therefore, can only be the practice and acquisition of virtues. It is the virtuousness of the soul that merits it an eternal life of happiness in heaven, else it lives out its immortality somewhere else. For, if the soul cannot die, it has to go somewhere after death. Thence the endless debates on who goes where among those for whom Christ laid down his life that 'they may have life and have it abundantly' (John 10.10).

The very understanding of eternal life undergoes a significant change. We concentrate on the 'eternity', the endless prolongation of existence forever and ever.[33] This endless existence is not very difficult to imagine, and Christians have not been slow to imagine it, its uninterrupted repose, and its happiness without end. But what is quite impossible to imagine for us mortals is any life with the other which does not stand under the shadow of death. This is what the gift of eternal life grants us. This is what our resurrection

[33] What Socrates' argument in the *Phaedo* demonstrates is, of course, that the soul cannot die, not that it exists for ever.

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will make possible: to be with the other without the fear of interruption or severance.

The soul–body dichotomy is, of course, a dichotomy of principles, not of parts. Nevertheless, it is a dichotomy between the corruptible, mortal body and the incorruptible, immortal soul, which – qualify and distinguish as we might – becomes in death a dichotomy of parts: the corruptible, and therefore mortal, body is consigned to the putrefaction of the grave; and the immortal soul ushered to life unending.[34]

Precisely at this juncture, Christianity has always run the risk of succumbing to one of two extremes: libertinism or asceticism.[35] Libertinism did not, in general, fare too well in the Church, except perhaps in this century, when its point of attack and entry has altered ('psychology', after all, is about 'soul'). It gives every promise of having established a firm foothold in the Christian community.

The risk of asceticism, which has always been, to a greater or lesser degree, in firm possession, especially after its recurrent encratistic extremes are modified or purged, is always there. The ascetical movements themselves were tamed and co-opted by the institution; but the tendency among the faithful to regard ascetic practices as a short cut to the ornamentation of their souls has scarcely diminished, once you discount the bluster of pious rhetoric. It used to be said that there are no atheists in foxholes. I suspect there are no liberals there either.

In light of the immortality of the soul, the notion of sin alters. The soul being immortal, it cannot well commit sin in the biblical sense of grasping for life on its own, i.e. of forgetting the nature of the gift and separating it from its giver. Eternal life is difficult to conceive as an absolute gift in Christ Jesus. The believer in every age seeks to lay claim to it and merit it. Consequently, the law and its host of interpreters thrive, and Paul's 'justified by faith apart from the works of the law' (Rom 3.28) becomes unavoidably a *crux interpretum*. Inevitably, too, moral theology is in the ascendancy. It can determine, define and measure virtues. It can indicate where the 'golden mean' lies, and what vices, those children of excess, are to be shunned, to what extent, and when.

[34] Medieval theologians were not unaware of the problem of a soul separate from the body. You can have two separate substances, but not one that is separable into a body and a soul. See P. Masset, 'Faul-il encore parler de "résurrection"?' *NRT* 118 (1996) 258–65, at 261.

[35] See Brown, *The Body and Society*, esp. Part Two, 'Asceticism and Society in the Eastern Empire', 213–338.

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Consequently, Christian preaching is directed to the practice of these virtues and the avoidance of those vices. The 'formation of conscience' is undertaken in the serious effort to enable believers to decide and choose, to know what to do, how to do it, and how far to go without seeming to transgress. The love commandment, in any of its formulations throughout the NT, falls victim to qualification, and 'love' itself becomes a 'virtue'. The meaning of the word 'love' alters and, consequently, the need to categorize and distinguish the 'spiritual' from the 'carnal' arises. More significantly, the need to distinguish – far beyond the analogy required in theological discourse – the love of the Creator from that of the creature increases.

In the light of the immortality of the soul, sundry problems in Christology also arise: (1) The death of Jesus raises the question of who and what died on the cross, of what happened to his soul after death (the *descensus ad inferos*).[36] (2) Since knowledge and will are powers of the 'spiritual' ('intellectual' in conciliar language) soul, the question of the various kinds of knowledge in the person of Jesus Christ arises, as do questions of 'dyotheletism' (the orthodoxy of two wills, the human and the divine, in Jesus),[37] preexistence and, of course, the hypostatic union.

A few concluding remarks are in order, first about the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth: (1) It is and can only be the object of revelation, not of observation and deduction. It is, in other words, not a theologoumenon to the belief in the general resurrection of the dead, but the primary revelation. (2) Jesus of Nazareth had to rise from the dead *qua* Jesus of Nazareth, recognizably and identifiably as such. Hence, his resurrection is a bodily resurrection.[38] (3) He is the Lord precisely in his resurrection from the dead (Phil

[36] See, for instance, the condemnation of Peter Abelard's error regarding the matter by the Council of Sens (1140): 'Quod anima Christi per se non descendit ad inferos, sed per potentiam tantum' (Denzinger-Schönmetzer no. 738), the soul of Christ descended into hell only in potency. See St Thomas's response to the question 'Whether all of Christ descended into hell': 'In morte autem Christi, licet anima fuerit separata a corpore, neutrum tamen fuit separatum a persona Filii Dei . . .' (*Summa Theologiae* 3 q. 52, a. 3). In the death of Christ, though his soul was separated from his body, neither was separated from the person of the Son of God.

[37] The Dyotheletes defended the orthodox Christology of two wills in Jesus Christ, the human and the divine, against the Monotheletes, whose heresy had its origin with Sergius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, in the beginning of the seventh century. See, e.g., the insertion of the article into the Chalcedonian confession of faith by the Lateran Council (AD 649) under Martin I (Denzinger-Schönmetzer nos. 500, 510; Neuner and Dupuis no. 627/10).

[38] See C. Bynum: 'Resurection not of "the dead" or "the body" (*soma* or *corpus*) but of "the flesh" (*sarx* or *caro*) became a key element in the fight against Docetism (which treated Christ's body as in some sense unreal or metaphorical) and Gnosticism (which carried "realized eschatology" so far as to understand resurrection as spiritual and moral advance in this life and therefore as escape from body)' (Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 26).

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2.9–10). (4) As risen Lord, Jesus of Nazareth necessarily belongs to the eschatological realm and, therefore, in his case, the 'No one has ever seen God' (John 1.18; 1 John 4.12) is operative every bit as much as it is in any Exodus theophany (Ex 3.6; 19.18–20; 24.15–18). This is why, as has already been said, the risen Lord had to reveal himself to his own and, in the revelation itself, he had to be recognized precisely as the risen *Jesus of Nazareth* and no one else, not some genderless, indefinable Cosmocrator, a cosmic Lord or transcendent hermaphrodite.[39]

Concerning our own resurrection from the dead: (1) Our resurrection is, in every sense of the term, a new creation. The real mystery is not that we are raised, but that we are raised as identifiably the same person who died. (2) It is a resurrection of the body (the σῶμα, the בָּשָׂר), not as distinct from 'soul' or 'spirit' (ψυχή or πνεῦμα), but the resurrection of the totality of the 'I' (the *ego*), the subject of the relationships with my Creator and with all creatures. It brings to life the entire whole that died. (3) Resurrection is, therefore, a creation in the strictest sense of the word, a creation *ex nihilo*, not the reunion of the immortal soul with its corruptible, but now reassembled, body. The true miracle of the resurrection is not that we come to life, but that we come to life as identifiably the person who once lived and wholly died. (4) Precisely at this point, the belief in the immortality of the soul comes into conflict with faith in the gospel of the resurrection (1 Cor 15.17–18, 'If Christ has not been raised . . . then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (ἀπώλοντο)').

Two questions remain unanswered and unanswerable, genuine aporiae of the revelation: (1) The *how* of the resurrection is unknown. Any attempt to respond to it, including Paul's own (1 Cor 15.35, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?') is futile. The proliferation of Paul's analogies (15.36–41) is the signal of his failure to find a satisfactory answer. Moreover, no one and no institution has been any more successful in providing an answer either. (2) The question of the interim period, too, is unanswerable. What happens to those who fall asleep between now and the resurrection of the dead? There is only one available answer, and that of faith: 'We shall always be with the Lord' (1 Thess 4.17). What this means, especially since our God is the God

[39] Compare the comment of St Irenaeus on Eph 5.30, 'because we are members of his body': the apostle speaks not of some spiritual and invisible man, but of a flesh and blood human being with flesh and nerves and bones ('non de spiritali aliquo et invisibili homine dicens haec – sed de ea dispositione quae est secundum verum hominem, quae ex carnibus et nervis et ossibus consistit' (*Adv. Haer.* 5.2.3; SC 153, 34–6).

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of the living and not of the dead (cf. Luke 20.38 with Rom 14.9), whose Providence extends over both the living and the dead (1 Thess 5.10, 'our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him (σὺν αὐτῷ ζήσωμεν)'), I do not know, nor does anyone else.

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