

RESURRECTION: WHAT KIND OF BODY?

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One of the things we expect the future to bring is our own death. Despite all the advances in medical science, the death rate for human beings is still running at 100%. Thus the question regarding the possibility of life beyond the grave is still on people's minds. Polls consistently show that nearly three out of four Americans answer "yes" to questions asking about belief in life after death. A recent Gallup poll reports that 67% of teenagers believe in life after death, including 91% affirming that there is a heaven where the good are rewarded and 76% that there is a hell where the wicked are punished.¹ This kind of data prompts Andrew Greeley to remark that "we are born with two incurable diseases: life—always fatal, and hope—never curable. The critical question is whether hope is revelation or deception."² The Christian faith affirms that it is revelation and not deception. Further, the specifically Christian vision of life beyond death affirms with the Apostles' Creed belief in the "resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." Now, what does this mean?

Our task here will be to clarify just what we mean by life beyond death understood in terms of resurrection, and we will pursue this task by comparing the biblical view with some alternatives. The alternatives we will entertain here are four: (1) modern naturalism; (2) immortality of the soul; (3) absorption into the infinite; and (4) astral projection.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE BIBLICAL VIEW

Modern Naturalism

The first possibility we will dub the position of modern secular naturalism which in effect says, "when you're dead you're dead!" Death is the natural conclusion to life. It is the end, pure and simple. Naturalism assumes and asserts that the natural world constitutes the whole of reality. There are no windows that open out into another reality. There is no supernatural. Life is fundamentally physical in character, and there is no spiritual reality to which we can escape the inevitable terminus that death brings. Living is only a physiological process with only a physiological meaning, argues Joseph Wood Krutch. Novelist Jack London goes on to describe our desire for immortality in terms of a delusion.

All these baffling head-reaches after immortality are but the panics of souls frightened by the fear of death, and cursed with the thrice-cursed gift of imagination. . . . [The human person] is compounded of meat and wine and

sparkle, of sun-mote and world-dust, a frail mechanism made to run for a span, to be tinkered with by doctors of divinity and doctors of physic, and to be flung into the scrap-heap at the end.³

The naturalist position must conclude that not only do individual human beings die, but knowing the scientific projections for the future of the cosmos, that all the achievements of civilization must also pass into oblivion. Moving from the personal scrap heap to the cosmic scrap heap, Bertrand Russell draws out the nihilistic consequences:

... all the labor of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noon-day brightness of human genius is destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.⁴

"If that's all there is," once sang Peggy Lee on the U.S. Hit Parade, "then I'll just go on dancing."

The diagnosis of modern secular naturalism is that death is incurable. The patient will die completely and stay dead. The next three alternative views, however, all believe they can save the patient through a surgical procedure in which they extract a non-physical selfhood from the physical body. By performing what we will here call a "soulechtsomy," they believe the patient can live on even though the physical body will die.

Immortality Of The Soul

The first soulechtsomy we wish to mention is that performed by the great philosophers of the Platonic tradition in ancient Greece. The Greeks began by noticing how the ideas of the mind (*psyche*) seemed to be immune to the deteriorations of the body. Even though individuals would die, their ideas could be passed on from generation to generation unchanged. Perhaps certain ideas are eternal, the Greeks thought. If so, then the task of philosophy would be to discern which ideas are eternal and then try to train the mind to ponder only the eternal thoughts, so that the mind—which is identified with the true self apart from the body—would cut itself free from all temporal concerns. Free from temporality it could then leave the body and enter the realm of strictly disembodied and hence everlasting reality. With this scheme in mind, death became thought of positively because it would release the soul from temporal concerns and permit greater concentration on what is eternal. Thus Socrates says to Phaedo just before drinking the hemlock that will put his body to sleep forever:

The body and its desires are the only cause of wars and factions and battles; for all wars arise for the sake of gaining money, and we are compelled to gain money for the sake of the body. We are slaves to its service. And so, because of all these things, we have no leisure for philosophy. But worst of all is that if we do get a bit of leisure and turn to philosophy, the body is constantly breaking in upon our studies and disturbing us with noise and confusion, so that it prevents our beholding the truth, and in fact we perceive that, if we are ever to know anything absolutely, we must be free from the body and must behold the actual realities with the eye of the soul alone. . . . when we are dead we are likely to possess the wisdom which we

desire and claim to be enamoured of; but not while we are alive.⁵

What we need to notice here is the direct competition between the mind or soul, which is the suprasensible self, and the body in which it is trapped. Plato says the soul "is imprisoned in the body like an oyster in his shell" and it seeks to escape from it through death. There is no concept here of a transformation or renewal of the physical world which would put body and soul into harmony, as one would find in Christianity. Nor does death cause Socrates to tremble with the fear of annihilation, because he seems confident that his true self is leaving a forsaken world to enter a blessed one.

Not everyone who dies becomes blessed, however. According to the Platonic scheme human souls are confronted with a judgment beyond the grave that determines where they will spend eternity. Following the ways of God and embodying justice are the criteria. Plato writes, "he who has lived all his life in justice and holiness shall go, when he is dead, to the Islands of the Blessed (*eis makaron nesous*), and dwell there in perfect happiness out of the reach of evil; but that he who has lived unjustly and impiously shall go to the house of vengeance and punishment, which is called Tartarus."⁶ Then after a millenium (1,000 years) the souls of both may be reincarnated and return to life on earth, the souls of those never having seen the truth returning in the form of animals while those who have sought eternal ideas will return as humans. But the soul of the philosopher has wings with which after three millenia it can fly to the heavenly throne of God and there enjoy the eternal beatific vision.⁷

Plato's version of the soulehtomy has been partially integrated into Christian thought. The Fifth Lateran General Council of 1513 filtered Plato's view through Aristotle and then pronounced it Christian dogma, condemning and rejecting all those "who assert that the intellectual soul is mortal or one soul common to all. . . ."⁸ The Westminster Confession combines immortality of the soul with resurrection by placing them in sequence.

Question 37: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

Answer: The souls of believers are, at their death, made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

Question: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

Answer: At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

John Newport is uneasy with this. He writes, "The biblical view teaches that human persons are in no way created to be or to become immortal by their nature. Rather, persons created in the image and likeness of God live within the limits of human nature bounded by mortality and dependent upon God for the gift of immortal life through resurrection from the dead. . . . Thus we see that the Greek idea of the innate immortality of the soul is alien to the teaching of the Bible, even though such ideas have become mixed in with Christian doctrine at various times in the centuries since Plato."⁹

Absorption into the Infnite

What Plato propounded is quite similar to what Brahman seers in India believed. In the ancient Asian version of the soulehtomy—the Asian version precedes Socrates and Plato by half a millenium—we find the same basic competition between what is

physical and what is mental; we find a similar version of metempsychosis or reincarnation; and we find that salvation is also understood as escape from the physical realm. But a certain accent appears during the age of the Upanishads in India that distinguishes it somewhat from the Greek doctrine of body-soul separation, namely, salvation understood as absorption into the infinite. Thus, although there is considerable overlap, we will think of this as a third alternative way to view life beyond death.

In Sanskrit one's true self, *atman*, is suprasensible or spiritual in nature and is in essence at one with the ultimate and comprehensive reality, *Brahman*. It is life amidst the cares of the body within the finite constraints of time and place that prevent ordinary human consciousness from realizing this transcendental oneness. We think of ourselves as separate and unique individual selves even though we are not. Our problem then is one of ignorance, of living in an illusion. To find the truth we must transcend the cares of our physical existence by penetrating the depths of the mind until cosmic unity is apprehended. Rather than ponder a group of eternal ideas as Plato suggested, in ancient India one seeks to get beyond all ideas whatsoever to the undifferentiated and meta-intellectual unity of all things. To do this one is not supposed to study philosophy but rather meditate—that is, practice yoga.

Should one fail through meditative yoga to free the *atman* from the body before one's physical death, then karma—the karmic triad of desire, thought, and action—will cling to the soul and force it back into rebirth. Ordinary death can not produce the liberation which Socrates was expecting. Between death and rebirth the disembodied soul can experience great truth, but once it reenters the new mother's womb it returns again to ignorance and must start again to walk the long path toward enlightenment. The ultimate objective of Upanishadic Hinduism is to achieve liberation, *moksha*—that is, to get off the wheel of rebirth and dwell forever in the disembodied oneness of *atman* and *Brahman*.¹⁰ To achieve this liberation our finite consciousness must be absorbed without remainder into the infinite, into eternal oblivion.¹¹

As various strands of Asian mysticism have begun to dangle amidst the loosely knit fabric of Western culture, interest has begun to grow for both meditation and for reincarnation. But the connection is not regularly made. Meditation is pursued by middle class professionals for the purpose of overcoming stress and gaining self-control, not necessarily to lose oneself in the infinite. Reincarnation, curiously enough, is often taken to be a good thing, as an opportunity to gain another chance at terrestrial living and to refute the pessimistic naturalists. It becomes an object to be sought in the West. This is almost comical because at home in India it is something from which the truly spiritual souls seek to escape. There is a deep cleavage between European culture and Indian-based religion that often goes unnoticed. What the Eastern heirs to the Upanishads view as the equivalent to eternal life, namely, the escape from ego existence into the oblivion of the infinite, appears to those of us in the West with our strong egos and essentially materialistic disposition as eternal death.¹²

The Astral Body

A fourth mode of conceiving life beyond death is that of the astral body or etheric double, a version of the *soulectomy* employed especially in the contemporary occult. It may have roots in certain ancient conceptualities such as the Egyptian *ka*, the detached part of the personality which plans and acts for the rest of the person. The *ka* is born with the individual as an identical but immaterial twin, accompanies one through life as a sustaining and constructing force, and then effects existence in the world beyond death. Pic-

tured on the walls of the early pyramids, this etheric double has one's human shape and shadows one's profile in a fashion that leads German archaeologists to dub it a *Döppelgänger*. The distinctive characteristic here is that even though the ka is supraphysical in character it assumes one's physical shape.

The actual name "astral body," however, means "star body" and connotes a form composed of light and deriving its existence from the heavens. It is an exact copy of the flesh and blood body—that is, the earthly body—but is made of a finer supraphysical material and has a shining and luminous appearance. Among the magicians of the West Indies, people of either sex called "hags" are said to be able to release themselves from their physical bodies and travel about astrally. The release is effected through the singing of charm songs while sitting naked and alone in the woods at night.

At death the astral body sleeps for a period of three or four days in a half-conscious state sometimes dubbed "hades." During this time the cords that bind it to physical life are being cut. Then the astral being awakens to find itself in a world so much like the one it left that at first it may be difficult to realize that death has taken place. Sometimes the new world appears as a beautiful land where illnesses and infirmities are healed. Other times it is purgatorial in nature where selfish souls mourn their loss rather than find new delights. But this world has an illusory character to it because it still reflects memories of life on earth.

Today's occult reflects the ancient spiritualist cosmos constructed with seven planes or spheres of existence. We start out on the lowest, at the level of physical life on earth. Immediately after death, when released from the physical realm we travel upward in our astral bodies to hades. This is followed by the world of illusion. Eventually one advances to the higher planes of supraphysical existence: the planes of color, flame, light, and finally union with God.

Philosophers of a naturalistic bent have for some time looked upon claims regarding astral travel and spiritualist ascent with light-hearted skepticism. But recent anecdotal testimonies of involuntary out-of-the-body experiences have raised new scientific interest in the whole question of a suprasensible self and survival beyond death apart from one's body. We will return to this modern development following a brief detour through a premodern view of soulechtsomy.

IS SOULECHTOMY FOREVER?

The three versions of soulechtsomies just discussed—immortal soul, absorption into infinity, and astral body—all seem to presuppose not only that the self can be extracted from the body, but that in its disembodied form it is potentially, if not actually, eternal. Is it always the case that disembodied existence is thought to be everlasting? No, not necessarily. It is conceivable that the supraphysical self can pass out of existence.

Let us turn to the Akamba people who, like most all traditional African religious cultures, work with a dualism. According to Akamba tradition, the human person is made up of at least two parts: the physical part which at death is put into the grave or otherwise disposed of and the non-physical part which survives and bears one's selfhood into the hereafter. Hence, physical death for the Akamba does not mean annihilation, but a departure to the world of the *Aimu*, of the departed spirits. Each human being has a spirit (*veva*)—that is, he or she has, but is not, a spirit. At death his or her personhood moves to the spirit world where it receives another body which is identical with the body left in the physical world. This new body belongs to the *Aimu* world, not ours. There is no doctrine of reincarnation here, but we do have another case of soulechtsomy.

When someone dies to the physical world, say the Akamba, he or she begins a process towards disintegration and disappearance into the past. The new member of the living-dead comes back on occasion to visit former relatives, usually appearing to one or two and asking about the welfare of the others. The new initiates to the Aimu realm may serve as guardians in our physical world and may even influence the birth of new children. Shamans receive instructions on medicine and the cure of diseases from their deceased predecessors. Some hostile disembodied souls take possession of various individuals, causing injury and epileptic fits. Thus, there is communication between the living-dead and their survivors, but it is not a full fellowship because they do not share meals, chores, and the joys of life.

But this communication does not go on forever. It dissipates. As long as one's name can be remembered, the living-dead may remain present. But after three to five generations when it is difficult for the survivors to remember, the loss of the name signifies the loss of existence. The living-dead slip away into the forgotten realm of nonbeing. "The individual finally disappears," writes John Mbiti, "melts away into the existence without personal names and hence without personality, deprived of the totality of being. God does not enter into the picture in this process of evaporation to reintegrate, recondense the vapour of human being into a new whole, a new persona, a new nameable thing."¹³

In their own way, then, the Akamba believe there is an interim period between physical death and final disposition. During this interim period the living-dead function as nonphysical or spiritual beings who, as long as their survivors remember their names, continue to bear their own identities and personhood. The annihilation of the self does not occur at the moment of physical death, then. As with the Greeks and Hindus the true self disengages itself from the physical body and continues on. Annihilation only comes later, gradually. In contrast to Christian eschatology, there is no anticipated ultimate future when the God and creator of all things will recreate us and establish for us an everlasting life. Once the dead past is dead for the Akamba, it stays dead.

LIFE-AFTER-LIFE

As one more sign that the edifice of modern naturalism and materialism is showing cracks and losing some of its mortar, the recent and widespread fascination with out-of-the-body experiences (OBEs) or near death experiences (NDEs)—sometimes dubbed near death out of body experiences or NDOBEs—reveals the double mind with which we approach natural science. On the one hand, the naturalistic philosophy that so often accompanies modernity seems too restrictive, too insensitive to our deeper feelings and aspirations, too inflexible on the question of human immortality. So when witnesses from the beyond tell us of another reality, we are ready to listen. With a marked tone of iconoclastic relish we like to think that the narrow restrictions of science have been exceeded, that the chains of the modern mindset have been broken. On the other hand curiously enough, we are not ready to listen to the witness of religious faith in this matter. It is important for the public to think that "scientists are working on this question," because we assume it can become fully believable only when it can be proved empirically. So what we end up with is a phenomenon which commands great interest and which allows us to express a love-hate relationship to scientific truth.

At the eye of the hurricane we find the journalistic work and reflection of Raymond A. Moody during the 1970s. Moody scrupulously studied the reports of out-of-the-body experiences of three groups of people: (1) those surgical cases where the patient was

pronounced "dead" in the clinical sense of the word and then resuscitated; (2) those who came close to death but remained alive; and (3) those who died and who told others of their experience while in the process of dying. With numerous peripheral variants, a fascinating and significant core pattern has emerged. The core pattern can be discerned in his first person account of someone undergoing surgery.

I heard the doctors say that I was dead, and that's when I began to feel as though I were tumbling, actually kind of floating through this blackness, which was some kind of enclosure. There are not really words to describe this. Everything was black, except that, way off from me, I could see this light. It was a very, very brilliant light, but not too large at first. It grew larger as I came nearer and nearer to it.

I was trying to get to that light at the end, because I felt that it was Christ, and I was trying to reach that point. It was not a frightening experience. It was more or less a pleasant thing. For immediately, being a Christian, I had connected the light with Christ, who said, "I am the light of the world." I said to myself, "If this is it, if I am to die, then I know who waits for me at the end, there in that light."¹⁴

The core elements found in many similar reports include the darkness usually described as a tunnel, the bright light which grows larger as one approaches, the lack of fear if not feeling of well-being, the sense that the light not only symbolizes truth, but is also compassionate and accepting. It is also interesting to note how, in this case, the party undergoing the OBE does not actually see the profile of Jesus. What is seen is light, obviously the light of truth. Knowing that Jesus is the truth as well as the way and the life, the patient connects the two at the level of interpretation.

People who undergo such experiences usually report that upon return to normal day to day living they now have a deeper sense of the meaning of life. Their values change. No longer do they wish to put off to tomorrow what is important today. Material possessions lose their worth and intense appreciation of human relationships and spiritual truths free them from the obsession to obtain money or status. Finally, they say they no longer have a fear of death.

The light-hearted skeptics among us have sought to identify such reports with Jungian archetypes or to explain the tunnel-light phenomenon as an imaginary recapitulation of one's birth and the emergence into the world from the mother's birth canal. Psychiatrists working at the Menninger Foundation do not believe that the souls of these people actually leave their bodies, but that we should look for some "parapsychological explanation." Moody himself speculates that what is being reported may look at first like Plato's immortal soul, but upon closer examination it comes closer to the idea of the "spiritual body" reported by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. It is my judgment that most of the cases Moody cites come closer to fitting the idea of the astral body, although not all of the testimony is easily corralled into a single theoretical idea. Regardless of which model it fits better, we have here another form of soulchotomy.

We will not tackle the scientific veracity of personal testimonies of OBEs.¹⁵ But I believe that for the time being we must grant them hypothetical status—that is, we must grant the possibility that there is some validity to what is reported. We must note further that there seems to be continuity between these reported life-after-life experiences in our own modern world and similar reports in ancient times that may or may not have fed into the construction of religious beliefs. The tale of Er reported in the closing pages of the *Republic* has a curious or anomalous character to it, but Plato is able to refashion it to

support his overall vision. Similar accounts are reported by Augustine and the Venerable Bede. In the *Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thodol)* and in Chinese *Buddhist Sutras* we find accounts of souls passing from one incarnation to the next through darkness, experiencing light, and even seeing one's future mother and father in the act of conception which will bring the soul back to the physical plane.

Now let us simply observe a couple of things about our original four options. First, there is a significant difference between modern naturalism and the various soulechtsomies. The revival of soulechtsomy on contemporary operating tables right beneath the hands of the paradigm of the modern mind—the medical scientist—marks a point at which current consciousness is challenging the modern naturalistic worldview for its narrowness. Second, none of these four positions point toward the path we should follow if we wish our evangelical explication to draw out faithfully what Christians mean by "resurrection of the body and life everlasting." We need now to turn to the specifically theological understanding of the significance of death and its relationship to what has been accomplished in the work of Jesus Christ. Then we will return to an analysis of soulechtsomy to determine just how much—if any—complementarity there can be. We will begin by stepping back into the Garden of Eden where all this death stuff began.

DEATH AS THE DESTRUCTION OF EVIL¹⁶

The Garden of Eden story in Genesis 2-3 introduces us to the tension between knowing that we must die yet imagining life without dying. The fall into sin that subjects us to mortality was precipitated by the violation of God's command to avoid the knowledge of good and evil. Reacting to this disobedience God threw Adam and Eve out of the garden and placed the cherubim at the gate with a flaming sword, preventing the man and woman from returning. Why such a dramatic reaction on God's part? Was it due to a divine temper tantrum? Could God claim temporary insanity, claiming that it was blind rage that drove him to pull the trigger leading to the death of Adam and Eve? No, the expulsion from the Garden expresses the same abiding love of God that leads to redemption and salvation.

Why then did God expel them? The answer has to do with the second special tree. Although Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they had not yet tasted fruit from the tree of life. This is important. Had they eaten fruit from the tree of life, then they would "live forever" (Gen 3:22). What we know as the fall introduced into God's otherwise good creation such things as enmity between humans and wild beasts, the sweat of the brow by which a living must be wrested from nature, pain in childbirth, and all manner of suffering. None of us, not even God, wants the items on this list to go on forever. It is redemptive love, then, that motivates God to separate Adam and Eve from the tree of life. In its own way death becomes a gift of divine grace; it marks the point at which the consequences for sin come to an end. There is no suffering in the grave. Death is the door that God slams shut on evil and suffering within his creation.

Paul said that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). What does this mean? We may interpret this negatively to mean that death is the appropriate penalty for disobedience.¹⁷ We may think that just as serial killers should be punished in the electric chair or gas chamber, so also is eating forbidden fruit similarly punishable. Death is a sign of the deserved loss of divine grace. Yet, it may not be quite so simple. We may offer a long range positive interpretation as well. Might we say that in light of Genesis 3 and in light

of Easter that death plays an important role in the divine plan of salvation? Is death a necessary step down the path toward resurrection to new life, to a new life immune from the sufferings of this fallen world? Perhaps we can interpret death according to either the Law or the Gospel. According to the Law it is our just desserts for acting sinfully. According to the Gospel, it is a gift that opens the door to an everlasting life free of the sufferings we undergo in this life.¹⁸

If this is the case, then we need to emphasize the totality of death. The Bible really believes that we humans are mortal. We really do die and cease to exist. There is no salvation by heroic soulechtsomy. The understanding of sin with which we work is that sin is a cancer which eats away at the totality of human existence, leaving no organ, whether physical or spiritual, uninfected. The resulting death means true extinction.

Does this sound like modern naturalism? It should. Death, theologically understood, puts an end to all that we are and have on this side of mortality. It puts an end to all evil. It also puts an end to all that is good, mortally good. We do not possess an intrinsically good immortal soul that is somehow exempt from the disease of sin so that it can simply shed the body like a shelled oyster and go on to a higher plane of existence in the great sea of eternal ideas. And certainly there is no room for an evil immortal soul that similarly sheds the body so that its evil existence will continue on everlastingly. Whoever and whatever we are dies totally and completely. Death symbolizes that end, the termination.

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

This applied to Jesus. He was born a mortal and died a mortal and he knew it. There are many things in common between the death of Socrates and the death of Jesus. But there are some notable differences which are relevant to our discussion here. Jesus did not live with the comfort Socrates had regarding the immortal soul and the bliss of philosophical speculation. The death of Socrates, as described by Plato, is a beautiful death. It is free of anxiety and terror. Like shedding one's coat, Socrates rids himself of his body and slips quietly off into a better existence.

This is not the case with Jesus. Death for him was the end. In Gethsemene he was "greatly distressed and troubled," saying to his disciples, "my soul is sorrowful, even to death" (Mark 14:33-34). In agony Jesus prayed "with loud cries and tears" (Heb 5:7), "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44). The contrast with Socrates is vivid. Socrates took the cup of hemlock calmly and voluntarily; but Jesus, in contrast, petitioned God: "remove this cup from me" (Mark 14:36). "Jesus is afraid," writes Oscar Cullmann. "He is afraid in the face of death itself. Death for him is not something divine; it is something dreadful. . . . Here is nothing of the composure of Socrates, who met death peacefully as a friend."¹⁹ Note how Socrates went out drinking the hemlock in sublime calm, whereas Jesus cried from the cross, "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). This is not a death of liberation, but death in all its frightful horror. It is genuinely the "last enemy" of God (1 Cor 15:26).

This is by no means to picture Jesus as a coward. His courage was stalwart. Despite his petition in the Gethsemene prayer that he not have to drink the cup of death, he still concluded his prayer, "yet not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14:36). And despite his agonizing sense of abandonment on the cross, he still uttered, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Death is terrible, but Jesus' faith was strong.

The death Jesus died on Good Friday is the death of Adam, the death of us all. Yet, this is not the end of the story. On Easter God raised the dead Jesus to new and ever-

lasting life. Jesus died a mortal, but God the creator of the old creation acted with the power of the new creation. God bestowed new life. And this new life is different from the old life which Jesus gave up. The new life is no longer subject to sin, suffering, or death. It is this that makes Jesus' resurrection salvific. In this regard we can contrast Jesus' Easter resurrection with the resurrection miracles such as the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17), Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21-43), and Lazarus (John 11:38-44). In these miracles we find a resuscitation of a corpse. Three persons were raised, but they were not raised to immortality. They were simply returned to normal life. They would all have to face death again just like the rest of us. But Jesus' corpse was not merely resuscitated, not merely restored to ordinary life. No one expected Jesus to return to Nazareth to resume his duties as a carpenter. Jesus' resurrected existence had become eschatological. Jesus will not have to die again. When those who enjoyed fellowship with the risen Jesus reported what they saw, they did not say, "wow, the Nazarene is back!" Rather, they reported that they had seen "the Lord" (Luke 24:34; John 20:18).²⁰

Easter opens the gate so that as we share in Jesus' resurrection we pass through to a new and everlasting life. As we turn and look backward, we see Jesus' death standing like the angel with the flaming sword at the Garden of Eden, preventing suffering and death from following us into the new creation.

THE SPIRITUAL BODY

Let us ask about the nature of resurrected existence.²¹ In introducing his great discussion of resurrection, Paul speaks of heavenly bodies (*somata epourania*) with their *doxa*—connoting glory or radiance or luster—and identifies them with the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:40-42). Does this indicate that he has something like the *ka* or astral body in mind? After all, does not occult thinking affirm that we have a star body, a body of light immune to the decay of more physical things? For the occultist, the body of glory simply sheds its physical body and goes on, maintaining continuity between this world and the next on the basis of some built-in radiance principle. There is no genuine death or destruction in alleged astral existence. An element of the person abides. Is this what Paul means? No. Glory here does not refer to a body with radiance or any other such quality. "Rather, this reflects Jewish eschatological language for the future state of the righteous."²² For Paul there is no abiding life force at all that perdures through death. "Between 'is sown' and 'is raised' lies an infinite gulf which the body cannot span."²³ If there is resurrection, it is new creation. Therefore, the resurrected body of the New Testament must be something different from the astral body as ordinarily understood.

That there is total death and total new life is indicated by Paul's appeal to the image of the seed sown in the ground. The flower or tree that grows up looks quite different from what had been planted. However, in order to guard against any possible misinterpretation in terms of *soulechtsomy*, he exploits the deadlike appearance of the typical seed to say, "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies" (1 Cor 15:36). This analogy is delicate. Paul wishes to affirm continuity and discontinuity between the present and future realities. Resurrection is not exactly creation out of nothing, but creation of something out of something else. A dead seed is sown, but what is harvested is new life.²⁴

Paul describes this eschatological harvest in terms of four complementary contrasts.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown perishable (corrupt, *phthora*) is raised imperishable (incorrupt, *aphtharsia*). It is sown in dishonor

(*atimia*); it is raised in glory (*doxa*). It is sown in weakness (*astheneia*); it is raised in power (*dynameis*). It is sown a physical body (*soma psychikon*); it is raised a spiritual body (*soma pneumatikon*) (1 Cor 15:42-44).

For Jesus or for us to be raised "imperishable" is to be raised to everlasting life.²⁵ One's body is not resuscitated for the purpose of simply returning to one's daily toil. *Doxa*, which in reference to the heavenly bodies usually means luster, here means we are raised in honor. The power into which we will be raised, *dynamis*, is the same power by which miracles of healing are performed (1 Cor 12:28).

Of these four antitheses, the most interesting is the contrast between the earthly and the spiritual bodies. Pertinent to our discussion here is the fact that Paul does not describe the earthly body as one of flesh (*soma sarkikon*), as one might have expected. Rather, Paul describes the earthly body as a "psychic" body (*soma psychikon*). Literally this is the ensouled body with which we would associate the Greek philosophical tradition.²⁶ For Paul, the soul dies. And as if to rub it in, Paul says it is not the *psyche* which we find in the resurrection, it is the *soma*.

The resurrected body is a "spiritual body." Other writings of Paul indicate that he probably intended to contrast this spiritual body with the fleshly body as well as the ensouled body. When depicting the tension which characterizes Christian existence, Paul frequently portrayed it in terms of a war between the flesh (*sarx*) and the spirit (Gal. 5:13-26). Flesh is the power of sin that leads to death. The spirit is its great antagonist; it is the power of creation and new creation. Both powers attempt to invade and control us. It is important to discern here that when Paul used these terms he did not intend to make metaphysical statements regarding human nature—that is, flesh and spirit are not distinct ontological components of each human being. This is not another version of the Greek body-soul dualism. Rather, flesh and spirit are proclivities or forces which contend for domination of the whole person, body and soul included. Oscar Cullmann goes a bit too far when he hypostasizes them, describing flesh and spirit as "two transcendent Powers" which can enter us from without. But he is correct in saying that "neither is given with human existence as such."²⁷ With this background, we can see why Paul might say, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50).

Nevertheless, the concept of flesh as that which corrupts cannot be separated from its milder designation of the physical body which simply decays, and both meanings seem to be present in 1 Corinthians 15. Hence, there is overlap between flesh (*sarx*) and body (*soma*), although some scholars such as Cullmann try to drive a wedge between them. That there is room for some interchangeability is evidenced by the writings of the Greek fathers such as Justin Martyr, who could use the phrase "resurrection of the flesh" and declare that because flesh was created by God it must be deemed valuable by God.²⁸ Early versions of the Apostles' Creed rendered part of the third article as "I believe in the resurrection of the flesh." This upset Cullmann, who complained that this is "not biblical." Instead of "flesh" it should read "body," he said. Well, contra Cullmann, it appears quite biblical. This is clear from Luke 24:39, especially as interpreted by Augustine who affirms that even in our resurrected spiritual bodies the term 'flesh' may apply just as it did to the post-Easter Jesus.²⁹ Perhaps Cullmann's problem is that he wanted to deal with the issue strictly as a matter of word choice without looking at the conceptuality being conveyed. Paul and Luke paid less attention to vocabulary choice than Cullmann would approve of.

One attempt to get at Paul's underlying conceptuality here is to think of the *soma* as the form which can exist with one or another substance, either flesh (*sarx*) or spirit

(*pneuma* or *doxa*). Following the earlier work of Lietzmann, Hans Conzelmann advocated this form-substance theory and contended that there is no such thing as a *soma* all by itself. *Soma* always exists in a specific mode of being, either as *sarx* or as *doxa*. The form is always related to its concrete mode of being. It is always either heavenly or earthly. It does not constitute the individual human being as such. It exists on its own only as an abstract concept.³⁰ Although Conzelmann helps us here, this theory is not careful to show just how his idea takes account of the fact that Paul's contrast is actually between a psychic body and a spiritual body, not between a fleshly and a glorified body.

It seems to me that the spirit is not simply one substance interchangeable with others. The spirit is the power of God whereby reality itself is determined. The *soma pneumatikon* is the resurrected body which is determined by the Holy Spirit. It is the reality which we will be, because God will have created us—re-created us—in this form. And because it is an eschatological reality belonging to the new creation, and because we still live amidst the old creation, we cannot expect to apprehend clearly just what this means. Now we can only look through a mirror dimly, and Christ is that mirror reflecting the light of future glory amidst our present darkness. What we can say with confidence is that there will be a resurrection of the human self.³¹ What we cannot say at this point is precisely what that resurrected mode of existence will look like.

To my reading Paul seems to be thinking this out for the first time in his dialogue with the Corinthians.³² He is not simply reiterating an already existing set of ideas that previously belonged to the Jews, the Gnostics, the Corinthians, or any other group about which we know. He is not proposing one theory of immortality among others. Paul here is struggling to explicate the Gospel, to apply what he knows about the resurrection of Jesus to our promised resurrection. Paul has already confronted the Gospel and is now trying to represent it to an audience which probably believes the material body is inimical to the spirit. The readers of his letter in Corinth, probably heavily influenced by the Greek intellectual tradition, have misunderstood what the significance of the Gospel is for human mortality and eternal life. We today do not know exactly how Paul thought of the Gospel before explicating it to the Corinthians, so for us this letter serves as a primary stage of thinking through the implications of a Gospel that begins with the Easter announcement, "he is risen."

The final point I wish to make in this treatment is that neither the resurrection of Jesus nor your or my individual resurrections stand, alone. They play roles in a much larger drama, namely, the consummation of God's redemptive work for the whole of the cosmos. Resurrection and eschatology belong together. Before turning to the tie between the resurrection body and the cosmic scope of the new creation, however, we need to pause to ask about the interim state.

THE INTERIM STATE

A question which theologians have been compelled to ask in every generation since the close of New Testament times down to the present is, What happens to us between the time of our death and the time of Christ's return in triumph? This question is already asked by the Thessalonians. In responding, Paul speaks of the dead as "asleep," but tells us not to worry. Hope does not die with us. In fact, those who are alive at the advent of the eschaton will not precede those already in their graves. "The dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess 4:16). But, we might still ask, what happens to the dead prior to that resurrection?

There are different theories. Jerome believed that dead martyrs cannot be kept

"shut up in a coffin," and if the devil and demons can wander the streets; so can the souls of these holy ones.³³ Augustine certainly rejected the idea that the spirits of the dead live on to influence actively the course of normal events.³⁴ He said that during the interim between one's individual death and the cosmic consummation "the soul dwells in a hidden retreat, where it enjoys rest or suffers affliction in just proportion to the merit it has earned by the life which it led on earth."³⁵ Thomas Aquinas went further, saying that "as soon as the soul is set free from the body it is either plunged into hell or soars to heaven."³⁶ Even though both Augustine and Thomas insisted that resurrection consists in the transformation of our bodies which will occur at the consummate end, they were satisfied that in the meantime our souls are capable of leaving the body and going to a place where they will be occupied with either pain or pleasure. Calvin objected here. He objected not to the idea of a disembodied soul, which he approved, but to the excessive speculation of these earlier theories. He contended that "it is neither lawful nor expedient to inquire too curiously concerning the soul's intermediate state."³⁷ He failed to follow his own advice, however, and proceeded to argue that during the interim state the faithful exist in the presence of Christ, while the reprobate suffer the torments they deserve. Calvin differed from Thomas only in that he did not specifically locate these interim activities in heaven or hell. In our own time Karl Rahner stated unequivocally that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the interim state of disembodiment are not mere speculations but full articles of Catholic faith.³⁸

Oscar Cullmann, who expressed more than a little distaste for the Greek notion of a disembodied soul, tolerated none of this. He followed Calvin in reiterating the ban against too much speculation regarding the interim state. And like Calvin he spoke of the faithful as enjoying a "special nearness to God" even though they are "still in time" while fast asleep.³⁹ Such an interim of sleep should not bother us, he argued, because having died in the faith we will continue to exist within the grasp of the Holy Spirit until raised. Though asleep, we are not abandoned. Behind Cullmann is a long tradition of invoking the image of Abraham's bosom in Jesus' parable of Dives and Lazarus, according to which the faithful dead lie restfully in the bosom of Christ until awakened by the trumpet blast on the last day. They will not experience the lapse of time during their nap, and when they awaken on the last day it will seem like just a moment beyond their own death.

The Cullmann position has the virtue of being theologically consistent. Thomas Aquinas' position, in contrast, is less consistent. Thomas worked strenuously to defend the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and in so doing he appealed to Aristotle's allegedly convincing argument that the soul cannot exist separated from its body.⁴⁰ Once he has convinced the reader with Aristotle's help of the impossibility of a disembodied soul, he then proceeds with his own theological surgery to sever the soul from the body at the moment of death and to send it off temporarily to heaven, hell, limbo, or purgatory. In short, Thomas wants both immortality of the soul and resurrection of the dead, and the concept of the interim state permits him to have them in sequence. The only price is inconsistency. Cullmann avoids the inconsistency because he is willing to stick with the implications to be drawn from understanding just how seriously Paul meant it when he said that "what you sow does not come to life unless it dies" (1 Cor 15:36) What this means for us at this point in time is that the naturalists are right: when you're dead, you're dead!

But what about widespread belief systems that claim existence for disembodied souls of those who are dead? What about those we discussed earlier who claim to have had an out-of-the-body experience? Before proceeding further down the path which our

theological logic would like to direct us, let us pause to observe and assess some of these potential claims to the contrary. It is not necessarily helpful to march lockstep down the road of doctrinal reasoning without looking occasionally from side to side at common human experience. If we do, it will not be long before we will look back and wonder why no one is following us. In the case of what we have been calling the 'interim' and what other people normally think of as the time 'after death,' there are some amazing things to consider. Most of the peoples of the world do not accept the naturalist position that when you're dead you're simply dead. It is important to know this if for no other reason than our pastoral ministry will be ineffective if we do not take this into account. And what is important for our study here is that we are responsible for explicating our theology in light of this.

The particular question we are concerned with is, During the interim state do disembodied spirits exist and do they have social intercourse with those of us who are still alive? We have already noted that the Akamba—and this is true for both Christian and non-Christian Akamba alike—see the Aimu when they appear. They claim that the Aimu appear less often now than they did before Europeans arrived, but the appearances have by no means ceased altogether. We have also discussed OBEs, where people claim to be able to perceive what is going on in the physical world even if they are unable to affect it themselves while in their disembodied state.

Augustine wrestled with this issue while formulating his own position. He told of the case of a man named Curma in the town of Tullium, who had the equivalent of an OBE while he lay "all but dead for several days." While engaged in astral-like travel he met up with other previously deceased souls as well as living people in geographically removed locations. He also approached the gates of paradise, but there he was told that he should return to his earthly body and become baptized. Augustine was skeptical about Curma's account, but he wished to examine it with care rather than dismiss it out of hand. He wished to handle with equal gingeriness the more widespread claims that dead people have at times either in dreams or in other ways appeared to their living descendants and communicated astonishing information. Then he raised the question, Is there really social intercourse taking place between disembodied souls and those of us who still live corporeally? Augustine answered negatively. But rather than dismiss these anecdotal reports, he speculated that perhaps these appearances of the dead are due to the work of God-directed angels who wish to communicate with us mortals.⁴¹ Rahner asked the same question and, while affirming that the dead still live and denying that we can communicate with them, said that our posture should be one in which we "open our hearts to the silent calm of God himself, in which they live."⁴²

The problem which we face is that our evangelical explication of Paul's discussion of resurrection of the body seems either to ignore or preclude the possibility of supraphysical personal existence after death. Yet, there exist many philosophies of soul-ectomy, and there are widespread claims that people have experienced communication from just such disembodied beings. Have we come to a point of showdown where the Christian view is either right or wrong? Or is there any hope of merging horizons to form a larger more comprehensive integration of views?

PARA-ESCHATOLOGY

In working our way through this problem, two resources can aid us: first, the observation that the Bible in general gives no sign of conflict between belief in disembodied

spirits and eschatology; second, John Hick's helpful concept of pareschatology for organizing our thoughts.

Contact with the spirits of the dead through witchcraft is simply assumed to be possible when the frustrated Saul asks the medium at Endor to raise the dead Samuel so he can consult with him (1 Sam 28), although the Old Testament in general outlaws necromancy and divination (Exod 22:18; 1 Sam 15:23; 28:3; Micah 5:12). The New Testament seems to assume the existence of numerous supranatural beings such as cosmic rulers, *archontes* (1 Cor 2:6, 8; Eph 2:2), powers, *dynameis* (Rom 8:38; 1 Peter 3:22), authorities, *exousiai* (Eph 3:10; Col 1:16; 2:15), elemental spirits, *stoicheia* (Gal 4:3,9; Col 2:8,20), along with various and sundry demons and unclean spirits (Matt 9:33; Mark 1:23, 27, 34; 3:11; 1 Cor 10:20f) and even Satan himself (Matt 4:1-11; Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 5:5). Then, of course, there are the angels, whom we will be like in the resurrection (Matt 22:30). There may be a difference between some supraphysical beings and the souls of the deceased however. Demons and unclean spirits, for example, can enter a person and establish possession. In Jesus' parable of Dives and Lazarus, in contrast, it appears that dead people are not permitted to leave their abode to return and influence the course of ordinary events (Luke 16:26). In short, there is no shortage of background presence of supraphysical beings in scripture. Had there been an intrinsic antipathy between belief in disembodied spirits and the eschatological vision one would expect that it would have surfaced already within the New Testament. But such a tension does not seem to exist.

Thus we might consider the merits of the concept of pareschatology introduced by John Hick. Hick begins by affirming that the Christian doctrine of resurrection refers to the final or ultimate state of human existence. It does not refer to what happens immediately upon death. This opens the door to speculation regarding the interim state. Hick considers the various possibilities we have been discussing here and finds no intrinsic conflict between disembodied existence immediately after death and a final eschatology of the Christian type. Our discussion of what happens in between he dubs "pareschatology." The term appears to prefix 'eschatology' with the preposition 'para,' meaning 'along side of.' Whereas eschatology deals with 'last things,' pareschatology permits us to deal with the 'next-to-last things.'⁴³ As with 'parapsychology' and 'paranormal' we now have a category for dealing with relevant material which hitherto has fallen outside the confines of the discipline.

This category is helpful. The essential commitment of Christian theology is to the explication of the concept of resurrection as it is associated with ultimate destruction and new creation. What the category of pareschatology does is leave open—theologically speaking—considerable room for debate regarding the experience of death and what happens immediately thereafter.

It leaves it open to scientific reflection and discussion, however, not to religious dogma. By this I mean we should attend honestly and forthrightly—as a scientist would attend to an experiment—to the evidence. This is not the same thing as accepting the beliefs of occultists or Tibetan Buddhists as true on the basis of their traditional authority. Nor is it the same thing as accepting the assertions of modern naturalism, because this "ism" is really a form of unfounded ideology which is attached to science but not essential to science. If by 'science' we refer to an open-minded appraisal of possible explanations for experience, then this should be our approach in this matter. If the evidence is strong enough to make the naturalist case that when a person dies he or she remains dead, then we will have to accept it. If, on the other hand, reports of life-after-life experiences prove to be unassailable, then we will have to assess this theologically. At present, the jury is still out.

In the event that the jury returns with a convincing verdict in behalf of some form of *soulechtomy*, we need to ask what this could mean? The preliminary answer I suggest is that whatever the make-up of this disembodied post-mortem existence, it still belongs to this order of creation. It belongs to the old aeon. It is still subject to further destruction and new creation. If death does not occur when the body dies, it still will. Whenever claims are made that the nonphysical realm to which the disembodied self goes looks like life on this side—that the living-dead continue their anxieties over the welfare of their descendents, or that in this new realm we find punishments for previous sins and rewards for virtue—then we know that things have not changed much. Post-mortem experience is in too much continuity with premortem experience. Death has not yet done its job of annihilating the curse of evil. In other words, should the evidence compel us to affirm the existence of the living-dead now, then we must still anticipate that the living-dead like the rest of us will be subject to destruction at a later time. The Akamba provide us with an example of how we might conceive of *soulechtomy* occurring at the point of physical death, but annihilation occurring later. Thus, the thought is not without some precedent.

One of the difficult tasks conceptually is to coordinate the great divergence of opinions regarding what happens to the self once it is disengaged from the body at death. Does it hang around as a ghost so that we can communicate with it through a medium? Does it proceed gnostic style up the planes of existence toward some sort of perfection? Does it go immediately to a place of happiness or torment, as Plato or Thomas would suggest? Does it become reincarnated? These are open questions which we will simply leave open at this point. What needs to be affirmed here is that our theological method can and should be open to participating in a discussion of such matters.

THE COMING NEW CREATION

Let us turn to our final point and central thesis: human destiny is inseparable from cosmic destiny. One element in common among the four theories of immortality (or nonimmortality in the case of naturalism) as well as interim state speculations is that they all deal with the question of human destiny in partial isolation from that of cosmic destiny. One's own soul may exercise its philosophical wings and fly to heaven and there enjoy the beatific vision, or through strenuous meditative effort one might attain enlightenment and realize oneness with Brahman, but the affairs of this mundane world will simply go on as a matter of course without these now departed human souls. Not so with the Christian vision. What happens to us depends on what happens to the cosmos. The resurrection to a spiritual body can only occur at the advent of the eschaton. If there is no cosmic transformation, then there is no resurrection, and if there is no resurrection then our faith is in vain and we of all people are most to be pitied (1 Cor 15:14,19).

Resurrection is indispensably tied to the eschatological *parousia*—the second coming of Christ. Paul suggests an order to things. First comes Christ, the first fruits (1 Cor 15:23). This probably refers to Easter. Then at his coming "the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive" (1 Thess 4:16-17). He "will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory" (Phil 3:21; see Rom 8:29). "Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. . . . The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor 15:24, 26).

The key to understanding the resurrected body is placing it within the broader horizon of God's promised new creation. As the creation is transformed, so are we. Salva-

tion is creation wide, our bodies included. This leads Gordon Fee to comment:

The transformed body, therefore, is not composed of 'spirit'; it is a body adapted to the eschatological existence that is under the ultimate domination of the Spirit. Thus for Paul, to be truly pneumatikos is to bear the likeness of Christ (v.49) in a transformed body, fitted for the new age.⁴⁴

Augustine's works provide us with a logical direction for drawing out implications of these New Testament commitments. In the final sections of his *City of God*, Augustine asked whether everybody will be raised. Yes, he said, and the resurrection will even include aborted infants. Will we get our own bodies back or will we be issued new ones? He said that the actual physical elements which composed the first body will be retrieved for the new one. What condition will our physical bodies be in? Every blemish and infirmity will be removed. How old will we be? The age at which we die? No. We will be at our healthiest mature age. This Augustine guessed is about thirty, about the final age of Jesus.⁴⁵ Will some of us be bigger and stronger than others? No, we will all have the same stature. Will there be two sexes in heaven? Yes, but "we shall enjoy one another's beauty without any lust."⁴⁶ Will we remember our past tragedies and sufferings? Yes, we will remember them intellectually, but we will no longer feel the pain.

Augustine did not have apodictic knowledge. He was speculating. But, then, that is what theologians are supposed to do. On the basis of the witness of scripture to the Gospel we try to construct reasonable answers to questions which may not have been directly posed and answered within the pages of the Bible. What Augustine said is a carefully thought out explication of the New Testament. His thoughts regarding the great transformation have been quite widely accepted in subsequent centuries. This is a mysterious area, of course, and many questions almost defy a coherent answer.

CONCLUSION

Despite the mystery, the Christian faith has medicine appropriate to humanity's two diseases: life that is always fatal and hope that is never curable. The latter is medicine for the former. Yet, his hope is not a generic drug for a vague expectation that there might be more beyond the grave. Rather, it is prescription for hope based upon God's promise for the transformation of creation, for the new world to come into which the godly in the present world will be resurrected for everlasting life.

NOTES

1. George H. Gallup, Jr., and Robert Bezilla, *The Religious Life of Young Americans* (Princeton: The George H. Gallup International Institute, 1992), 22-23.
2. Andrew Greeley, *Death and Beyond* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1976), 49.
3. Jack London, *John Barlycorn* (New York: Signet, 1990), 218-219.
4. Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," *Mysticism and Logic* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 44.
5. Plato, *Phaedo*, 66.
6. Plato, *Gorgias*, 523.
7. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 249-250; *Republic*, X:614-621.

8. Cited by Karl Rahner, ed., *The Teaching of the Catholic Church As Contained in her Documents* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1966), 124.

9. John P. Newport, *Life's Ultimate Questions* (Waco, TX: Word, 1989), 277.

10. Three broad paths or *margas* make up the complex history of Hinduism: the path of ritual action (*karma marga*); knowledge (*jnana marga*); and devotion (*bhakti marga*). The second, the path of knowledge, most emphasizes the ultimate identity of the self (*atman*) with the All (*Brahman*). See Thomas J. Hopkins, "Hindu Views of Death and Afterlife," in *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*, Hiroshi Obayashi, volume editor, Number 33 of *Contributions to the Study of Religion*, Henry Warner Bowden, series editor (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 143-156.

11. Some nondualist theists within Hinduism claim to stop short of oblivion. "Moksha for the nondualist (advaitin) does not mean that the self merges into Brahman as a river merges into the sea, but that the self realizes itself as it eternally exists; i.e., in perfect identity with the Absolute. Hence liberation is not a state to be newly attained, but is the very nature of the Self become conscious of its identity with the All-One." Mariasusai Dhavamony, "Death and Immortality in Hinduism," in *Death and Immortality in the Religions of the World*, Paul and Linda Badham, editors (New York: Paragon House, 1987), 106.

12. In another work I attempt to show that the Western interest in reincarnation as we find it in New Age spirituality is due to the conflation of the notion of karma with that of trauma in psychotherapy and its use in so-called reincarnation therapy. See Ted Peters, *The Cosmic Self: A Penetrating Look at Today's New Age Movements* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 71-74.

13. John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 139.

14. Raymond A. Moody, *Life after Life* (Atlanta: Mockingbird Books, 1975 and New York: Bantam, 1977), 48; see *Reflections on Life after Life* (New York: Bantam & Mockingbird, 1977) and Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, *Death, the Final Stage of Growth* (New York: Macmillan, 1975). Ordinarily interpreters of NDEs speak modestly about subjective survival beyond physical death. On a much more grand scale, however, Kenneth Ring connects NDEs with UFO experiences, sees both as initiation rites into a cosmic reality, and then projects a near eschatological vision of a new level of evolutionary development. He says "the world of the dead and the world of the living are ones between which there may eventually no longer be a sharp distinction. Veils will be lifted from the face of the nonphysical, and we ourselves will become diaphanous beings, with bodies of light." Kenneth Ring, *The Omega Project: Near Death Experiences, UFO Encounters, and Mind at Large*, (New York: William Morrow, 1992), 239.

15. John Newport summarizes critical assessments of NDOBE claims such as attempts to explain them physiologically as hallucinations created by the brain due to the trauma of approaching death. *Life's Ultimate Questions*, 289. Questions of authenticity lead to controversy. Author Betty Malz published a book, *My Glimpses of Eternity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Chosen Books, 1977) which has sold nearly a million copies, describing her alleged 1959 death of 28 minutes on a hospital operating table, her OBE, plus her trip to heaven and back. The doctors involved—H. Clark Boyd, Henry Bopp, James Bopp—reported to *Christianity Today* investigator Lorna Dueck, however, that Betty Malz nee Upchurch did not die as she claimed. They describe what she writes as "almost a complete fabrication" and say "this didn't happen." Her editor defends her by saying that, whether actually dead or not, Betty Malz has "a marvelous ministry." Ken Sidey, "Doctors Dispute Best-Selling Author's Back-to-Life Story," *Christianity Today*, 35 (July 22, 1991): 40-42.

16. This expands a discussion begun in my book, *GOD—the World's Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 310-316.

17. Over against the neo-orthodox theologians for whom death belongs naturally to human finitude, evangelical theologians hold that human death is the result of human sin. John Newport writes, "humans were created with contingent or conditional immortality. They could have lived forever, but it was not certain that they would. Upon sinning, they lost this status." *Life's Ultimate Questions*, 296.

18. By adding this role of death in the plan of salvation I move a bit beyond the interpretation of John Newport who writes, "we must experience physical death simply because it has become one of the conditions of human existence." *Life's Ultimate Questions*, 296.

19. Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" in *Immortality and Resurrection*, ed. by Krister Stendahl (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 14-15.

20. "The post-resurrectional confession is not simply 'We have seen Jesus' but 'We have seen the Lord' (John 20:18; 25; 21:7; Luke 24:34). Since 'Lord' is a christological evaluation of Jesus, the evangelists are telling us that the witnesses enjoyed not only the *sight* of Jesus but also and even primarily *insight*." Raymond E. Brown, *Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1973), 112 (italics in original).

21. I am particularly indebted to Patricia Codron, my research assistant, for her aid in thinking through the issues associated with the spiritual body.

22. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, F. F. Bruce, general editor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 785.

23. Roy A. Harrisville, *I Corinthians* in *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 276.

24. Roy Harrisville notes that Paul's seed analogy emphasizes the discontinuity between death and resurrection. "But in neither instance is the move from agronomy to Christian existence, but exactly the reverse. The analogy is warped to what it serves, and here it is made to fit the assertion of discontinuity, the contention that there is no resurrection unless 'from the dead'. What that warping and twisting of the figure to serve its topic means is that there is, after all, no analogy in nature to the activity of God envisioned here, but only a refraction; no possibility of inferring the 'wisdom of God' from what can be observed in the world." *I Corinthians*, 274-275.

25. My assumption is that the Easter body of Jesus is the prototype of the eschatological bodies of the faithful. John Newport, however, is reluctant to make the equation. He drives a wedge between the body of Jesus immediately after Easter and Jesus' ascended reality which comes later. "Our resurrection body will be like Jesus' present body, not necessarily like the body he had between his resurrection and ascension. We will not have those characteristics of Jesus' postresurrection earthly body which appear inconsistent with our resurrection bodies, which the apostle Paul calls 'spiritual bodies' (1 Cor 15:44). The characteristics we will need will not necessarily include physical tangibility and the need to eat." *Life's Ultimate Questions*, 305-306. I gather this means that in heaven there will be no Big Mac Attacks.

26. "The idea that the soul is naturally immortal, deathless by definition, is at home in much of Greek thought but not in the New Testament. . . . The New Testament has a unique idea of immortality: The whole person will become immortal by resurrection." Leander E. Keck, "Death and Afterlife in the New Testament," *Death and Afterlife*, 84. This seems to be the consensus. Thomas Deidun sees Paul as refuting a presupposed dualism of spirit and body among the Corinthians and proposing in contrast to see the resurrection and transformation of the body as the completion of God's work of salvation. "The *soma* is to be eschatologically changed by God's power. It will become *soma pneumatikon*. Yet it remains *soma*—the substantial point of continuity between now and then." Deidun proceeds to argue that this affirmation of the body in resurrection has an impact on sexual morality, because "the mutual love of sexual union is capable of eschatological transformation without losing its deepest significance." "Beyond Dualisms: Paul on Sex, Sarx, and Soma," *The Way*, 28:3 (July 1988): 203. Brendan Byrne similarly argues that affirmation of bodily resurrection has an impact on morality: "Paul derives from the heart of the gospel an eschatology of resurrection that endows bodily life with lasting moral value." "Eschatologies of Resurrection and Destruction: The Ethical Significance of Paul's Dispute with the Corinthians," *The Downside Review*, 104 (October 1986): 295.

27. Cullmann, 25. Walter Wink would tend to agree with Cullmann in dubbing sarx a transcendent power. The transcendent power in Wink's case has to do with fallen social-psychological structures, not necessarily a supernatural power. "Life lived 'according to the flesh' (*kata sarka*) denotes the self externalized and subjugated to the opinions of others. It is the self socialized into a world of inauthentic values, values that lead it away from its own centeredness in God. . . . 'Fleshly' or 'carnal' refers to a life that has abandoned the transcendent and become fixated on personal satisfactions. . . . The best paraphrase I can render for *kata sarka* is 'dominated existence' . . ." *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 62-63.

28. Justin, *On the Resurrection*, II and VII in ANF, I:194 and 297.

29. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, Chapter 91 in NFNF, 1st: 266.
30. Hans Conzelmann, *I Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 282.
31. Resurrection will include a dialectic between transformation and continuity. Our personal identity cannot be obliterated completely; otherwise transformation would consist of simple destruction. Something subjective and identifiable must continue. Newport reminds us that this continuity is a gift of divine grace, however, not a natural propensity. "Our personal identity is not a predication we can make based on our creaturely nature. Rather, it is predicated upon the initiative of God, who addresses us and upholds us as the persons we are before him and with each other." *Life's Ultimate Questions*, 303.
32. A panoramic view of the Pauline writings shows no special apologetic preoccupation in the presentation of the resurrection of Jesus. However, on the relatively few occasions when the question came up, Paul did have to come to grips with the problem of the risen body and with the law of conformity to Christ in all aspects of his life and destiny." Giuseppe Ghiberti, "Contemporary Discussion of the Resurrection of Jesus," in *Problems and Perspectives of Fundamental Theology*, edited by René Latourelle and Gerald O'Collins, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist, 1982), 231.
33. Jerome, *Against Vigilantius*, vi.
34. Augustine, *On Care to be had for the Dead*, 12,18.
35. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 109.
36. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, III:Q.69:A.2.
37. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III:6.
38. Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Crossroad, 1973), 16; and "The Life of the Dead" in *Theological Investigations* (21 Volumes: New York: Crossroad, 1961-1988), IV:352.
39. Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" 39. A similar position is taken by Paul Althaus, *Die Letzten Dinge* (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 8th ed., 1961), 155-157.
40. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, III:Q.75:A.1; Aristotle, *On the Soul*, II:2 (414a,12).
41. Augustine, *On Care to be had for the Dead*, 12-15.
42. Rahner "The Life of the Dead," 353-354.
43. John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (New York: Harper, 1976), 22.
44. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 786. Ben F. Meyer asks if corporeal participation in the final salvation is ruled out. Then he answers, "No; the issue is not 'body versus spirit' but body in the present age—be it the flesh and blood of the living or the decayed body of the dead—versus body transfigured and immortal in the reign of God." "Did Paul's View of the Resurrection of the Dead Undergo Development?" *Theological Studies*, 47:3 (Summer 1986): 381.
45. Augustine, *City of God*, XXII:15.
46. Augustine, *City of God*, XXII:24.